

Tunnel Vision: The Life and Times of a Copper Prospector in the Nizina Mining District



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**“Binocular is a secret, and mystery, to all
but one man—and I am that man”**

**~Martin Radovan
Radovan’s Dream, circa 1973**



Table of Contents

A Life Lived in the ‘Land of Hope,’ an Introduction

Marion Radovanovich Comes to America, 1900-1911

Augusta Louise Iverson:
From Norway to the Pacific Northwest, 1884-1911

Gold, Copper and Love:
Life in Early Blackburn and McCarthy, 1912-1919

Martin and Augusta’s Life at Dan Creek, 1920-1929

The Prospector and the Impossible Prospect at Glacier Creek, 1929-1944

The Lone Prospector:
Life after “Gussie, 1944-1951

Business Deals and Family Reunions, 1951-1969

Tunnel Vision:
The Legacy of a Lifelong Prospector, 1970-1975

A Life Lived in the ‘Land of Hope,’ An Introduction

Mountains, on all sides of me. Although I never saw big mountains before, they would always come to me in my dreams.

~Martin Radovan
Radovan's Dream, circa 1973

In an article for *Scribner's Magazine* in 1912, Dora Keen, the first mountaineer to ascend Mount Blackburn, described the Alaskan prospectors she had encountered while visiting the Nizina country the previous year. “His motto is ‘Never stuck...’” she wrote, “...His is the land of hope. He is always ‘going to make a strike next year, sure,’ therefore always ready to endure and to smile, whatever happens.”¹

Had she met Martin Radovan, she would have described the prospector and his unyielding faith in his prospects perfectly. Martin came to Alaska following a dream. “Arriving in New York, then step by step to Alaska...,” recalled an aging Martin, “...I came half way round the world to the mountains of my dreams.” Whether crossing oceans and continents, surmounting glaciers and cliffs, or befriending the local wildlife, Martin Radovan never doubted there was copper to be found deep within the mountains of the Nizina country, a place that, after a lifetime of prospecting, became his ‘land of hope.’

Martin spent his entire adult life searching first for gold and then copper in the Nizina Mining district in the Chitina copper belt, located in the shadow of the Wrangell Mountains in southcentral Alaska. A nineteen-year-old Martin Radovan departed Žrnovo, Croatia, an Austrian province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, for the United States in 1900. He arrived at Ellis Island where his surname, ‘Radovanovich’ was transliterated to ‘Radovan.’ He gained railroad experience in New Jersey and in California, but after the 1906 earthquake that leveled much of San Francisco, Martin moved to Seattle. It was in the Pacific Northwest where Martin learned of a railway being constructed into the Interior of Alaska by two giants of American business: J.P. Morgan and the Guggenheim brothers.

Martin arrived at Cordova in 1908. Putting his railroad skills to good use, he quickly found work building the Copper River & Northwestern Railway. After completion of the railway in 1911, Martin took a job with a hydraulic mining company at Dan Creek, south of present day McCarthy in the heart of the Nizina mining district, and began to prospect nearby creeks and benches for gold on his own. In the 1920s, Martin began searching for

¹ Dora Keen, “Arctic Mountaineering by a Woman: Mount Blackburn,” in *Scribner's Magazine* volume LII, July-December, 1912.

copper in a glacial cirque on Glacier Creek, a tributary of the Chitistone River. The cirque later became known as Radovan Gulch.

In pursuit of his dream, Martin, like many copper prospectors at the time, followed the very tangible advice of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). The agency's relationship with private investors cultivated a new field known as 'economic geology.' And, contrary to popular frontier mythology, the combined efforts of corporate America and the federal government—not rugged individuals—began to exploit, and eventually incorporate the Nizina country's copper into the American economy.²

By the early twentieth century, copper was a coveted metal made increasingly valuable by America's desire for electric power. In 1900, Kennecott's world-famous Bonanza copper deposit was discovered along a depositional contact zone where marine rocks of the Chitistone Limestone overlay the basaltic flows of the Nikolai Greenstone, a formation that dominates much of the visual landscape south of the Wrangell Mountains. As a result, agency geologists advised prospectors to look for copper where the distinctly colored deposits meet. Once word got out, Martin Radovan, like nearly all the copper prospectors working the Nizina district, began to scrutinize every accessible linear foot of the contact zone.

Martin gained notoriety as a prospector with his conquest of the Binocular Prospect, a copper outcrop above the greenstone-limestone contact on the face of a cliff overlooking a large, glacier-filled cirque on the south side of the Glacier Creek drainage. USGS had known about the outcrop, and had studied it—through binoculars—since the turn of the century. The vertical face of the cirque wall, and the location of the outcrop over 3000 feet up, had prevented geologists from gaining detailed inspection and sampling. By the mid-1920s, the Kennecott Copper Corporation had sought to extend its operational life by exploring for other mining opportunities in the Nizina district. In 1929 the company took an option on the nearby Nelson prospect and that same year sent European mountain climbers to try to reach the Binocular prospect. After a summer of attempts, the climbers failed to reach the contact and obtain samples.

Meanwhile, Martin's prospecting of the Nizina country had led him to Glacier Creek, where that same season he managed to reach the outcrop by following a precipitous route along the cliff wall toward the contact zone. He built a stair-step trail, only one-foot wide at places, and made even more treacherous from the constant threat of falling rocks and glacial ice. At a point two hundred feet below the outcrop, he scaled the face of the cliff, using ropes and steel spikes driven into the rock crevices. Martin staked some thirty claims over the next two years. Although Kennecott never optioned or leased his claims, Martin nevertheless gained local notoriety for besting the Kennecott Copper Corporation and beating their hired expert climbers to the copper-stained outcrops, and perhaps more importantly, for his death-defying, legendary route, that allowed him to access the Binocular Prospect in the first place.

² For further readings on USGS and its role in the process of Americanization see, Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of American Cultural and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 20; Morgan Sherwood, *Exploration of Alaska, 1865-1900* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1992), 172; and William Robbins, *Colony and Empire: The Capitalist's Transformation of the American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994) 68.

Supporting Martin in his early mining endeavors was his wife, Augusta Louise Iverson, a person of great significance in Martin's life. Somehow Martin—a prospector who spent more time in a tunnel than in town—caught the attention of a Norwegian bookkeeper who worked at the Kennecott milltown. Martin and Augusta were married by the Justice of the Peace in McCarthy in 1914. Moving seasonally between the cabin at Dan Creek and the camp at Glacier Creek, she made a life with him in the Nizina country for the next three decades.

Augusta's life was cut short in 1944 when she was sixty-five years old. But Martin, for the next thirty years, continued his search for copper in the cirque which bears his name. Besides the Binocular Prospect, he discovered and staked two others: Low-Contact and the Greenstone, and built a substantial camp on the banks of Glacier Creek near the mouth of Radovan Gulch. Alone and unaided, built a tram that allowed him to cross Glacier Creek to his creekside camp. When he was not tunneling into the limestone, Martin passed time by feeding the local wildlife, an activity that brought him much comfort and companionship after "Gussie" died. In 1948, Martin filed twelve claims at Radovan Gulch, many of which were named after things he cherished most: his pet fox 'Boots,' the grey jays he called 'Ki-Ki' birds, a bear he called 'Pongo Boy,' and his wife and partner of thirty years, "Augusta."

By a twist of fate, Martin was reunited with his long-lost brother Jack Radovich of Delano, California in 1951. Jack, a wealthy vineyard owner, flew to Glacier in hopes of reuniting with his brother Martin, whom he had not seen in fifty years. Jack wanted his Sourdough brother to return with him to Delano, but the family reunion did not deter Martin from his mining aspirations. As Martin recalled, "I had some good claims and was preparing for the winter." All too aware that he needed a company with the capital and technology to develop his prospects, Martin remained at Glacier Creek, persistently working his claims and marketing the prospects to outside interests.

After a string of disappointing leases and business arrangements between the 1950s and the late 1960s, a geological and geophysical exploration company, the Geneva-Pacific Corporation, purchased Martin's prospects in the early 1970s, giving Martin hope that the Binocular Prospect would finally be mined and his life work validated. In 1974, at age 92, Martin left Alaska to spend time with his brother Jack Radovich in Delano. The following spring Geneva-Pacific reached the Binocular Prospect using a helicopter and professional geologists. Before the company's findings were reported, Martin died.

Had any of his claims proved to be substantial at depth, Martin, or at least his extended family, would have been rich. Of course, this was not to be Martin's fate. Martin never found his copper mountain, but *Tunnel Vision: The Life and Times of a Copper Prospector in the Nizina District* looks at what Martin did unearth after a lifetime of work, love, and faith—belief in his prospects, and perhaps more importantly, faith in himself. Instead of disappointment, Martin Radovan, the undaunted prospector, lived a life of contentment—always ready to endure and to smile—in what can only be described as his 'land of hope.'

Marion Radovanovich Comes to America 1900-1911

Time to go, it must be admitted. At the thought of having to bid good-by, to all, and everything I ever had, hard for me, to leave home for the first time. We stood, and looked at one another, crying.

~Martin Radovan
Radovan's Dream

Marion Frank Radovanovich was born on October 13, 1882³ in Žrnovo, Croatia, an Austrian province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.⁴ Martin's father was Marin Radovanovich and his mother was Jaka Segedin Radovanovich. Both were from the island of Korcula, located off the Dalmatian Coast in the Adriatic Sea.⁵ At the age of eighteen, Martin immigrated to the United States to find work and allegedly to avoid conscription into the Imperial Austrian Army.⁶ Years later, Martin recalled a story that illustrated the influence his parents had on his decision to emigrate from his Mediterranean island:

“One day I asked my father how big is the world? He said, too big for you to think about. But how big is it? I insisted. If you really like to know, [said his father] this Island is a thirty miles long, when you get to the end of it, that is the end for you, until you get to be a man, now get [to be] that man. The next day I asked mother, how big is the world mama? Very big my boy, there is no end to it, if you start to walk today, and live to be a hundred years old, if you don't use your head, you get no place. But mom we don't walk on our heads. I know that son, but by using your head you will save lots [of] walking.”⁷

A combination of romantic adventure, economic need, and the reality of war probably convinced Martin to leave Korcula. He departed on “June first nineteen hundred” on what he described later as a very sad day.⁸ Martin left his large extended family, boarded a boat, and steamed into New Jersey Harbor, arriving at Elis Island on July 1, 1900.⁹ While passing into the United States, Martin's name, like so many European immigrants,

³ World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918 record for Martin Radovan.

⁴ Sykes, 1980

⁵ Church Records, Katherine Cesare, June 10, 2010.

⁶ “Venerable Sourdough,” ADT, November 4, 1972.

⁷ “Martin's Dream,”

⁸ “Martin's Dream” National Park Service files, date unknown. NOTE: Although we know little about this first-hand account typed probably by Martin himself, it was probably written during Martin's last years in Alaska.

⁹ Dan Casley, “Venerable Sourdough Relates Alaskan Tale,” *Anchorage Daily Times*, Saturday November 4, 1972. No immigration records however, have been located for a Martin Radovanovich passing through Elis Island.

was transliterated—‘Radovanovich’ was shortened to ‘Radovan.’¹⁰ Once in America, Martin followed his parents’ advice and put to use his brawn and brains, a mixture of intelligent endurance that would characterize Martin’s approach to work for the rest of his life.

The young and hard-working Martin Radovan quickly found employment on the East Coast. He first worked for the American Pencil Co. in Hoboken, New Jersey for two years; then he found a job on the Erie Railroad Float Bridge as a night crew foreman until he was laid off due to an injury.¹¹ Martin later recalled, “On leaving my home in Austria I was just a boy, young and awkward, bashful, from the country, with [my] mind slowly ripening in its rough husk gathering gear...I moved from a place to place, scouring knowledge in order to use it, and by using it absolutely my own, and gaining capacity for more.”¹²

Picking up occupational know-how and putting it to use appears to be precisely what Martin did in those early years. The desire to learn more about the railroad business (presumably sparked while working on the Erie Railroad Float Bridge) drew Martin across the country to San Francisco where he worked for the Pacific Railway shops.¹³ Martin’s stay in California, however, was brief. He was living across the bay in Oakland at the time of the 1906 earthquake, which ignited a fire that destroyed much of San Francisco.¹⁴ Martin later recalled that he “could read the paper by the light of the fire in the City.”¹⁵ Martin told his niece Katherine Cesare, that he “decided to leave San Francisco on the first boat he could book passage...the boat was going to Seattle.”¹⁶ Martin traveled first to Portland and then to Seattle via steamship.¹⁷

Apparently, Martin’s time in the Pacific Northwest was also short. He quickly put his newly acquired railroad skills to good use and, in 1907, decided “to pursue advertisements he’d seen to work on the Cordova and Northwestern Railroad in Alaska.”¹⁸ The pay was supposed to be \$3 a day, much more than he’d ever made in his life.¹⁹ He arrived at Cordova, Alaska on October 9, 1908, and quickly found work for the Katalla Railroad, the contractor in charge of building the Copper River Northwestern Railway (CR&NW).²⁰ The railway line, paid for by the joint investments of J.P. Morgan and the Guggenheim family, was celebrated as an engineering feat, costing nearly twenty-five million dollars.

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¹¹ “Brother Reunited in Alaska after 50 Years,” *Anchorage Daily Times*, November 7, 1951; “Venerable Sourdough,” ADT, November 4, 1972; Historian for Geneva Pacific

¹² “Martin’s Dream,” circa 1972. NPS Files.

¹³ ADT, 1972.

¹⁴ Discussions with family.

¹⁵ Katherine Cesare, interview with Martin Radovan

¹⁶ Katherine Cesare, correspondence on June 10, 2010.

¹⁷ “Brothers Reunited,” ADT, Nov 7, 1951.

¹⁸ “Venerable Sourdough,” ADT, November 4, 1972.

¹⁹ “Venerable Sourdough,” ADT, November 4, 1972.

²⁰ “Venerable Sourdough,” ADT, November 4, 1972.

Spanning a distance of 192-miles from the site of the tremendous, yet practically inaccessible, Bonanza deposit in the Wrangell Mountains to the coastal town of Cordova, the railway overcame nearly impossible obstacles. Martin Radovan recalled that in order to get the ore to market, a railroad had to “cross the mossy swamps of the broad river delta and pass for miles over the solid ice of the great costal glaciers, and then carve its way through the rocky cliffs of the lower canyon.”²¹ In four years railroad crews chiseled roadbed from sheer rock, laid track on a moving glacier, and bridged the immense Copper River.²² In 1911, Alfred H. Brooks, head of the U.S. Geological Survey in Alaska, called the completion of the CR&NW Railway “the most important advance made in the history of Alaska transportation since steamboat service was established on the Yukon.”²³

Almost a decade earlier, international publicity regarding the Klondike gold discovery had lured thousands of stampedeers to the Far North. As Martin put it, “Gold was the metal that fired the imagination of men in Copper River and Chitina River valley in eighteen ninety nine.”²⁴ Park historian Geoffrey Bleakley notes that many stampedeers headed for the Yukon River through ports in Southeastern Alaska, “but some entered through Valdez, choosing to try their luck in the Copper Basin.”²⁵

By 1900, most journeying up the Copper River maintained their relentless search for gold. But after two independent discoveries of the Bonanza ore deposits in the limestone and greenstone contact near the Kennicott Glacier by Jack Smith and Clarence Warner and by a USGS geologist, who, in 1901, determined the deposit contained “over seventy percent copper and fourteen ounces of silver per ton,” prospectors coming up the Chitina and Nizina rivers came searching for copper as well.²⁶ Subsequent mining engineers reported ore bodies at Bonanza of “pure copper chalcocite measuring four feet across and fifteen feet in length,” but these extraordinary rich claims lay two hundred miles from the coast, in some of the most rugged terrain in Alaska, with only shoddy winter trails and impossible summer trails on which to travel and carry supplies.²⁷ Despite its potential, an enormous amount of financial support was needed to develop the Bonanza deposit and make it profitable.

Support for the venture eventually came from two of the biggest names in nineteenth century American business: financier J.P. Morgan and the Guggenheims, a family of industrialists who made their fortune in the mining and smelting industry. These

²¹ Radovan’s Dream.

²² M.J. Kirchhoff, *Historic McCarthy: The Town that Copper Built* (Juneau: Alaska Cedar Press, 1993), 25; For more information on the construction of the CRNW Railway and the role of Valdez, Katella, and Cordova, see Janson, *The Copper Spike*

²³ Alfred Brooks, *The Mining Industry in 1910*, USGS Bulletin 480 (Washington DC, Govt Printing Office, 1911): 23.

²⁴ Radovan’s Dream.

²⁵ Geoffrey Bleakley, “In the Shadow of Kennecott: The Forgotten Mining Camps of the Wrangell Mountain Region,” *WRST* 1

²⁶ Schrader and Spencer, “The Geologic and Mineral Resources of Copper River, 1901, pp. 85-86; Walter C Mendenhall and F.C. Schrader, “Copper Deposits of the Mont Wrangell Region, Alaska,” *Contributions to Economic Geology*, USGS Bulletin 213 (Washington, 1903), p. 145.

²⁷ Grauman, 8.

prospective investors had their interests in the Alaska prospect roused by the lobbying efforts of Stephen Birch, a mining engineer convinced of Bonanza's economic potential. Initially, Birch had joined the McClellan Group, the thirteen member party who originally staked the Bonanza claims. After seeing the ore deposit first hand, however, Birch began to buy out the individual shareholders, acting on behalf of Norman Schultz and sugar baron, Henry O. Havemeyer, Birch's childhood friend and son of his mentor.²⁸ Once Birch acquired the majority of the shares in the McClellan Party, he formed the Alaska Copper and Coal Company in order to manage the claims on behalf of his backers. Almost immediately after the potential worth of the mine became known, Birch found himself in court, defending his legal title to the claims. In a gesture that reflected his confidence for legal victory, as well as his belief in the prospect, Birch's Alaska Copper and Coal Company, while still in litigation, invested \$400,000 in development work at Bonanza.²⁹ In 1902, he built the first structure at the Kennecott Mill site, a log cabin at National Creek, and broke a trail up the mountainside to the green outcropping.³⁰

Birch's investment, however, only scratched the surface; in order to raise the enormous capital needed to develop the mines, Birch proceeded to lobby Morgan and the Guggenheims. Meanwhile, Birch's Alaska Copper and Coal Company prevailed in the court of Alaskan judge, James Wickersham, defeating the law suits filed against him.³¹ Then, in 1906, Steven Birch succeeded in merging the financial interests of the J.P. Morgans with the mining and smelting interests of the Guggenheims. Jointly, they formed the Alaska Syndicate which acquired a forty percent interest in the newly-formed Kennecott Copper Mines Company and made Birch the new company's manager.³² Building a transportation system that could haul building supplies and machinery to the mine site and copper out was the Syndicate's first priority. The plan, then, was for the Guggenheims to assume control over development of the Kennecott Mines Company while the Morgans tackled transportation problems.³³

What made the Syndicate's gamble on the Bonanza deposit worthwhile was America's transition to electrical power, which tremendously increased the market's demand for copper by the end of the nineteenth century. In 1879, Thomas Edison perfected the long-lasting incandescent light bulb, an invention that revolutionized American society and way of life.³⁴ Historian Timothy J. LeCain notes that what was equally striking about the invention was that Edison 'plugged it in,' for conducting electricity to Edison's light bulb was heavy copper wire.³⁵ From that day on, copper was the metal of choice to serve the growing demands of national electrification.³⁶ In 1911, mining engineer Daniel Jackling wrote:

²⁸ Grauman, 6; Hovis

²⁹ Grauman,

³⁰ Kirchhoff, 23.

³¹ Grauman, 6-7.

³² By 1909 the Syndicate had acquired the whole Company, three thousand acres of lode and placer claims, for 2,987,500. Graumn, 7.

³³ Graumn, 9.

³⁴ LeCain, 27-28.

³⁵ Timothy J. LeCain, *Mass Destruction: The Men and Giant Mines That Wired America and Scarred the Planet* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 26-27.

³⁶ LeCain, 31.

Copper is verily one of the world's most essential metals....Linked intimately with the production and application of electrical energy, copper plays a vital role in modern life....Thomas Edison's incandescent lamp was the invention that started the tremendous expansion of that industry. With the widespread use of electric power have come most of our modern conveniences—the telephone, automobile, radio, refrigerator, washing machine, water heater and, lately, air conditioning equipment.³⁷

In American factories the use of electricity went from essentially zero to almost nine million horsepower of installed manufacturing equipment between 1880 and 1914.³⁸ Centralized generating plants began using thick copper wires to transmit power over long distances and, by 1902, the nation had 21,920 miles of electrified streetcars, most of them fed by copper wires and using copper-based eclectic motors. Copper's high strength under tension made it well suited for stringing between power poles. Aluminum though lighter and cheaper lacked the conductive capacity of copper and is far weaker. And although copper's periodic relatives, silver and gold, are also superb electrical conductors, they were "precious" metals, meaning that they were rarer, and far more expensive, whereas copper, though still costly at the turn of the century, was a much cheaper "base" metal. As LeCain put it, "Coal, iron, and steel may have been the building blocks of the world's first industrial age, but copper was at the electric heart of the second."³⁹

Thus, the relatively high prices of copper, coupled by the country's so-called "copper famine," justified the enormous expense reaching over two hundred million dollars to develop the mine and transportation system. After two mis-starts, first at Valdez and then at Katella, construction of the Syndicate's Copper River and Northwestern Railway began from the fishing town of Cordova in 1907. Martin Radovan was one of the thousands of laborers hired to construct the railway, and was witness to the growth of Cordova, which in Martin's words, "sprung up, like a flower, in May of 1908."⁴⁰ Martin worked at a variety of positions, and later told a reporter that he had learned bridge building and some engineering while working on the railway. He labored for four years, long enough to see it completed in 1911.⁴¹ He even received a patent in 1914 on an invention that would have prevented a train accident that he once saw. The invention, according to Martin, was a "plate placed at the ends of the ties designed to prevent the gapping caused by steel tracks laid in summer that tended to contract in the winter." Despite its practicality, the plate was never used.⁴²

The U.S. Census found Martin working at the CR&NW's Woods Canyon railroad camp as a single laborer in the spring of 1910. Interestingly, Martin was not always forthcoming about his Croatian/Austrian heritage. He told the census recorder that his

³⁷ LeCain.

³⁸ LeCain

³⁹ LeCain, 29.

⁴⁰ Radovan's Dream

⁴¹ "Brothers Reunited," ADT, Nov 7, 1951; "Venerable Sourdough," ADT, November 4, 1972.

⁴² "Venerable Sourdough," ADT, Nov. 4, 1972,

father came from France and mother from Bohemia.⁴³ There is no record of a ‘Martin F. Radovan’ or ‘Radovanovich’ passing through Ellis Island in 1900. He refused to declare his country of origin on his World War I Draft Registration Card,⁴⁴ and in 1920, he lied again, telling a census taker that he and his father were French.⁴⁵ Motivating Martin’s dishonesty was probably the social and political upheaval plaguing his homeland during the first decades of the twentieth century. In Bosnia and Herzegovinian, a neighboring Austrian province, a Bosnian Serb assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in 1914. The assassination caused the Austro-Hungarian Empire to declare war on Serbia, becoming the catalyst for the outbreak of World War I. If Martin did in fact leave his home county to avoid conscription, then he would have indeed wanted to disassociate himself from the increasingly hostile Austrian Empire.

Moreover, Martin probably lied about his origin of birth to avoid discrimination by his current countrymen. It makes sense that Martin would not want it known that he was from a country with which the United States was about to go to war. Furthermore, Martin was part of a massive wave of immigrants to the United States understood to be the “new immigrants,” because unlike earlier immigrants who came primarily from northern and western Europe, the majority of these newcomers came from non-English speaking European countries, particularly southern and eastern Europe.⁴⁶ The perception existed among many Americans that the newly arriving immigrants were somehow inferior to those who arrived earlier.

At the same time Martin was making his way across the nation and to Alaska, an increasingly vocal group of politicians and nativists began to demand restrictions on the immigration of the newest arrivals. In an attempt to preserve the ethnic character of the “old immigrants,” the federal government passed laws and regulations such as the Chinese Exclusion Act, the Alien Contract Labor Law and instituted literacy tests. Such discriminatory activities peaked between 1921 with the passage of the Quota Laws and 1924 with the passage of the National Origins Act. Thus, it is not surprising that Martin Radovan, a young immigrant from the Adriatic Coast whose name had once been Radovanovich, chose to conceal his southern European roots and remain, if possible, invisible.⁴⁷

Augusta Louise Iverson:

⁴³ “Mertin E. Radovan” 1910 United States Federal Census. It also states that Martin immigrated in 1878, several years before he was born. There is a good chance the recorder wrote a seven instead of a nine and Martin actually immigrated to the US in 1898. (Martin writes, however, that he traveled to America in 1900.)

⁴⁴ “Martin Radovan” WWI Draft Registration Card.

⁴⁵ US Federal Census 1920.

⁴⁶ Between 1900 and 1915, more than 15 million immigrants arrived to the country

⁴⁷ According to his friend and employee, Jim Edwards, Martin did not like having his picture taken. Thus, his efforts to remain unknown may, at least in part, explain why historians have found so few photographs of Martin as a young man.

From Norway to the Pacific Northwest 1884-1911

Monday, 14 February: On the evening of this day, as fate would have it, we got to see land, Hawaii. The promised land. ... We anchored right by a little town, but we could hardly see it because of the palms and banana trees. Many natives came to look at us, and they probably thought we were some strange people.

~Nils Emil Aars, Beta passenger
Journal entry, February 14, 1881

Martin Radovan was not invisible to everyone. Somehow this brown-eyed, black-haired Croatian with a muscular build caught the attention of a pretty Norwegian bookkeeper who worked at the Kennecott mill town. Her name was Augusta Louise Iverson. The details of Augusta's life are sketchy, but what we do know about her family is fairly remarkable.⁴⁸ Whereas Martin followed a more traditional route from Europe to the United States, making his way across the country to Alaska by way of the Atlantic seaboard, Augusta's family made their way to the Pacific Northwest, and eventually to Alaska, by following a far less customary course.

Augusta's father was John Alfred Iversen, the son of Iver Tonnesen. He was a mason from Oslo, Norway, who married Thora Laurette Fredrikke, also from Oslo and daughter of Lars Nyrholm, on October 31, 1879.⁴⁹ Nine days before she married, Thora gave birth to a baby girl, at Fodselstiftelsen (The Birth Institution) in Oslo. Three day later, on October 26, Thea Augusta Lovise was baptized. The family emigrated from Norway a year later.⁵⁰ Norway, in the late nineteenth century, was in the midst of a depression. Unemployment was widespread throughout the country. The Iversons were most likely extremely poor and, in order to survive, joined other Norwegian laborers on a voyage to the Hawaiian Islands—a paid voyage that took them half way around the world—to work on a sugar plantation on the island of Maui. Local newspapers in Drammen, Tidende and other towns throughout Norway printed the following message with hopes of attracting hard-working help:

Contracts with those who will go to the Sandwich Islands, are drawn up and signed on Wednesday, Sept 23, and the following days at the office of Hans P. Faye, at Drammen from 11 to 3 o'clock. The parties must be provided with good recommendations, and attestations for good and faultless behavior. Parties under obligation of military service, must bring

⁴⁸ Augusta's DOB October 26, 1884, Death certificate, Territory of Alaska Although her death certificate states that she was born in Oslo, Norway, there is no record of an Augusta Iverson being born there on that date. Correspondence

⁴⁹ The Registry of Trefoldighetskirken (Trinity Church) in Oslo. Norwegian census and church records

⁵⁰ 1930 US Federal Census, Death certificate, WWI draft card, even her own journal state he birth date as Oct 22, 1884. But Norwegian Records give a birth date of January, 1880—she leaves Norway on Oct 27, 1880. Perhaps her parents decided to celebrate her birth date her birth on the departure date?

release from service. Signature for minors must, to be valid, be confirmed by guardian. The conditions are now regulated, and thus fixed: Laborers over 20 years, 9 dollars; under 20 years, somewhat less, per month, with free board, or board-money and free lodging, families may bring two children with them. Free passage and board, which is not to be worked out afterwards.

Char. L'Orange, Agent of the Hawaiian Bureau of Immigration, Sandwich Islands⁵¹

On July 20, 1880, the Hawaiian Bureau of Immigration authorized Captain Christian L'Orange to sail four hundred passengers, mostly young married couples, on a four-month journey across the North Atlantic, around Cape Horn into the Pacific, and to the Hawaii Islands.⁵² The bark *Beta* left Drammen, Norway on October 27, 1880, arriving at Maui on February 14, 1881. According to the passenger list, Johan A. Iversen embarked with his wife and infant.⁵³ The voyage was long and arduous. The *Beta* was outfitted with bread, crackers, flour, salt-dried fish, a few live hogs and fifty chickens—barely enough provisions for over 400 passengers and crew members for several month. The passengers endured everything from rough seas and fires to melancholy and a bittersweet Christmas celebration as they passed Cape Horn. Nine children died of seasickness, malnutrition, or accident. One couple lost two young sons within two weeks of each other, and in the midst of great suffering, five babies were born.⁵⁴

After four mouths at sea, the *Beta* eventually anchored at Ma'alaea Bay on the island of Maui. To the Nordic passengers, central Maui was a foreign land. The Island's wide, flat plain was like "a Sahara in miniature, a dreary expanse of sand and shifting sandhills."⁵⁵ Johan Iversen was assigned to one of Castle and Cookes three sugar plantations in Paia, Hamakuapoko or Haiku. The company kept families together, so Thora and Augusta remained with Johan. The family lived in a structure unfamiliar to Scandinavians—a single walled house of several rooms, minus glass windows, and built of rough lumber. While living on Maui, Thora gave birth to a second child, a son, Charles John, born on December 27, 1881.⁵⁶

Almost immediately, unrest and discontent appeared among the Scandinavian labors. The strangeness of Maui's environment, coupled by contract disputes, caused the

⁵¹ Torbjorn Greipsland, *Forgotten Norwegians in Hawaii: From Life in Slavery to Life in a Vacation Paradise* (Emigrantforlaget, 2004), 4.

⁵² Torbjorn Greipsland, *Forgotten Norwegians in Hawaii: From Life in Slavery to Life in a Vacation Paradise* (Emigrantforlaget, 2004), 4.

⁵³ Passenger List for the Bark Beta. The passenger lists an Johan A. Iversen, wife, and 9 month old child (though Augusta would have been 1 year by the date of departure.)

⁵⁴ Eleanor H. Davis, "The Norse Migration: Norwegian Labor in Hawaii," in *The Hawaiian Historical Society Seventy-First Annual Report*, December 1962, 28-35.; Diary.

⁵⁵ Eleanor H. Davis, "The Norse Migration: Norwegian Labor in Hawaii," in *The Hawaiian Historical Society Seventy-First Annual Report*, December 1962, 28-35.

⁵⁶ US Census Records; Charles J. Iverson Death Certificate, King Country Department of Public Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics.

Norwegian laborers to become unhappy with their living and work conditions. Accustomed to group action and labor organization, the Scandinavians instigated one of the first labor strikes on the Island, which subsequently, caused an international uproar between Norway and the United States, their employers' home country. The Iversens, as well as the other Scandinavians, did not stay long, for the island kingdom was no paradise. Disgruntlement continued over issues such as food, flimsy housing, deductions in wages, and unfair treatment of nonworking family members by the company. Because of the problems they confronted in Hawaii, most of the Norwegian migrants left after three years when their contracted expired, and were replaced by laborers from the Azores, Japan, and the Philippines.⁵⁷

The Iversens disappear for awhile from the historic record after 1884.⁵⁸ Interestingly, nearly all sources—her dairy, census and death records—indicated that Augusta's date of birth is October 22, but the year is often listed as "about 1884" rather than 1879. In fact, 1879 never appears in records associated with the United States. No explanation has been discovered as to why she would say otherwise. Perhaps Thora changed her daughter's birth date to match the year she entered the United States. No naturalization records have been found for Augusta, and in 1880, when she traveled with her family to Hawaii as an infant, the Sandwich Islands were governed as a kingdom—Hawaii was not annexed by the United States until 1898. Until immigration or naturalization papers for Augusta are uncovered, if they indeed exist, the likelihood of determining the reason remains slim.

Furthermore, it remains unclear when the family left Maui and when and where John Alfred died. Instead of returning to Norway, it is likely the family looked to a much closer destination, one that was actively encouraging the settlement of Scandinavian immigrants—the Pacific Northwest. By 1876, the Scandinavian Immigration and Aid Society had formed in Seattle, Washington with the purpose of bringing Scandinavians to the Puget Sound city. Over twelve percent of the Seattle population in 1900 was from Scandinavia or were children of Scandinavians. About half were women, a majority of whom were classified as single.⁵⁹

Many Norwegians felt at home in Seattle because the surrounding environment reminded them of home. Moreover, the physical similarities between the Pacific Northwest and Scandinavia parlayed into economic similarities—fishing, logging, farming, and woodworking.⁶⁰ Most single Scandinavian women in Seattle, as with the women in their home country, worked as domestic servants.⁶¹ In addition, almost all Scandinavians who

⁵⁷ Eleanor H. Davis, "The Norse Migration: Norwegian Labor in Hawaii," in *The Hawaiian Historical Society Seventy-First Annual Report*, December 1962, 28-35.

⁵⁸ Augusta Radovan's death certificate states that she was born in Oslo, Norway on October 23, 1884. The information was undoubtedly provided by Martin, who may not have known for sure where Augusta was born.

⁵⁹ Reiff, 170-184.

⁶⁰ Janet E. Rasmussen, *New Land New Lives: Scandinavian Immigrants to the Pacific Northwest* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993), 7-8.

⁶¹ According to historian Janice Reiff, in 1900, 90% of single Norwegian women living in Seattle worked as domestics, although most lived with their employer or in private homes that let rooms. Few actually lived in a boarding or lodging situation. Reiff, 170-184.

migrated to the United States had a high rate of literacy. In Norway, the importance of public education was cultivated early in the nineteenth century, and by 1837, it was the law. According to historian Janet Rasmussen, attendance was expected from the age of seven to the time of confirmation.⁶² Thora was undoubtedly raised in an environment where education was valued. She, in turn, passed the value of education on to her children.

Fifteen years later, the historic record picked up the Iverson's trail in Seattle.⁶³ The Polk Directory listed both Augusta L. Iverson and her brother Charles J. Iverson in 1899. Augusta, who was twenty at the time,⁶⁴ was living at a boarding house on Lenora Street in downtown Seattle. Charles, who was eighteen, was living on 1st Avenue and attending the Acme Business College, whose motto in 1899 was "Learn to do by doing."⁶⁵ Located on the corner of Second and Pike, the Seattle Business College initially taught shorthand and typing, but expanded its curriculum to include bookkeeping, accounting, business law, English and mathematics after it was bought out by the Acme Business College in 1894.⁶⁶ In 1900, Augusta was enrolled at the college, while Charles, living at an address on Second Avenue, worked as a fireman at a planing mill in north Seattle. Their mother Thora, described as a 'widow,' lived at the same downtown address as Charles.⁶⁷

In 1900, the U.S. Census recorded a "nineteen-year-old" Augusta Iverson working as a nurse for the Trimble family on Aloha Street on Lower Queen Anne Hill in Seattle.⁶⁸ The census, however, stated that this young woman came from Minnesota and described her as "Swedish," and not Norwegian. Moreover, the family's nurse would have likely been living at the family's residence, rather than living in a boarding house downtown. Still, Queen Anne Hill is not far from Lenora St, a destination she could have accessed fairly easily using Seattle's street car system.⁶⁹ One of the Timbles, with little knowledge of Augusta's family history, might have incorrectly assumed her ethnicity and migration. And there is no way to know how long the job actually lasted. In other words, Augusta may have only worked at the Trimble household for a short time before the census was counted. Although most young single Scandinavian women worked as domestic servants in Seattle at this time, it is unclear if in fact the same Augusta Iverson who eventually traveled to Alaska and married Martin Radovan worked as a nurse in 1900.

If Augusta was in fact this family's nurse, then she figured out a way to move beyond domestic servitude rather quickly. By the time she reached Seattle, Augusta had broken

⁶² Although the school term in rural districts lasted at most twelve weeks a year.

⁶³ By this point the family is spelling their surname 'Iverson' rather than "Iversen"

⁶⁴ Age is based on Norwegian birth records.

⁶⁵ Polk Directory, 1899 and 1900. In 1899 Augusta's address is dom 216 Lenora; Charles address is Acme Bus Coll, res 2910 1st av. In 1900, Augusta's address is Wilson's MBC, beds 216 Lenora; Charles is 1711 2d av. Thora is listed at the same address.

⁶⁶ Guide to the Metropolitan Business College Records, 1919-1981, Museum of History and Industry, Seattle Washington.

⁶⁷ Polk Directory, 1899 and 1900.

⁶⁸ ; "Thora Iverson" 1900 U.S. Federal Census; Polk's Seattle Directory, 1899 and 1900; "Augusta Iverson" 1900 U.S. Census;

⁶⁹ "Seattle's Streetcar History," *The Seattle Times*, December 23, 2007, http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/localnews/2004062952_streetcartimeline10.html.

ties from the country of her parents and had learned the basics of modern American life. She spoke English and, being single, she understood what tools she needed in order to support herself. While attending school, she obtained bookkeeping, typing, and accounting skills. Such expertise was advantageous in a city where numerous jobs were opening to Scandinavians. Augusta's aspirations for a better future reflected both her native country's value in education, while at the same time, her new country's belief in independence and self-reliance.⁷⁰

Ten years later, Augusta, now entering her thirties, found employment as a bookkeeper at a local Seattle office. She lived with her mother Thora in the southwest part of Seattle in a house on which Thora was paying a mortgage.⁷¹ Thora, a widow, made ends meet as a cook.⁷² The fact that other Scandinavians were not living nearby was fairly typical. Although patterns in Scandinavian settlement would change in Seattle after 1910, historian Janice L. Reiff points out that prior to that year, "the dynamics of the city worked to discourage ethnic isolation."⁷³ She notes that in 1900 residential segregation was nonexistent in Seattle. Even when Scandinavians lived in the same broad areas of the city, their immediate neighbors, the people on the same block, and the neighborhood businessmen were most often non-Scandinavian. This was true for Augusta and her mother, for their neighbors were not Scandinavians. According to Reiff, by putting themselves into contact with their native neighbors, this neighborly configuration probably helped both Thora and Augusta (to a lesser degree) accept the American way of doing things.⁷⁴

Besides attracting Scandinavians to the Pacific Northwest, Seattle had become a magnet for other groups of people looking for a new life. In 1880, Seattle was a small port town of 3,500. Within a few years, however, it had become the center of water trade between Puget Sound and the Far North. In addition, the completion of the transcontinental Northern Pacific Railroad at Tacoma meant that the Pacific Northwest was accessible to both East Coast markets and migrants by 1887. As a result, by 1900, Seattle had boomed into a major urban center of 42,000.

The decade of 1890 began with a "building boom," prompted by two major events: the Great Seattle Fire in 1889 and the arrival of James J. Hill's Great Northern Railway, who selected Seattle as the terminus for his transcontinental line.⁷⁵ The railway, completed in 1893, initially led to the city's growth and prosperity. But unchecked speculation on Wall Street and overexpansion of the railroad industry sparked the Panic of 1893.

⁷⁰ For more information on Scandinavians in the Pacific Northwest see Jorgen Dahlie, *A Social History of Scandinavian Immigration, Washington State, 1895-1910* (New York: Arno Press, 1980); Janet E. Rasmussen, *New Land, New Lives: Scandinavian Immigrants to the Pacific Northwest*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993); and Janice L. Reiff, "Scandinavian Women in Seattle: Domestication and Americanization," in *Women in Pacific Northwest History: An Anthology* ed. Karen J Blair (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988).

⁷¹ 1910 U.S. Federal Census.

⁷² 1910 U.S. Federal Census.

⁷³ Janice L. Reiff

⁷⁴ Reiff, 170-184.

⁷⁵ Lisa Mighetto and Marcia Montgomery, *Hard Drive to the Klondike: Promoting Seattle During the Gold Rush* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002),

Frightened foreign investors began to sell their American bonds, draining gold from the U.S. Treasury and creating the worst economic downturn the nation had yet to experience.

Economic hard times hit the Northwest as well. Such conditions lasted until July 1897, when the steamer *Portland* sailed into Seattle, laden with more than a ton of gold from the Canadian Far North and the sixty-eight “Argonauts” who had hit paydirt. The Klondike discovery not only caused a rush north, but made Seattle the jumping off point to Alaska’s believed “riches.” As a result, Seattle was suddenly transformed into “the metropolis of the Northwest.”⁷⁶ As one historian put it, “The Klondike Gold Rush was at once the last frontier fantasy of the 19th century and the birth of modern Seattle.”⁷⁷

After the Klondike gold discovery, the Seattle Chamber of Commerce initiated a public relations campaign designed to make Seattle the gateway city to the northern goldfields. Their marketing efforts worked—for most of the thousands of miners and prospectors heading to the Far North left from the port of Seattle. In 1899, gold discoveries on Alaska’s Seward Peninsula cemented Seattle’s function as an outfitting and transportation center. In April and May of 1900, approximately 8,000 gold seekers passed through Seattle on their way to Nome. Though the Far North never regained the excitement of the Klondike Gold Rush, Seattle retained its dominant connection to Alaska. According to historians Lisa Mighetto and Marcia Montgomery, the Gold Rush not only fueled a longstanding commercial spirit in Seattle that has continued through the present, but the Chamber of Commerce’s wildly successful advertising blitz linked Seattle to Alaska and the Far North in the public mind.⁷⁸ In 1898, *The Seattle Daily Times* wrote:

“There is probably no city in the Union today so much talked about as Seattle and there is certainly none toward which more faces are at present turned. From every nook and corner of America and from even the uttermost parts of the earth, a ceaseless, restless throng is moving—moving toward the land of the midnight sun and precious gold, and moving through its natural gateway—the far-famed City of Seattle.”⁷⁹

If there was one single event that did more to promote Seattle as a gateway to the rich resources of Alaska, it was the Alaska-Yukon Pacific Exposition in 1909. Washington’s first World’s Fair was envisioned to celebrate the host city’s ties to the Far North and to commemorate the ten year anniversary of the Klondike Gold Rush. It attracted nearly four million people to Seattle, from President William Taft to populist William Jennings Bryan. Primarily, the A-Y-P focused national attention on the city and the region.⁸⁰

At the center of the A-Y-P exposition was a brightly lighted, extravagant street of eateries and entertainments called the “Paystreak,” a term for the richest deposit of gold in a

⁷⁶ Lisa Mighetto and Marcia Montgomery, *Hard Drive to the Klondike*, vii.

⁷⁷ *Hard Drive*.

⁷⁸ *Hard Drive*, xii.

⁷⁹ *Hard Drive*.

⁸⁰ *Hard Drive*, 59-60.

placer claim and an allusion to the importance of Alaska gold mining to Seattle.⁸¹ The Paystreak featured an attraction called “Gold Camps of Alaska” as well as an Eskimo village. Additional references to the Far North at the exposition included a large gold nugget, on display from the Yukon. Especially visible was the Alaska monument, a gold-covered column measuring eighty feet high that continually reminded visitors of the ties between Seattle and the Far North.⁸² Historian Clarence B. Bagley notes that the fair successfully met the city’s objectives, writing that “the city’s guests left the fair with the knowledge that Alaska was a golden possession and Seattle a growing metropolis.”⁸³

There is no way of knowing why Augusta went to Alaska. Perhaps Augusta attended the Exposition sometime in August 1909, attracted by the promotion of “Norway Day” or “Acme Business College Day,” her alma mater.⁸⁴ Maybe the nearly five-month long celebration of Alaska triggered an interest in the North, but even if Augusta did not attend the fair, given where she lived and her occupation, Alaska would have been on her mind. Alaska and the development of its resources were central to the city’s growing economy, but it also had become a focus of politics during the Roosevelt and Taft administrations. Seattle’s own Richard A. Ballinger made headlines between 1906 and 1909, first as the Commissioner of the Central Land Office and then as the Secretary of the Interior, in his public battle with Louis Glavis and Chief Forester Gifford Pinchot over coal leases in Alaska.⁸⁵

Underlying the public affair was Gifford Pinchot fear of a Morgan-Guggenheim monopoly of Alaska’s coal, which the Syndicate intended to use to fuel the CR&NW Railway and the coastal smelters for Kennecott’s copper. But because the federally-controlled coal leases remained withdrawn and unavailable, the Copper River & Northwestern Railway was forced to shift to more expensive oil to fuel their locomotives.⁸⁶ Moreover, without cheap coal, the Syndicate could no longer afford to develop the promised coastal smelters. Instead, high grade copper ore would have to be processed outside of Alaska.

The Alaska Syndicate, then, confronting serious transportation problems, bought the Alaska Steamship Company so they could transport copper mined in the Wrangell Mountains to smelters in Tacoma, Washington.⁸⁷ They merged the company with the Northwestern Steamship Company, keeping the Alaska Steamship Company name. Ironically, the merger of the two companies just about gave Morgan and the

⁸¹ Alan J. Stein, Paula Becker & the HistoryLink Staff, *Alaska Yukon Pacific Exposition: A Timeline History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 8.

⁸² Hard Drive, 60.

⁸³ Hard Drive,

⁸⁴ Alan J. Stein, Paula Becker & the HistoryLink Staff, *Alaska Yukon Pacific Exposition: A Timeline History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009)

⁸⁵ The infamous Ballinger-Pinchot Affair would effectively split the Republican Party, and pit conservationists against preservationists in a battle over management of America’s natural resources for decades to come. For more about the Ballinger-Pinchot Affair, see

⁸⁶ Melody Webb Grauman, “Big Business in Alaska: The Kennecott Mines, 1898-1938” National Park Service, 1977, 8-14.

⁸⁷ Melody Webb Grauman, “Big Business in Alaska: The Kennecott Mines, 1898-1938” National Park Service, 1977, 8-14.

Guggenheims a monopoly in the Alaska shipping industry. The transaction occurred in 1909, and was perhaps overshadowed in Seattle by the golden-hyped A-Y-P Exposition. Nevertheless, the shipping deal, which essentially solved Kennecott's transportation problems, allowed the Syndicate to focus on developing the mill and mines, an operation that eventually earned investors one hundred million dollar profit and quickly became the Nizina district's primary economic engine. This Alaskan venture with direct ties to the Northwest undoubtedly impacted the lives of Augusta and Martin, too. At the very least, for someone with Augusta's skills, Alaska meant employment. Indeed, that was the case for Martin, whose interest in railroad construction initially brought him north.⁸⁸ In all likelihood, both found their way to Alaska aboard an Alaska Steamship.

Although Augusta and Martin both lived for a time in Seattle, as far as we know, their paths never crossed. They were two Europeans—one with roots in the north, the other the south—who emigrated from their native lands, taking entirely different routes. One came to America alone, following a common pattern familiar to most immigrants, and initially entered the United States on the East Coast. The other was brought to America by her family who had traveled to an exotic Pacific island and, after some time, eventually entered from the West Coast. Both found their way to the Pacific Northwest. At the time, Seattle, the hailed gateway to Alaska, directly linked the Northwest to the copper mines at Kennecott. Each journeyed north, driven by their individual needs and dreams. It is only after arriving to Alaska that Martin and Augusta found each other, deep in the heart of the Wrangell Mountains.

⁸⁸ ADT

Gold, Copper and Love: Life in Early Blackburn and McCarthy 1912-1919

It was rumors of gold that first brought prospectors to the Wrangell Mountains, but it was copper that kept them there.

~ United States Geological Survey (USGS)⁸⁹

After four years of railway work, Martin Radovan remained in the Nizina district, taking whatever job was available. USGS had established the Nizina district in 1908 after a favorable reconnaissance survey of the so-called “copper belt” located just south of the Wrangell Mountains. Named for the Nizina River, a northern branch of Chitina River, the new district afforded USGS geologists the opportunity to solve the region’s geologic puzzle; and to provide support for the placer mining that had been conducted in the area since 1901; and to observe and mine valuable copper ore.⁹⁰

In 1912, Martin took his first mining job in the Nizina district with a hydraulic mining company at Chititu Creek called the Andrus Mining Company. That first year, Martin placer-mined for Andrus through the summer months; by winter, he had built a cabin in a ravine between the bases of Nikolai Butte and Williams Peak on Dan Creek, a tributary of the Nizina River. The cabin was situated near the mouth of Boulder Creek, above Dan Creek on a bluff. From his cabin, Martin viewed sheep grazing on Williams Peak to the south, the creekside gold camp to the west, and the Copper Creek drainage to the east. Using his cabin as a base, Martin began prospecting throughout the Nizina River watershed, including the creeks of Young, Dan and Glacier.⁹¹

As noted by USGS geologists, miners had worked Dan Creek continuously since the discovery of placer gold in paying quantities there in 1901.⁹² Then, after gold was found on Chititu Creek in 1902, a stampede of a thousand men entered the Nizina country between 1902 and 1903. The swelling population converged at a mining camp aptly called Nizina, which between 1903 and 1926 had its own post office.⁹³ The camp was located on Chititu Creek, five miles southeast of its confluence with the Nizina River, and served miners on Dan, Young, and Chititu.⁹⁴ Hydraulic mining at Dan Creek began in 1908, but by then the rush had subsided. Even though the creek areas were rich, the available ground was limited. By 1911, the collective population had dwindled to 150.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ “A Geological Guide to Wrangell-Saint Elias National Park and Preserve, Alaska: A Tectonic Collage of Northbound Terranes”

⁹⁰ Fred H. Moffit and Stephen R. Capps, “Geology and Mineral Resources of the Nizina District, Alaska,” Department of the Interior United States Geological Survey, Bulletin 448, GOP, 1911. pg. 7.

⁹¹ “Brothers Reunited,” ADT, Nov 7, 1951.

⁹² USGS, “A Geological Guide,” 88. Pilgrim, 1931, 93.

⁹³ 100 years of Alaska postmasters

⁹⁴ Hunt, 69.

⁹⁵ Kirchhoff, 33.

Even the construction of the Nizina Bridge in 1914, and adjoining wagon road built by the Alaska Road Commission, which made it easier to haul in heavy equipment for hydraulic and lode mining, did not immediately revive the tremendous interest the country once held. By 1912, Martin, who by all definitions was a “Johnny-come-lately” to the Nizina gold rush, was one of those who remained, persistently prospecting for gold on the surrounding creeks.⁹⁶

Martin’s chances of finding gold at Dan Creek depended upon how and where millions of years of tectonic activity deposited the gold placers. As the on-going collision of the Pacific Plate with the North American Plate forced the heavier oceanic slab to plunge beneath the continental shelf, waterlogged marine sediment became superheated, producing molten rock, or magma. The lighter magma rose to the surface, cooled, and solidified. If any gold was present in the magma, intense pressure would have sweated it out and then transported it, deep into the fractures of the rock, where it crystallized into gold nuggets, most often enveloped by masses of white silicon dioxide, known as quartz.

Subduction, while lifting the surrounding mountains, also elevated the hard rock veins, sources of lode gold deposits, to well above sea level.⁹⁷ Yearly rounds of freezing, thawing, and erosion eventually worked some of the lode gold free from the quartz or granite and washed it as dust and fragments—placer gold—into rivers and creeks. Because gold was substantially heavier than anything else, it sank into the gravels that formed the beds of the rivers and streams, and came to rest when it met something dense enough to stop it. Miners called what ever stopped the gold bedrock. Although miners found placer gold in the bedrock of streams like Chititu Creek and Dan Creek, placer gold was also found in the bedrock of ancient streambeds, which lay underground, far below the surface creeks, or far above them on hillsides.⁹⁸

Although miners like Martin were after gold, Dan Creek was also the site of Chief Nicolai’s famed “Copper Mine” that initially attracted the first explorers to the Nizina River region in 1885. While his party was exploring the Chitina River region, Lt. Henry Allen had sought a meeting with Chief Nicolai, the head chief of the Copper River Ahtna, at his hunting camp on Dan Creek. Allen and his men were starving. In order to survive he needed assistance from the local Native people. Nicolai gave Allen a portion of his people’s meager food and provisions, and thusly, saved the expedition, as well as the men’s lives.⁹⁹ Nicolai also showed Allen the Ahtnas’ copper utensils and knives, and may even have shown Allen the source of the native copper.¹⁰⁰

Alaska Natives of the Wrangell Mountains had long used the copper found in their streams, fashioning the nuggets into arrowheads, cooking utensils, and knives. Copper was an important article of trade, with intertribal commerce extending as far south as the

⁹⁶ “Brothers Reunited,” ADT, Nov 7, 1951.

⁹⁷ Morse, *Nature of Gold*

⁹⁸ Others discovered lode gold imbedded in the rim rock situated at even higher elevations in mountains like Williams Peak Bleakley

⁹⁹ Cronon, *Kennicott Dreams*

¹⁰⁰ Sources of the Nicolai story...

Queen Charlotte Islands in Canada. Coastal Natives told early explorers that the copper had come from a rugged inland area to the north. Tales of a “copper mountain” provoked tall-tales among the early traders and pioneers, but no real attempt was made to find the deposits until Allen’s expedition in 1885.¹⁰¹ Fourteen years after the Nicolai meeting at Dan Creek, William S. Abercrombie was sent into the region to construct a safe military trail into the interior in order to support the increase of miners heading for the Klondike. Abercrombie blazed a rugged new trail from Valdez through the mountains over Thompson Pass, and made the headwaters of the Copper River relatively accessible for the first time. Not surprisingly, a procession of prospectors came in the wake of federal road building, and as historian M.J. Kirchhoff writes, “the legend of Lt. Henry Allen’s Nikolai Mine was vivid in their minds.”¹⁰²

Besides enticing prospectors like Warner and Smith of the McClennan Party to the Nizina country, the rising economic interest in copper prompted Abercrombie to send Oscar Rohn up the Chitina River also in the summer of 1899. While struggling up the Chitina, Rohn came across the camp of a prospector named James McCarthy. McCarthy lent Rohn some of his surplus horses and supplies, and in return, Rohn named a creek farther up the river for McCarthy. He also named the nearby Kennicott Glacier after Robert Kennicott, an early Alaskan explorer. Rohn was the first explorer to describe in detail the McCarthy and Kennicott area. He recorded geological formations, noted the mineralization in the area, and wrote that he had found slivers of copper ore called “copper floats” in the gravel of McCarthy Creek.¹⁰³

Rohn’s investigations laid the foundation for many subsequent geological surveys and mineral discoveries in the Nizina district. Like previous government expeditions, Rohn benefitted from the company of prospectors and Natives, who already had acquired working knowledge of routes and conditions found in the Nizina country, as well as locations of gold-bearing placers and copper bear lodes. After Rohn made his findings public 1899, discovery of the Bonanza deposit soon followed.

In 1906, a prospector named John Barrett found a vein of chalcocite on top of a cliff along McCarthy Creek. The chalcocite was seventy percent pure copper, the same quality as the Bonanza deposit, located in the contact a few miles away. Kirchhoff explains that Barrett had good foresight to recognize that the only economical way to access the copper prospects located thousands of feet above the Kennicott Glacier was by railroad. “As Barrett surveyed the country around the Bonanza Mine..., writes Kirchhoff, “...it dawned on him that any railroad built to Bonanza would have to traverse a narrow strip of land between the face of the Kennicott Glacier and the mouth of McCarthy Creek.”¹⁰⁴

Barrett decided to stake a homestead of 296-acres at the mouth of McCarthy Creek in July of 1906, one year before the Alaska Syndicate began to mark locations for the

¹⁰¹ Kirchhoff, 16-17

¹⁰² Kirchhoff, 19.

¹⁰³ Kirchhoff, 19-20.

¹⁰⁴ Kirchhoff, 28.

CR&NW Railway line. Because Barrett had staked the most desirable land in the McCarthy Creek area, the company ended up renting part of Barrett's homestead for a freight yard.¹⁰⁵ By 1911, the company had built a bunkhouse, cookhouse, depot, and water tower on Barrett's property.¹⁰⁶ Concerned that renting too much of his homestead before he owned it outright might invite legal problems, Barrett began to discourage newcomers, attracted to the budding but closed, company town of Kennecott, from tenting. But with completion of the railroad, businessmen and merchant continued to arrive along with prospectors and miners. The new arrivals began to congregate just north of Barrett's homestead. They called the booming community, Blackburn.

Blackburn started at the site of another homestead near the railroad belonging to John Blomquist, who also staked his claims in 1906. The first businessmen in the area were the Fagerburg brothers, who had run a small store at the mining camp at Nizina. In 1911, the Fagerburg brothers constructed the Blackburn roadhouse, a two-storey structure with the bottom storey built of log construction and the second storey of wood frame construction (milled wood). At the time it was considered the "biggest log structure in the district."¹⁰⁷ The Fagerburgs' roadhouse played a key role in the first ascent of Mount Blackburn, the tallest peak in the Wrangell Mountains.¹⁰⁸ In early August of 1911, mountaineer Dora Keen outfitted at Fagerburgs' Roadhouse and hired John Barrett and three other experienced men to serve as packers and helpers. Keen was not successful in her first attempt, but she returned in the spring of 1912, and made it to the top of Mount Blackburn.¹⁰⁹

R.F. McClellan, superintendent at Kennecott mine, organized Keen's first expedition and had secured local prospectors to complete her outfit. Apparently, a young Martin Radovan assisted with the 1911 expedition, supplying logistical support.¹¹⁰ He was not named in the party that made the failed ascent, however, and it's unclear what role Martin actually played in the expedition. Keen, in an article for *Scribner's Magazine*, noted that numerous prospectors served as "guides" and members of a "relief party." She also made the point that "my men had been...Americans all, Mr. McClellan knew them....He wanted men 'whom he could count on to put a hundred pounds on their backs and go where he told them,' and he had found them, not far from the Road House."¹¹¹ Although he can be placed in the area at that time, clearly knew the terrain, and could easily pack a hundred pounds, Martin, who spoke with a thick Slavic accent, was not an American, and Keen may have overlooked or ignored his efforts in her article. Nevertheless, whether his role was minor or more involved, Martin Radovan participated in the historic event.

¹⁰⁵ Kirchhoff, 29-30

¹⁰⁶ Kirchhoff, 31.

¹⁰⁷ Chitina Leader, July 15, 1911.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Gary Green-- Kirchhoff, 34.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Gary Green-- Kirchhoff, 34.

¹¹⁰ McCarthy resident Gary Green, who worked for Martin in the early 1970s, remembered that Martin told him the story of the Blackburn ascent. Martin had told Gary that he help by hauling food and other supplies for the first attempted that later failed. It is unclear if he was associated with the successful 1912 ascent.

¹¹¹ Dora Keen, "Arctic Mountaineering by a Woman: Mount Blackburn," in *Scribner's Magazine* volume LII, July-December, 1912.

In 1912, the same year as Keen's successful ascent, the townsite of Blackburn was laid out on a slit of land between Barrett's and Blomquist's homesteads, and not surprisingly, a construction boom quickly followed. That same year, Oscar Breedman, a hotel owner with ties to Chitina and Cordova, bought the Fagerburgs' hotel. John Blomquist, the new mayor of Blackburn, predicted to a Valdez paper that a great future lay ahead for the new interior town.¹¹² Convinced that there was money to be made, Martin Radovan took a job running the restaurant at the Blackburn Roadhouse in 1913. Running the restaurant with him was "one of Kennecott's secretaries," Augusta Iverson.¹¹³

Martin and Augusta's flirtation in the restaurant business was brief due primarily to Blackburn's sudden economic downturn caused by the Shushanna gold rush.¹¹⁴ In July 1913, miners discovered gold in Shushanna country, about eighty miles from Blackburn on the north side of the Wrangell Mountains. The discovery ignited the last major gold rush in Alaska, which subsequently, depopulated the Nizina watershed, including McCarthy, Blackburn and Chitina, Dan Creek, and Chititu. However, the surging number of miners and merchants arriving each day on the railway inundated Barrett's homestead with squatters. It is unknown if Martin went to Shushanna himself, but as proprietor of the roadhouse, he was at least a firsthand witness to the event.

James Edwards, a long-time McCarthy resident and friend of Martin, recalls that, "Radovan advertised his roadhouse as offering a meal and guide service. The meal: a bowl of beans. The guide service: 'Shushanna is that-a-way.'"¹¹⁵ Meanwhile, Barrett, in order to accommodate the influx of newcomers incorporated the town of McCarthy.¹¹⁶ Undoubtedly, the need for grubstakes and outfits for Shushanna sparked the development of McCarthy's commercial infrastructure, but the stampede that took miners over the Wrangell Mountains and out of the Nizina country had a dire affect on Blackburn. Historian M.J. Kirchhoff explains, "Since McCarthy had the railroad deport and Blackburn didn't, most the traffic consequently went to McCarthy merchants, and the town of Blackburn started to shrivel."¹¹⁷ Consequently, Martin and Augusta only ran the roadhouse for at most two years.

¹¹² Kirchhoff, 41.

¹¹³ McCarthy resident, Loy Green, told the Wrangell Saint Elias News that Martin "married one of the secretaries from Kennecott and brought her to his cabin at Glacier Creek. Loy Green, "Life in the Wrangell Mts. & Meetings with remarkable Men & Women from 1963" April 21, 1994.

What appears to me a menu was written in a book that Augusta Radovan later used as a diary. On April 9, 1931 she writes "1913—when we had the restaurant in Blackburn." *Augusta Iverson's Diary, 1930-1931*. Martin Radovan Collection, private collection, Chico, California. James Edwards also remembers that Martin ran the Blackburn roadhouse for a short time, recalling that "a patron once ran off without paying, and Martin Radovan chased him down and got his money."

¹¹⁴ Today "Shushanna" is spelled "Chisana."

¹¹⁵ Interview with James Edwards, July, 2010.

¹¹⁶ Kirchhoff writes that McCarthyites seriously considered changing their town's name to Shushanna Junction. Although the railroad deport did adopt the new name, the town and post office retained the name of McCarthy. 44.

¹¹⁷ Kirchhoff, 42.

In spite of Blackburn's inevitable decline, Martin and Augusta remained involved with the community well into the 1920s and early 1930s. Most significantly, they spent their honeymoon at the Blackburn Roadhouse in 1914.¹¹⁸ Martin and Augusta were married by the Justice of the Peace in McCarthy on February 27.¹¹⁹ Sources who knew Martin say that he also worked at Kennecott for a short time, perhaps at the same time as Augusta, but no hard evidence exists that explains how and where Martin and Augusta met. Martin had a homestead near McCarthy, and many sources allude to a place they resided at while in 'town,' but according to Martin, he did not make improvements on the homestead and eventually "lost the land."¹²⁰

It is also unclear as to where exactly the couple was living in 1914, but they had ties to the terminus town of Cordova, Alaska. In 1918, Martin listed himself as an "unemployed machinist," on his World War I draft card, implying that he worked for an employer, perhaps Kennecott.¹²¹ He called Cordova his permanent residence and named "Mrs. Augusta Louise Radovan of Cordova, Alaska" his nearest relative.¹²² In 1924, Augusta was called to Cordova for jury duty, leaving from and returning to McCarthy. The call to public service again offered another clue as to the couple's tie to the coastal town.¹²³ Unfortunately, associated records of the Radovans early life in Cordova likely burned in one of the many fires that swept through town in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.¹²⁴

One important record that survived was the Radovans marriage certificate. Present at the couple's wedding on that February day were two witnesses: Frank A. Iverson and Anna Sornes.¹²⁵ Although they shared a last name, Frank Iverson was not related to Augusta. He was originally from the Dakotas, and like Martin, made his way to Seattle. Frank worked as a surveyor in the Puget Sound city at approximately the same time Augusta's family lived there, but it is unknown if the families knew each other then.¹²⁶ As with Martin, Frank Iverson came to Alaska to work on the CR&NW Railway. He lived in Chitina between 1911 and 1912, and then sometime after that, he homesteaded near Blackburn. Frank Iverson operated the McCarthy Dairy during the 1920s and was one of about five local farmers who supplied vegetables and other supplies to Kennecott.¹²⁷ He was married to Anna Sornes by 1920. Anna was born in Norway, immigrated in 1912, and was similar in age to Augusta.¹²⁸ Considering Anna witnessed Augusta's nuptials, it

¹¹⁸ Gary Green interview.

¹¹⁹ Marriage License; McCarthy resident, Loy Green, told the Wrangell Saint Elias News that Martin "married one of the secretaries from Kennecott and brought her to his cabin at Glacier Creek. Loy Green, "Life in the Wrangell Mts. & Meetings with remarkable Men & Women from 1963" April 21, 1994.

¹²⁰ Interview Notes, Katherine Ceasere talking with her grandfather, Jack Radovich. No Date is provided.

¹²¹ Employee records for Kennecott begin in 1918.

¹²² WWI Draft Card

¹²³ Augusta serves on a jury in Cordova for several weeks. She returns to McCarthy on November 8. McCarthy Weekly News

¹²⁴ Cordova Museum Archivist

¹²⁵ Marriage Certificate

¹²⁶ Washington State and Territorial Census record for Frank A. Iverson, 1892; Seattle Directory; Polk Directory.

¹²⁷ Bleakley

¹²⁸ 1920 US Census.

can be assumed the women, who shared a common background and story, were good friends.

Besides being friendly, the couples' shared life experiences, shaped by broad historic patterns and trends. Unlike Augusta Iverson's family, Frank Iverson followed a traditional immigration route for Scandinavians: his family first migrated to the Midwest, then to the Pacific Northwest, then to Alaska.¹²⁹ Although it is unclear how Anna ended up in McCarthy, it is important to note that she came to work for Kennecott as a single person, and like Augusta, presumably met her husband after she had arrived. In addition, both women—whether it was farming or mining—worked side by side with their husbands. These actions not only reflect traditional roles of Scandinavian wives, but they hint at a pattern where, instead of women following men north, (aka, the reluctant pioneer) women like Anna and Augusta came to Kennecott for their own reasons and merits, and only afterwards, chose to get married. In other words, these women were anything but passive players in history; they played active roles in their work, marriages, communities, and desires for coming to Alaska in the first place.¹³⁰

Five years before the Radovans were married by McCarthy's Justice of the Peace, the United States Congress established four judicial districts to cover the Territory of Alaska. The Third District covered Cordova, Valdez, Chitina, Kennicott, and McCarthy.¹³¹ Except for mining claims and his marriage Martin's only other known legal dealing was a supposed felony. On March 8, 1914, *The Alaska Citizen* reported that Martin Radovan was indicted for alleged robbery at McCarthy, but was "granted his freedom by order of Judge Brown" because the district attorney was unable to locate witnesses, and that "there was not available evidence to insure conviction."¹³² The only other altercation described in association with Martin was a story told by James Edwards. "While Martin was in charge of the Blackburn roadhouse," recalled Edwards, "a patron once ran off without paying, and Martin Radovan chased him down and got his money."¹³³ There is no way of knowing if the incidences were related, or even what the circumstances were surrounding them.¹³⁴ But they do suggest that Martin was no 'pushover.' He was as tough as the town's reputation and, like many of McCarthy's inhabitants, took the law into his own hands when believed necessary to do so.

As the boomtown of Blackburn declined, Augusta was also doing what was necessary to support their chosen lifeway. She returned to Kennecott to work as a bookkeeper at the National Creek in 1918. By 1918 Kennecott had enjoyed record profits for the last four years, due to skyrocketing copper prices sparked by World War I.¹³⁵ In addition, rich new finds of ore were discovered at Jumbo and the Mother Lode prospects. High copper prices encouraged the mines and mill to operate around the clock, creating a need for

¹²⁹ Scandinavians in Seattle.

¹³⁰ Scandinavian women in Seattle, *The Women's West*

¹³¹ (U.S. Stat., vol. 35, ch. 269[1909], sec. 2/pp. 839-840) S.D. Charles of Cordova was appointed deputy marshal for law enforcement and M.V. Lattin was appointed the U.S. commissioner.

¹³² *The Alaska Citizen*, Fairbanks Alaska, Monday Morning, March 9, 1914. vol. v. no. 1.

¹³³ James Edwards Interview

¹³⁴ Chitina Courthouse burned in 19**

¹³⁵ Kennecott employee records

more labor. This probably attracted Augusta's younger brother, Charles John Iverson, to Kennecott, who, by 1918, was working at the mill as a receiving clerk.¹³⁶ Charlie, or C.J. as he was also called, remained working at Kennecott at least two more years.¹³⁷ By 1930, however, Charles had returned to Washington, presumably to take care of the sibling's aging mother, Thora Iverson.¹³⁸ By then, Augusta had also left the milltown, for the U.S. census found the Radovans living at Martin's Dan Creek cabin in 1920.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ WWI Draft Card.

¹³⁷ 1920 Census.

¹³⁸ 1930 United States Federal Census.

¹³⁹ U.S. Census Records

Martin and Augusta at Dan Creek 1920-1931

And now let us consider what manner of women we shall endeavor to be, to the end that the world may find in us the inspiration of which it is so sorely in need.

~Margaret Harrais,
McCarthy resident, WCTU Vice President, and Augusta's friend
"A Prayer for All Women"¹⁴⁰

In the 1920 Martin listed his occupation as "placer miner." Though he had a tendency to provide false information to census takers, this statement was undoubtedly true. Henry Allen's famous meeting with Chief Nicolai originally associated Dan Creek with copper, but after the 1901 placer discoveries, what Martin and others sought at the Nizina tributary was gold. Alaska's placer miners employed an array of technological innovation to remove gold from the ground. The most iconic was panning, but the method, though popular and inexpensive, was not commercially viable. Next to the gold pan, the most recognizable tools used by Alaskan miners to extract gold from pay dirt were the sluice and the rocker boxes. Mining methods culminated at Dan Creek, however, with the development of hydraulicking, which used a strong spray of water to loosen and transport gold bearing gravels and soils to a processing facility for recovery of the gold.

By the early 1920s, interest in the placer camps across the Nizina River at Dan and Chititu creeks had renewed. With the growth of the depot-town of McCarthy came road and communication connections with the gold mining camps. The road was the longest in the district. It crossed the Nizina River by a long bridge two miles west of the mouth of Young Creek. At the roadhouse on May Creek, one mile east of Young Creek, the road forked, one branch going to Dan Creek and the other to Chititu Creek. As a result, labor and materials were easily imported into these areas, leading to more aggressive hydraulic mining at Dan Creek. Stephen Birch, while serving as president of the newly formed Kennecott Copper Company, invested in an extensive hydraulic system in 1918. The system enabled miners to unearth huge mounds of dirt, in order to expose older placer gold deposited.¹⁴¹

John J. Price and Lewis A. Levensaler obtained Birch's Dan Creek property, forming the Nicolai Placer Mines Company in 1927.¹⁴² Working for Price was a crew of fourteen men. Inspector for Alaska's Territorial Department of Mines, Earl Pilgrim, reported that, "the discovery...of additional bench deposits...justify[s] the belief that profitable placer

¹⁴⁰ Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, November 29, 1917

¹⁴¹ Hunt, 66.

¹⁴² Bleakley.

operations will continue on Dan Creek for many years.¹⁴³ Besides hydraulic mining, miners also attempted lode mining along the creek. By 1931, a 200-foot tunnel was driven to develop the hard rock deposit on a property held by John Barrett, situated on Williams Peak opposite the mouth of Dan Creek, near the site of Martin's cabin.¹⁴⁴

Meanwhile, Martin began to work a number of placer claims on upper Dan Creek not far from his cabin. Park historian Geoff Bleakly points out that the on-going economic boom re-populated the Dan Creek area, which began to serve as a kind of suburb of McCarthy. It is probably safe to say that Augusta enjoyed the Dan Creek location for its proximity to town and its subsequent social life. By the 1920s, the couple had become well-known, and seemingly respected by their fellow residents. When good fortune ascended upon them, the town rejoiced. The *McCarthy Weekly News* heralded in 1922 that Martin and Augusta found the "old Klofer and Meyers pay streak" near a hard to locate area in a gulch. The paper noted that "The Rodavans [sic] have worked hard on this property and deserve all the good luck that will come their way."¹⁴⁵

Augusta made her way to town far more often than Martin. Martin usually went to McCarthy for reasons such as a broken finger,¹⁴⁶ or to pass through on his way to Valdez or Cordova for mining business.¹⁴⁷ If he did go to McCarthy, Martin never stayed long.¹⁴⁸ Augusta, on the other hand, was observed Christmas shopping in "the big city."¹⁴⁹ She often accompanied Mrs. and Mr. John J. Price, who in addition to operating his mining company, served as Dan Creek's postmaster from May 1924, until mail service was discontinued in April 1932.¹⁵⁰ Augusta, who had postal work experience herself, was likely assisting Price with his postal duties.¹⁵¹ McCarthyites admired the Radovans. The *McCarthy Weekly News* reported on March 28, 1925 that "Mr. and Mrs. Martin Radovan walked in from Dan Creek this week. They say they could have ridden in but, like the retreating soldier, they didn't want any horse to hold them back."¹⁵²

Insightful information about Martin and Augusta's marriage and life at Dan Creek are scattered throughout the historic record. She is mentioned only incidentally in newspaper interviews conducted with Martin as well as in other popular accounts about his life. The most informative source about the couple is a diary Augusta kept between April 1930 and June 1931. Characteristically practical, Augusta wrote her daily thoughts in an old address book, originally intended as a way to keep track of customers running tabs at the Blackburn Roadhouse restaurant in 1913. For example, under 'I' it lists a tab for Frank

¹⁴³ Pilgrim, Report on Cooperative Mining Investigations, 1931, 93. In 1931, Acting Territorial Mine Engineer Benjamin D. Stewart appointed Earl Pilgrim a member of his staff in charge of hardrock (lode) examinations for the Alaskan Territory. Alaska Mining Hall of Fame.

¹⁴⁴ Pilgrim, 1931.

¹⁴⁵ *McCarthy Weekly News*, October 21, 1922.

¹⁴⁶ Sept 19, 1925

¹⁴⁷ *McCarthy Weekly News*, 1923.

¹⁴⁸ On October 31 he again "mushes" in from Dan Creek and quickly returns. 1925

¹⁴⁹ Dec 1924

¹⁵⁰ John J. Price was appointed postmaster at Dan Creek in May 1924. Ora B. Dickerson, *120 Years of Alaska Postmasters, 1867-1987* (Scotts, Michigan: Carl J. Cammarata, 1989), 28.

¹⁵¹ *McCarthy Weekly News*, Dec 27, 1924; Feb. 21, 1925; AR journal is obsessed with mail.

¹⁵² *McCarthy Weekly News*

Iverson, who ate numerous meals at the roadhouse from Nov 17 to Dec 25, including “two Thanksgiving Turkey Dinners for \$3.00” and an “eleven-and-a-half-pound ham for \$3.22.”¹⁵³ Seventeen years later, she recycled the notebook, filling its blank pages with daily accounts of her life with Martin at Dan Creek.

Absent from the journal are any romantic discussions about Martin or their marriage. On their wedding anniversary, for example, she wrote, “Martin went down and got our stuff. Lou and Ole ran into rim at end of 50ft tunnel. We carried everything up hill.” Then, almost as an afterthought, she added, “Feb 27. Our wedding anniversary.” Nevertheless, her journal clearly describes two people who were content, committed, and who shared a common vision. She visited him regularly at work, usually bringing him lunch. She never complained about his devotion to mining, and even when it was clear cabin life was getting her down, Augusta put on a stoic face. On Easter Sunday she lamented, “Sun shining and no Easter bonnet to wear.” But then she reasoned, “Would have no place to wear it if I had one. So it’s alright.”¹⁵⁴

The journal made apparent a shared a common interest by the couple in the comings and goings of the local wildlife. Augusta wrote prolifically about the animals that visited them at Dan Creek. On April 13, 1930, she “counted six sheep” on the mountain behind the cabin. On January 16, she counted eight little birds, one woodpecker, fifteen magpies, and one weasel. Throughout the spring, Augusta kept her eye on a curious coyote, dreamed of bears, and on May 28, 1931, she observed a big porcupine outside her cabin door. “Its lots of fun watching him through the window,” she wrote, “I put out some dried apples for him but he didn’t take any.”

Interacting with the local wildlife brought Augusta great joy, and apparently to the animals as well. “Fed the birds,” wrote Augusta on returning to Dan Creek after a week’s absence, “They were glad to see us back.” Martin also cared deeply for the animals. Years later he had told a reporter for the *Anchorage Daily Times* that while working on the railway, he had made friends with numerous black bears, and “had one eating out of my hand within three days.”¹⁵⁵

Had it been a different time Martin and Augusta, with their keen eyesight and interest in observing animals, could have been wildlife biologists. But repeated habituation, feeding, and anthropomorphizing of the surrounding wildlife suggests that, perhaps, it was more than a hobby. Augusta and Martin never had children, yet there was something ‘parental’ in their relationship with nature. On May 29, 1931, for example, Augusta walked down to the lower camp and along the way noticed a mother bird feeding her chick. “One of them tucks a piece of bread into the mouth of another,” she enduringly described, “It must have been a baby.”¹⁵⁶ At first glance the Radovans’ rapport with the local wildlife seems trivial. But the relationship clearly pleased Augusta, who spent countless hours alone at the cabin. Moreover, the wildlife was significant to Martin, especially later in life, for the

¹⁵³ Augusta Radovan’s Journal

¹⁵⁴ Augusta Radovan’s Journal

¹⁵⁵ Dan Casley, *Anchorage Daily Times*, 1972.

¹⁵⁶ Augusta Radovan’s Journal.

animals he befriended provided him with a sense of happiness and companionship, not unlike children who bring comfort to their aging parents.

Martin's mining endeavors at Dan Creek meant that the couple's daily routines were spent apart. Cabin life required they take on different tasks and responsibilities. Augusta's journal provides daily testimony of Martin's persistent and somewhat obsessed mining activities. In their search for gold, the pair maintained at least two Dan Creek camps: a lower camp at creekside in which they sluiced for gold, and an upper camp in which Martin tunneled into the mountainside in search of ancient bedrock. On February 18, 1931, Augusta wrote, "Martin went to work in tunnel." On March 1, he "reached the rim [rock] in the tunnel today. It goes up slanting a little enough to get a foot hold."¹⁵⁷ Two days later, she helped him "measure tunnel and height of rim." On March 10, "Martin got an early start in the tunnel," and on April 1, "Martin struck second point in tunnel," adding optimistically, "might be something there." Martin's objective at Dan Creek was gold, because as Augusta noted, he "found a big piece of copper but no gold with it."¹⁵⁸ Also, Martin was not prospecting alone at Dan Creek. Price and "the boys" were tunneling into the rim rock just down the creek from Martin's prospects. Augusta's journal entry for March 2 reported:

Martin climbing rim trying to get to bed rock level. 20 above. Lou called from Creek bottom and said there was a letter for me. I went down and got it from Mrs. Kay. Price brought it up to their tunnel on Boulder Creek. They too are climbing the rim. Pretty well discouraged [by] both of these.¹⁵⁹

While Martin remained focused on his tunnel work, Augusta filled her days with a variety of household tasks. On March 19, 1931, she wrote, "I baked bread—7 loaves and got wood. Martin working in tunnel. Sun is shining." Depending on the season, Augusta fished at the creek, hauled water up the hill from the creek, cut fire wood, and even placer mined on her own. Cabin life could be dangerous, however. During a dry stretch in May, the grass near the cabin caught fire:

Yesterday after 2:00 lit the fire. About 5:30 sat down to rest when all of a sudden a big fire was raging just outside the window in the grass. I had a terrible time putting it out—had to call for help. Pete heard me and ran up the hill with his gun thinking I had seen a bear. He got here just in time as the fire seemed to be gaining. It was finally put out. I burned my arms and hands.

Then, without missing a beat, she wrote, "Martin will be home Monday June 1. Walter Holmes came back. No water in Dan Creek. I baked 6 breads." The next day, she matter-

¹⁵⁷ Rim rock is the bedrock rising to form the boundary of a placer or gravel deposit. Albert H. Fay, *Glossary of Mining and Mineral Industry* (Bureau of Mines, Department of the Interior, 1920), 571.

¹⁵⁸ Augusta Radovan's Journal

¹⁵⁹ Augusta Radovan's Journal

of-factly wrote without complaint of pain or discussions of what might have been: “cleared away all the dry grass around cabin.”

Despite the crisis, Augusta’s account of cabin life was, in her mind, completely ordinary. On May 22 she wrote, “Cleaned and fixed my house. Nothing new. Cleaned and sluiced.” Though life at Dan Creek appeared uneventful for both Martin and Augusta, these accounts are important because they construct a realistic portrait of mining in the Nizina district. As western historian Sue Armitage observes, “Even the most heroic people lead ordinary lives 99 percent of the time.”¹⁶⁰ And like the story of the American West, ordinary lives are the true story of the Alaska frontier too, for men as well as women.

Besides providing insight into what might be considered the lonely life of a prospector’s wife, Augusta’s journal also provides a rare glimpse of the social life at the surrounding mining community. She paints a picture of the individuals who inhabited the creekside camps, frequently mentioning the activities of J.J. Price and Pete Eikland, who worked during the winter as a carrier on the McCarthy-Chisana mail route. She also talked often of Lou Anderton, Cliff [last name unknown], and Ole [last name unknown]—the so-called ‘boys,’ who occupied the tent camp at the bottom of the hill. Atop the hill was the Radovan’s cabin, from which Augusta kept track of their whereabouts.

On March 7, 1931, Augusta wrote, “Saw Lou, Ole and Cliff coming up the creek. Cliff stayed all night with them.” On March 22 she noted, “Pete just came up the creek with his dogs,” and on April 3 she observed, “Saw man going down creek at 6:30. Looked like Ole.”¹⁶¹ From these seemingly innocuous observations emerge a situation in which people, instead of living solitary frontier existences, look out for each other. In fact, it appears that Augusta truly cared for the group of bachelors she fondly called “the boys.” At times she seems protective: “Lou and Ole quit, claiming Cliff double-crossed them.” She even treated them like family: “Lou and Ole came up and spent the evening,” she wrote on March 13, “Lou asked me to wash and iron his shirt—I couldn’t refuse—but will not charge for it. He wants to wear it to town.”¹⁶² As historian Phyllis Movius notes about Alaska’s early mining societies, “Not only did the citizens socialize together, they rallied around anyone in need.”¹⁶³

From the pages of Augusta’s journal materializes a mining community that exhibited the same social norms as in any rural American town. In what was generally perceived as a male-dominated frontier that supposedly lacked a social class structure, a majority of the social organizers and cultural facilitators in this Nizina community were in fact women. Unlike Martin who spent most of his time at his tunnels, part of Augusta’s daily routine consisted of calling upon the wives of other miners. On May 30, 1931, Augusta wrote, “I

¹⁶⁰ The Women’s West, 14.

¹⁶¹ Augusta Radovan Journal

¹⁶² Augusta Radovan’s Journal; Louis Anderton came to the region in 1922, when he was hired to complete the tunnel connecting the Erie and Jumbo Mines at Kennecott. He eventually moved to the Nizina district, where he worked for the Chititu Mining Company in 1926. During the late 1930s, he prospected on Rex Creek, where he was badly injured in a mining accident. (Bleakley)

¹⁶³ Phyllis Demuth Movius, *A Place of Belonging: Five Founding Women of Fairbanks, Alaska* (Fairbanks: University Alaska Press, 2009), 17.

went down and called on Mrs. Price...Mrs. Price thinks the boys don't work hard enough—she is disgusted with them.” Besides the Prices, there were other mining couples with whom Augusta interacted. For example, Augusta one day wrote:

Went to foot of hill and Mrs. Malhorn and Mrs. Holmes were there having arrived the night before. They were in bed all tired out. The men Pete, Ole and Walter were eating their lunch. The women brought the mail from the Road H[ouse]. One letter for me from Mrs. Kay. I stopt [sic] and talked to them about 20 minutes then came home. Lots of Mosquitoes.¹⁶⁴

Because the wagon road and Nizina Bridge made transportation between Dan Creek and McCarthy relatively easy, the social network extended beyond camp and into town. During such a trip to McCarthy and Blackburn, Augusta “saw Mrs. Sel[enrers], Mrs. Barrett and Mrs. Harrais.”¹⁶⁵ These were all women who had achieved a high level of social stature within the Nizina mining community. Mrs. Barrett’s husband founded McCarthy and had a profitable gold lode operation at Williams Peak, while Margaret Harrais was a leader in the Alaska chapter of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union and her husband, Martin Luther Harrais, had worked at Kennecott for several years.¹⁶⁶

Like Augusta, Margaret Harrais also married a ‘Martin,’ who spoke with a thick accent, and was considered a “new immigrant.” He had arrived from Riga, Latvia at age twenty-three, attended college in Seattle, and headed to the Dawson goldfields after 1897. Margaret married him in 1920, previously commenting to a friend that if she did decide to marry him, she would have to decide “to marry Alaska, too.”¹⁶⁷ This was a sentiment undoubtedly shared by Augusta—and arguably any miners’ wife at the time. During her eight years in McCarthy, Margaret Harrais taught school and, to the chagrin of numerous parents, she instilled in their children the principles of temperance. Through her organizing efforts, Margaret proudly witnessed the first female jurors perform their public duty, for whom Augusta would soon follow, and she continued her involvement with the WCTU, accepting the position of president of Alaska’s chapter after Cornelius Hatcher left the post.¹⁶⁸

As Augusta’s relationships with the other miner’s wives clearly showed, these pioneer women did not spend all of their time isolated in a cabin. They had public and social lives in which they organized everything from entertainment to morality. Even in Dan Creek, rules dictated social behavior representative of the times. On one occasion in March 1931, Augusta called on Mrs. Davis, but “Mrs. Price said she thought that she

¹⁶⁴ Mr. Walter Holmes was an early resident of May Creek. In 1936 he staked in a tributary of Copper Creek in the Nizina district. Mt. Holmes, a prominent summit just south of Rex Creek was apparently named for him.

¹⁶⁵ April 18, 1931.

¹⁶⁶ The Harrais’ would soon lose their life savings in the Great Depression. “Selected Residents of and Visitors to the Wrangell-St. Elias Mountain Region, 1796-1950,” compiled and edited by Geoffrey Bleakley, May 2006.

¹⁶⁷ Phyllis Demuth Movius, *A Place of Belonging: Five Founding Women of Fairbanks, Alaska* (Fairbanks: University Alaska Press, 2009), 92.

¹⁶⁸ Phyllis Demuth Movius, *A Place of Belonging: Five Founding Women of Fairbanks, Alaska* (Fairbanks: Alaska Press, 2010), 92-93.

might be asleep, and that I had better not go and disturb her so I didn't." Concerned that she had not shown proper etiquette, Augusta added, "I hope she does not think that I passed her up on purpose, for I did not."¹⁶⁹ Likewise, on May 25 Augusta had expected friends to visit for a few days, but apparently they changed their minds. Clearly upset by their rudeness and display of bad manners, Augusta expressed a rare outburst of emotion in her journal that day:

At ten they all left for Price's camp. They were suppose to stay with me 3 or 4 days and imagine my surprise—they said they had to go back to town tomorrow after having dinner at Price's camp at one. I am suppose[d] to go down too but that is too much to ask of one who has been handed such a jolt. Rather a relief though, but I wouldn't let on...they will never be asked again. (Although they invited themselves this time).¹⁷⁰

Because of the difference in socialization and life experience, men and women did not see the world identically. When Martin recorded his daily activities, he documented information useful to him. Things like the length of his tunnel and types of mineral he uncovered that day. His notebook (after 1935) contained information such as social security numbers and travel itineraries. Martin hardly mentions life beyond mining.¹⁷¹ Augusta, on the other hand, wrote about topics significant to her. That often meant the coming and goings of Nizina society. On December 31, 1930, she wrote, "I went down town saw Mrs. Hellenrich and the boys—and Mrs. Hubrick and Harte and his wife. The asst[ant] district attor[ney] came up yesterday to see about Dan Pearson who killed himself."¹⁷² Two day later she noted that Mrs. Harrais gave birthday dinner for her husband. District attor[ney] and Barretts were invited." What some might call gossip, Augusta's depictions of residents and their activities provide a clearer idea of community life, the community's rules, and the active role that women played in organizing that community.

Also present in Augusta's diary is a picture of how the community was linked. On the way to town from Dan Creek, for example, Martin and Augusta stayed in road houses, which among other uses, served as hubs of the community's social network. Many of Augusta's journal entries underscore the socialization conducted at these places, particularly the Nizina Roadhouse run by Jim and Tess Murie. On December 29, 1930 she wrote:

Martin and I are going to town. We stayed at the R[oad] H[ouse] and had lunch. Dusty and his wife were there. We reached town at 6 o'clock.

¹⁶⁹ According to Geoffrey Bleakley's "Selected Residents of and Visitors to the Wrangell-St. Elias Mountain Region, 1796-1950," there were five different Davis' associated with the Nizina district.

¹⁷⁰ Augusta Radovan's Journal

¹⁷¹ Martin's Notebook, Martin Radovan Collection.

¹⁷² John "Cap" Hubrick became one of the region's first and most famous commercial outfitters, guiding sport hunters out of McCarthy during the teens and 1920s. During the off season he published a short-lived newspaper called the *Copper Bee*, and produced superb hand-tinted panoramic photos. Hubrick died in 1930. John Hart established the first Sourdough Roadhouse in 1903. (Bleakley)

Murre [Murie] brought in Dusty and his wife [Tess] right after us. We got some food from the store and went to Blackburn.¹⁷³

On May 19, 1931 she wrote:

Got up early straightened things up, left at 11 for town. No mail train came in. I walked to Mile 3 saw Martin gave him note to sign for bill. Murri [Murie] caught up with me—I road to R[oad] H[ouse] had lunch then to Dan Creek on Murie's truck—then home.

Always in the backdrop of Augusta and Martin's day-to-day life was their reliance upon the outside world. Beside trucks, and trains, she described airplanes as necessary modes of modern transportation, noting that "First and second class mail came to McCarthy by airplane"¹⁷⁴ and hints at the presence of the Alaska Road Commission expanding the network of transportation into and out of the district.¹⁷⁵

Through those various modes of transportation, town stores were stocked with processed canned foods, prepared by an industrial network of farmers, meat packers, canners, label makers, advertisers, and retail sales people that connected the Nizina mining district to workers and environments across the United States. Martin and Augusta consumed local foods on occasion, but not enough natural resources were available to sustain the Nizina's growing population. On April 17, 1931, Augusta wrote, "Martin went to Kennecott...Got our groceries there." In the bitter cold month of February, Augusta mentioned that she received "six lemons," a citrus fruit grown in places like California and Florida.¹⁷⁶ And when bad weather prevented the train's arrival, breaking the link to the industrial market, it sparked "a food shortage in town."¹⁷⁷ As Martin and Augusta purchased and prepared their canned bacon and beans they help to create linkages that connected Dan Creek to the larger national society and economy.

Also underscoring the couple's connection to the outside world was Augusta's constant writing of the mail. Beside processed foods, the entire Nizina community seemed to circulate around the postal service. On February 16, 1931, she wrote, "Stopped at R[oad] H[ouse] with mail also Price's camp where we had tea. Mrs. Price gave us some doughnuts to take home. They were nice. Had mail for them. Also had mail for Lou." Although on March 7, Augusta wrote, "I dreamed of El[ves] last night. It means news of some kind of letters..." Indeed, it was not elves providing the mail service to Dan Creek,

¹⁷³ Jim Murie participated in the Chisana rush. In 1916 he and his wife Tess began operating the Nizina Roadhouse. After Jim died in 1940, Tess married her old friend Walter Holmes. (Bleakley)

¹⁷⁴ March 11, 1931

¹⁷⁵ Her journal entry for April 16, 1931 hints at the presence of the Alaska Road Commission William R. Cameron worked as a foreman in Chitina in 1911 and 1912 and later worked for the Alaska Road Commission; Boldy or perhaps Bodie, prospected at Chititu Creek; Pete Brenwick lived in McCarthy and participated in the Chisana gold rush, made much of his winter income during the 1920s supplying cord wood to Kennecott. (Bleakley)

¹⁷⁶ Augusta Journal Feb 23 1931.

¹⁷⁷ Augusta Journal March 24, 1931.

but rather a massive government-run network that depended upon steamships, railroads, trucks, airplanes, even dog teams to deliver the mail.

Martin and Augusta well-being seemed almost contingent upon the mail service—Martin because it allowed him to communicate with the mining industry and Bureau of Mines, which represented the corporate and government institutions that ultimately dictated his mining future, and Augusta because it not only provided her employment at one time or another, but allowed her receive word from family living in Seattle and other places far from Alaska. On March 22 she noted deep concern about a registered letter to Mr. Hancock regarding mineral samples that had not yet been delivered:

Martin worked in Tun[nel] this morning....A letter from Ben telling us that our letter is still in Chitina and has been since Feb. 25 or 26. Chitina P[ost] M[aster] would not send registered letter by plane unless authorized by postal inspector. Don't know what effect it will have on [mining] deal.

Instead of waiting weeks, even months, for a respond, Augusta, in the age of electrification and instant communication, had access to a telephone, even at Dan Creek. “March 30. I went down to Price’s and phoned Ben about our registered letter. It left Chitina the 17th. So it must have got the boat leaving 22nd of Mar.”¹⁷⁸ As a one-time employee of the postal service, Augusta nevertheless grumbled, “Five weeks is a long time to hold back a registered letter.” On a separate occasion the mail brought better news: “April 9. Martin went down Lou hollered for him. There was mail—letter from mamma and Charlie which were very cheerful and one from Chic Nelson—saying that Presley wanted to See Martin.”¹⁷⁹

Finally, looming in the background of daily life in the Nizina district was the ominous presence of the Great Depression. In December 31, 1930, Martin went to Kennecott and “saw Engineer who complained of hard times.” He was there to ask James McGavock, Kennecott’s master mechanic, for a loan. Augusta’s mother Thora was also experiencing hard times and needed money for her house payment. “Martin asked McGavock for \$75.00, explained Augusta. “He insisted on a note signed by us both and no time limit—a call note.”¹⁸⁰ We won’t take it. Martin got \$50.00 from Al Grate without anything to be signed for which we bless him and will remember him.”¹⁸¹

While hard times fell upon the entire Nizina district, Martin was able to acquire what others could not—a job that paid wages. In spite of Kennecott’s gradual decline, it was still the region’s economic engine and it provided Martin with needed work. On April 17, 1931, Martin agreed to do the company’s assessment work for a new road. Accordingly, he earned \$200 from the company and another \$400 from the Road Commission.¹⁸² Likewise, a month after the Stock Market crashed in October 1929, the

¹⁷⁸ Augusta Radovan Journal

¹⁷⁹ Augusta Radovan Journal

¹⁸⁰ Bleakley

¹⁸¹ Augusta Radovan Journal;

¹⁸² Augusta Radovan Journal, April 17, 1931.

U.S. Census reported Augusta employed as a typewriter at an office, undoubtedly at Kennecott.¹⁸³

Although Martin continued to work at Dan Creek until the 1970s, he totaled only somewhere between \$5,000 and \$6,000 from the “benches.”¹⁸⁴ He told Gary Green that his only real pay dirt at Dan Creek was “two halves of the same gold nugget.”¹⁸⁵ Perhaps it was not the typical prospector fairytale life, but Martin and Augusta’s experience at Dan Creek is important, for it helps us to understand that a typical prospector’s life was actually pretty ordinary. They were not living a solitary life, suspended from modern good and services. On the contrary, Augusta paints for us a picture of two people fully engaged in early twentieth century American society and culture. They participated in a community that replicated most rural American towns. It was a place where both men and women played major roles. And their livelihood was dependent upon an industrialized economy that, through various modes of transportation, communication and distant markets, linked their life at Dan Creek to people and places throughout the world. Still, Martin recognized none of this, and if he had—he probably never viewed it as important anyway. For his focus by 1929 had turned to copper and his nearly impossible prospects on Glacier Creek.

¹⁸³ US Census, 1929.

¹⁸⁴ “Brothers Reunited,” ADT, Nov 7, 1951.

¹⁸⁵ Conversation.

The Prospector and the Impossible Prospect 1929-1944

According to Webster, the explorer is actually one who “seeks discoveries.” He is not simply and solely the “discoverer.” Instead the accent is upon process and activity, with advances in knowledge simply fortunate though expected incidents along the way. It is likewise not casual. It is purposeful. It is the seeking.

~William H. Goetzmann, historian
Exploration and Empire:

The Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the American West, 1966

The saga of copper and its pursuit by humans is an ancient one. With the advent of metallurgy five thousand years ago, people began to alloy copper with tin, thus, initiating one of the major “ages” of human history—the Bronze Age. The Roman discovery of a new copper alloy, brass, caused the productivity of coppersmiths to soar throughout antiquity. During the Renaissance, notable sculptors worked with bronze and painters commonly used thin sheets of copper as their canvases. It is well known that Watt’s steam engine, which ushered in the Industrial Revolution, depended largely on iron and coal. Yet, copper also helped pave the road to modernity with attributes such as durability and resistance to corrosion, which made it the choice metal for steam pipes, plumbing, automobile radiators, and other heat exchange devices. The Statue of Liberty, dedicated to the United States by France in 1886, was constructed of copper. But it was Edison’s invention of the light bulb and the subsequent development of electrical power that revolutionized the global demand for copper. It seemed that Martin Radovan picked a good time to begin his story as a copper prospector in the Nizina mining district.

Martin launched his search for copper in the mid-1920s in a mountainous and rugged region, where Pleistocene ice left behind flat-bottomed, steep-sided valleys, with intimidating walls and jagged peaks reaching 6,000 to 8,000 feet high.¹⁸⁶ As a prospector, Martin forded swift treacherous glacial streams, and while exploring elevations at easily 3,000 feet and above, he avoided a litany of dangers, primarily threats due to snowslides, rockslides, and mudslides. Martin’s explorations eventually brought him to the west side of Glacier Creek, where he started prospecting in a glaciated cirque surrounded by steep cliffs that towered to 9,000 feet. “I set out to stake my own claim up there,” recalled Martin, “and it took all summer to make the trip.”¹⁸⁷

The Radovans established a camp at Glacier Creek, which, in 1913 and 1914, was used as a corridor for stampedeers heading to the Chisana gold fields, and is a possible explanation for how Martin originally came to the gulch.¹⁸⁸ About four miles separated the Radovan’s

¹⁸⁶ Geological investigator Alan M. Bateman, 1930.

¹⁸⁷ “Venerable Sourdough,” ADT, November 4, 1972.

¹⁸⁸ WRST HIS 1984, 91.

Glacier Creek camp from their cabin on upper Dan Creek.¹⁸⁹ In between, however, lay some of the most rugged terrain in the Nizina district. One USGS geologist exploring the Chitistone-Glacier Creek area noted:

“The highest peaks, more than 8,000 feet, are between Dan Creek and Glacier Creek. All of the area except the highest peaks and ridges had been glaciated, and glaciers still exist in several valleys and on the ridge between Dan and Glacier Creeks.”¹⁹⁰

Forced to circumnavigate the mountains, Martin and his wife Augusta followed about thirteen miles of foot and horse trails along the waterways. A well traveled route took them to the mouth at Dan Creek; northward on a traversing trail on the flat on the east side of the Nizina River, eastward up the Chitistone River, and then back southward, up Glacier Creek drainage.¹⁹¹ Spruce Point on the Nizina River and Peavine Bar on the Chitistone each maintained roadhouses, which served as temporary staging areas for portaging supplies. When the trail was in good shape, the distance between the two camps could be traveled in under a day, and if horses were used, it took only several hours.¹⁹² Jim Edwards remembers that Martin “worked both properties, traveling back and forth on foot over river bars and through the brush several times each year.”¹⁹³ The only other prospector in the area was Charles Nelson, who had discovered a promising copper deposit not far from Martin’s camp in 1928.

Spurred on by the success of the Kennecott Copper Corporation, Martin believed that he would find “the greatest bonanza of all times on Glacier Creek.”¹⁹⁴ Underscoring his optimism was the presence of a large copper stain high on the face of a steep-walled recess in the same geologic formation—the Chitistone limestone—that held the Bonanza deposit. Martin’s interest was shared by others, for the outcrop had intrigued prospectors for years. None ever reached the stain, however, for its high altitude location made the prospect unreachable. The outcrops, therefore, had only been scanned with binoculars.¹⁹⁵ Territorial Mining inspector Earl Pilgrim explained in his *Report on Cooperative Mining Investigations* in 1931 that because the surface ore exposures were “visible from a distance with the aid of binoculars, the outcrops were referred to as the “binocular prospect.”¹⁹⁶

In 1929, the combination of Depression-era market stagnation and dwindling production due to the depletion of high-grade ore sources caused Kennecott, one of the richest copper mines in the world, to commence its decadal decline. At the time, however,

¹⁸⁹ Miller, 1943.

¹⁹⁰ USGS Bulletin, 1946.

¹⁹¹ Report on Cooperative Mining Investigations, 88.

¹⁹² Augusta describes the process of hauling supplies to their summer cabin at Glacier Creek from Dan Creek in May of 1930.

¹⁹³ James H. Edwards, “Martin Radovan” *Alaskan Sportsman*, September 1965.

¹⁹⁴ Radovan’s Dream.

¹⁹⁵ William R. Hunt, *Mountain Wilderness: Historic Resource Study for Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve* (Anchorage: National Park Service, 1991), 87.

¹⁹⁶ Pilgrim, 1931

Kennecott had made formidable efforts to revitalize operations, and continued to seek new profitable discoveries in the Nizina district. That summer, Kennecott optioned Charles Nelson's claim on lower Glacier Creek. Interested in the Binocular prospect as well, the company hired several expert European mountain climbers to reach the outcrop, but the cliff was too steep and the weather too volatile in 1929. As a result, the climbers left unsuccessful, and the prospect was deemed by all simply impossible.¹⁹⁷

Meanwhile, a forty-seven year old man with absolutely no mountain climbing experience was also trying to figure out how to reach Binocular. Each day the prospector studied the impossibly steep cliff-face, and then thought to put his mother's advice to good work—he decided *to use his head and save himself a lot of walking*. "I sat down on the small rock," recalled Martin, "and looking up, almost three thousand feet, underneath [the] overhanging mountain." Feeling defeated by Binocular, Martin left the gulch for the day:

I started back, to the camp, got there tired, opened up a can of beans, cooked some coffee, spread my blankets under a big spruce tree so tired.... As I slept, a vision came to me clear as a blue print...I saw a great bed of ore in that mountain, a thousand feet in, true solid rock, on both sides of the canyon....The vision of my dream.

The dream inspired Martin to ascend the mountain from the north side of the gulch. The next day he woke at dawn, cooked coffee and hot cakes, and put two in his pocket. He climbed a steep switchback trail from behind his camp until he reached a hanging valley with the remnant of a small glacier. Passing just to the south of the glacier, at an elevation of 6,480 feet, Martin crossed over the ridge into the gulch at the point where the Nicolai greenstone makes contact with the Chitistone limestone. With a two-thousand foot drop descending to the unnamed glacier below, and one thousand feet of rock and ice hanging precariously above, Martin followed the narrow shelf atop the greenstone for over a mile. Describing his ascent to Binocular years later, Martin confided, "I felt guilty, to sneak in from behind."¹⁹⁸

Jim Edwards, one of the few people who made the attempt to ascend Binocular besides Martin, recalls that "In some places it [the trail] is only a foot wide. At one point it passes under an overhanging glacier and often large chunks of ice fall onto the trail."¹⁹⁹ Loy Green was similarly amazed by Martin's feat: "Binocular's cliffs are almost vertical, and from base to top over 3000 feet."²⁰⁰ Martin, however, appeared unfazed by the hazards the mountain presented: "A few bad places but not too bad," he recalled. "I came to a narrow point, face to face, with binocular prospect."²⁰¹

Martin's exploitation of the Binocular prospect was so remarkable, that those familiar with the vertical environment questioned his achievement. "As Martin was alone with no one to witness his activities," wrote Green, "no one knows how he did the seemingly

¹⁹⁷ Hunt, 87; Radovan Gulch High-Contact Deposit, U.S. Department of Interior, (circa 1944).

¹⁹⁸ Radovan's Dream

¹⁹⁹ Edwards, 1965.

²⁰⁰ Green, 1994.

²⁰¹ Radovan's Dream.

impossible feat.”²⁰² Personal recollections forget, however, that Martin was not alone. He had Augusta with him. With her help, he cuts steps hundreds of feet along the face of the cliff. “For twenty-six days, I worked hard, from twelve to sixteen hours a day,” recalled Martin. They worked until the trail reached a point two hundred feet below the copper outcrops. From there, Martin scaled the wall, using ropes and steel spikes driven into rock crevices.²⁰³ The accomplishment instantly made Martin a local hero among regional miners.

By 1930, word of Martin’s Binocular conquest had begun to circulate throughout Alaska’s mining districts. Investigator Earl Pilgrim was one of the first to recognize the prospect’s precipitous location, noting that “The surface outcrops were considered inaccessible...until Mr. Radovan’s resourcefulness solved the problem of constructing a trail to the locality.”²⁰⁴ Newspaper reports described an “eleven foot wide, solid vein of high grade copper,” uncovered by Martin Radovan.²⁰⁵ The *Alaska Weekly* declared, “New Glacier Creek Strike is Important,” noting that Asa Baldwin, a Seattle mining engineer, had “no doubt that the Glacier Creek lime formation will show another big copper producer.”²⁰⁶ The article went on to provide a colorful description of the Binocular prospect and its “optimistic” prospector:

Radovan ... unaided has built trails and done development work on one of the most rugged pieces Mother Nature has ever tossed up. A precipice thousands of feet high with overhanging glacier, paths like mountain goat trails, upon which in many places, one has to crawl on hands and knees, is the game that Radovan played to prove the riches hidden away in the most inaccessible of places ever built on this universe.²⁰⁷

That same summer, the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner* reported: “Solid mountain of copper believed have been found.” As with the *Alaska Weekly*, the *News-Miner* also pointed out that Radovan’s prospect was located “in the same geological formation as the Kennecott mine,” and boasted the construction of a short spur that could be “made accessible to the present Copper River railroad.”²⁰⁸

As regional and territorial papers waxed enthusiastically about the Binocular prospect, Martin turned his full attention to its development. The Radovans began to live at Glacier Creek for longer periods of time, and Martin, who had been employed to do assessment work for Kennecott that spring, quit his job.²⁰⁹ By 1931, Martin and Augusta had staked thirty claims around the Binocular Prospect known as the Triassic claims, 1-

²⁰² Green, 1994.

²⁰³ A number of sources describe Martin’s Binocular find: Hunt, 87; Edwards, 1965; Green, 1994.

²⁰⁴ Pilgrim, 31.

²⁰⁵ The *Alaska Weekly*, August 28, 1931, 8. *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, August 28, 1931. *Alaska Weekly*, September 11, 1931. 1-2.

²⁰⁶ *Alaska Weekly*, Seattle Washington, Friday September 11, 1931, 1 and 2.

²⁰⁷ *Alaska Weekly*, September 11, 1931. 1-2.

²⁰⁸ *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, August 28, 1931.

²⁰⁹ Loy Green. *Augusta Radovan Journal*, April 17, 1931

30. Over the next ten years, Martin's devoted nearly all his time and energy to tunneling to his mountain of copper, attempting to realize his dream.

Much of the story of Martin's Binocular accomplishment, as well as the larger story of copper exploration and extraction in the Wrangell Mountains, revolves around the science conducted by geologists working for the federal government. During the late nineteenth century, major mineral discoveries in the Far North had sparked the interest of the U.S. Congress, and as a result, lawmakers directed the USGS to serve as the scientific arm to arriving prospectors, mining engineers, and investors.²¹⁰ The agency produced reports that contained "useful information" in "untechnical language."²¹¹ According to historian Morgan B. Sherwood, "the geologists even recommended the amount and type of provisions and the outfit with which the prospector should furnish himself."²¹² The reports not only provided scientific information, but served as 'how-to manuals' for miners. As Alfred Brooks, head of USGS in Alaska, wrote, "It is hoped that... [the] arrangement will make the results so far obtained of immediate and practical value to the average miner and prospector."²¹³

Making good use of such practical information were Clarence Warner and Jack Smith, who had been searching for the source of the copper float that USGS geologist Oscar Rohn had described in 1899, when they discovered the Bonanza lode the following year. Warner and Smith were not alone in looking for the copper's source, however. Within weeks of their discovery, USGS geologist Arthur Spencer independently discovered the copper-stained deposit in the greenstone forming the bulk of Bonanza Ridge, although he was a bit shocked to find the new claim markers on what he believed to be "unprospected territory."²¹⁴

Claim to the Bonanza lode failed to remain in the hands of Warner and Smith, and in the first two decades of the twentieth century, the two titans of American business—J.P. Morgan and the Guggenheim family—had consolidated the mining claims, developed the lodes, and completed construction of both production and transportation infrastructures. The success of the Kennecott Copper Company marked the end of geological pioneering in the Wrangell Mountains, and instituted more systematic investigations of the region's geological environment and mineral resources by the federal government.

By 1905, geologic maps and reports of mining districts began to appear. The numerous studies of Fred H. Moffit and his USGS colleagues on the southern flank of the Wrangell Mountains were particularly noteworthy. They recognized early on that the copper was most likely found near the visually distinct greenstone/limestone contact and advised prospectors to begin their search there:

²¹⁰ Morgan B. Sherwood (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1992), 171.

²¹¹ Sherwood, 172

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Brooks Richardson Collier and Mendenhall, *Reconnaissance in the Camp of Nome and Norton Bay Regions, Alaska*, (USGS, Washington, 1900), pp. 11-14. Sherwood, 180.

²¹⁴ A Geological Guide⁷

The most important conclusion bearing on the economic geology here presented is the fact that the copper-ore bodies appear to occur chiefly along a system of cross fractures which are at approximately right angles to the greenstone-limestone contact. These fractures occur along well-defined faults, at least one of which has been traced for a long distance. This may apply to the entire Chitina district find and is worthy of consideration by the prospector.²¹⁵

Martin's dream may have shown the way to the impossible Binocular prospect, and his determination and resourcefulness may have got him there, but the information provided by these federal geologists showed him where to look in the first place. According to USGS and other geologists, copper ore could be found in the contact zone, where the light-gray marine rocks of the Chitistone Limestone cap the distinctive maroon-colored slopes of the Nikolai Greenstone. The greenstone consists of basalts deposited by ancient lava flows approximately 250 to 200 million years ago during the Triassic period. The limestone was created by an evaporated oceanic tidal flat and also formed about that time. However, in 1929, the year Martin reached Binocular, federal geologists had no idea that both the greenstone and limestone deposits had originated thousand of miles of miles away, somewhere near the earth's equator.

In the 1960s, scientists studying mollusk fossils in the limestone deposits of the Wrangell Mountains recognized that the remnants were found in rocks native to Asia, but nowhere else in North America. It was postulated that the marine rocks were alien—in other words, they formed someplace else. This led to the 1970s advancement of the geological concept of exotic terranes—that land fragments consisting of similar rock units are created at distant locations, and through tectonic processes, drift thousand of miles, where they collide and create a tectonic collage of exotic terranes, adding incrementally to the continental margin. The first far-traveled terrane recognized and studied by scientists was Wrangellia.²¹⁶

Wrangellia, one of the most extensively displaced terranes in North America, is a composite terrane, consisting of several exotic terranes, including the Wrangell Terrane the geological bases of the Nizina country. Scientists believe that the massive terrane migrated from subtropical latitudes to northern temperate latitudes in the eastern Pacific between late Triassic and late Jurassic period, drifting some 2,500 miles or more before colliding with the North American Continent by the Cretaceous period. Although composed of many different rocks types, geologists identify the late Triassic flood basalts—the distinctive Nikolai Greenstone of the Wrangell Mountains—as the defining unit of Wrangellia.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Fred H. Moffit and Stephen R. Capps, "Geology and Mineral Resources of the Nizina District, Alaska," Department of the Interior United States Geological Survey, Bulletin 448, GOP, 1911. pg. 8.

²¹⁶ For more information about Wrangellia, see *A Geological Guide to Wrangell-Saint Elias National Park and Preserve, Alaska: A Tectonic Collage of Northbound Terranes* (USGS; professional paper 1616).

²¹⁷ For more information about Wrangellia, see *A Geological Guide to Wrangell-Saint Elias National Park and Preserve, Alaska: A Tectonic Collage of Northbound Terranes* (USGS; professional paper 1616).

How copper was actually placed into the basalts remained a mystery to geologists until recently. The scientific community has known for a long time that copper is a basic building block of the universe, one of the ninety-two atomic elements that occur naturally on earth and which all other substances are made. Such elements are products of the stars, as historian Timothy LeCain describes, “the original furnaces in which all the metallic elements are forged.”²¹⁸ The tremendous heat and pressure inside stars fused together the lighter elements to make heavier elements, but interstellar fusion can only create elements up to the atomic number of iron, 26. The remaining sixty-six elements that occur naturally on earth—including copper—resulted from even more extreme conditions.²¹⁹

Scientists believe that all the gold and silver on earth formed when massive dying stars blew themselves apart as spectacular supernovae. However, the origin of copper was debated by astronomers for decades. Today, a majority of scientists agree on the general conclusion that most of the galaxy’s copper was fused in “supergiants,” the biggest stars in the universe.²²⁰ Both the metals Martin sought in the Nizina district—gold and copper—were products of massive stars. The placer gold at Dan Creek and elsewhere was originally created during the intensely bright explosive moment in a dying star, but copper lodes of the Bonanza Ridge, the outcrops at Binocular, in fact all the copper on earth, was forged over the course of millions of years.²²¹

About 4.5 billion years ago a dust cloud from a shattered star began to orbit around a young star we know today as the sun. Over millions of years these stellar remains gradually accreted into rocky bodies of the planets, moons, and asteroids of our solar system. At this time point in time, the earth would obtain all the copper it will ever have—in all only one one-hundredth of one percent of the planet’s crust consists of copper.²²² Over time, geological forces concentrated the earth’s total allotment of copper in a relatively small number of sites around the globe. Some of the deposits were pure elemental copper, so-called native copper. Far more commonly, copper was deposited in combination with iron, sulfur, or other elements.²²³ Two of the most commercially important copper minerals are sulfides, chalcopyrite and chalcocite. The massive ore body near the base of the Jumbo vein at Kennecott was among the largest and richest sulfide ever discovered; it consisted of a single body of nearly pure chalcocite, 325 feet long, 65 feet wide, and 50 feet high.²²⁴

As with gold, the copper deposits of the Nizina district were created millions of years ago when drifting tectonic plates collided. As mentioned, these forces slowly extended the ancient North American continental margin and built mountain chains, and in the process brought molten rock magma containing copper much closer to the surface. Water from

²¹⁸ Timothy J. LeCain, *Mass Destruction: The Men and Giant Mines That Wired America and Scarred the Planet* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 32.

²¹⁹ LeCain, 32.

²²⁰ LeCain, 32-33.

²²¹ LeCain, 33.

²²² LeCain, 33.

²²³ LeCain, 33-34.

²²⁴ A Geological guide. 90.

the surface percolated down into the earth, dissolving the copper minerals from the magma. This superheated mineral-laden water was then driven back towards the surface, where it gradually worked its way into cracks and fissures in the rock above. When the water cooled, chalcocite, chalcopyrite, and other minerals were left behind, forming easily recognizable veins of minerals.²²⁵

Geologists postulated that the source of the rich ore deposits at the Kennecott mines was the Nikolai greenstone. After deposition of the Chitistone limestone millions of years ago, part of the copper was leached out of the greenstone by superheated water and deposited in favorable places in both the greenstone and the limestone.²²⁶ Being more fractured, the limestone became the host to larger and richer deposits than the greenstone. Still, geologists point out that copper is a primarily constituent of the greenstone, even though the ore is spread throughout the basalt in smaller amounts. This meant that the agency advised miners and prospectors to look for copper deposits in the so-called, “contact zone,” but recognized that ore found in the limestone would more likely produce larger bodies. The thin spread ore found in the greenstone would require far more complex and expensive methods of removal.

Subsequent surface erosion and chemical weathering also leached out copper at the surface, hence the distinctly visible green outcroppings that resulted in many of the early copper discoveries in the Nizina district. It was a green-stained outcropping that drew prospectors, geologists, and eventually Martin Radovan to Glacier Creek. That, combined with the government’s geological instructions, convinced him that a Kennecott-type copper deposit lay deep within the weathering cliffs of the Chitistone limestone that capped the rimming peaks of the gulch.

After his conquest of the Binocular prospect, Martin and Augusta focused on establishing their summer camp on the narrow floodplain, tucked between the south bank of Glacier Creek and a steep mountain, covered by a sentinel of alders, birches, and spruce. By 1930, they had built a small cabin, measuring 13 feet by 8 feet, constructed with milled planks and set on a foundation of cobblestone from the nearby creek.²²⁷ Their door included a manufactured key latch and enameled knob reminiscent of those used in homes in the pre-1920s.²²⁸ At one point they built an addition to the cabin, which probably served as a kitchen and storage for sundry items.²²⁹

That May, Martin and Augusta were in the process of moving their belongings from Dan Creek to Glacier Creek for the season. It is likely the couple used horses to haul their provisions, for Augusta wrote in her journal that “Late afternoon Martin went down and saw Price about paying for horses and taking mail into town.” On May 12, Martin constructed the distinctive cache at Glacier Creek. It was an A-framed structure, elevated

²²⁵ LeCain.

²²⁶ Miller, USGS, 1946, 99.

²²⁷ Ferreira, CLI, 2009, 26-27

²²⁸ XMC-141, WRST 94-001.

²²⁹ Ferreira, CLI, 2009, 27.

on four 6 to 8 inch diameter spruce log posts, about twelve feet tall. He situated the cache in the trees behind the cabin, near the base of the mountain. The following day, Augusta and Martin “stored everything in the cache,” and then returned to Dan Creek for another lode.²³⁰ Besides the cabin and cache, they also constructed an outhouse, a gabled-roof structure for storage, and a water system for collecting drinking water from a small stream behind the cabin.²³¹

Each morning, Martin rose, made coffee and pancakes, and headed into the gulch to work on the Binocular prospect. He loaded his pack with the necessary gear for a day of prospecting. The intimidating nature of the terrain he had to cross dictated that he travel lightly. His mining equipment consisted of the most basic hand tools in use for nearly a century by the mid 1930s: a small sledge (hammer), a pair of two-foot starter (drill) steels, several sticks of explosive, blasting caps, and a length of fuse. He may have made a long, slender spoon out of whatever materials he had available in camp (tin cans, wire and so forth) to use in cleaning out the drill holes in the rock. He may also have brought a light source, or (due to the shallowness of the prospect) relied on natural light to illuminate his work. Apart from these tools, only the most basic items of gear—a handkerchief, pocketknife, matches, water, some canned food, and of course his pancakes wrapped in paper, rounded out Martin’s mining equipment.

Once packed, Martin began to climb the slope immediately south of his camp, up the western shoulder of Radovan Gulch. The terrain was at first wooded, eventually yielding to shorter shrubs, grasses and moss as the elevation increased. After a few switchbacks Martin reached the bare greenstone bedrock. Working his way to near the top of the ridge, he picked his way through this jagged volcanic rock. In some places he probably made a few minor improvements to make his way easier: crude steps blasted with dynamite on a steep section, perhaps with a rope as a handhold.

After a mile or so working his way through the greenstone, Martin reached the contact – the point at which the deposit of lighter-colored limestone lying over the greenstone created a visible line where the two came into contact. The terrain at the contact was formed (or eroded) so that, along the sheer cliff that formed the sides of the gulch, a small ledge of greenstone projected out from below the limestone. It was just wide enough for a person to tentatively scramble along the treacherous, loose scree. Martin had improved this ledge with a few handholds and ropes. The last hundred and fifty feet of the journey consisted of a vertical climb from the contact ledge to the stain in the rock.

Once at the stain, Martin used his steel and sledge to drill holes in the rock. Turning the steel after each strike created a fairly round hole. Once deep enough to hold a charge, Martin cleaned the holes of loose rock using his spoon and primed his explosives. He stuck a blasting cap on the end of a section of fuse and inserted this into the stick of explosive. The primed charge was then placed in the drilled hole (he might “shoot” several holes at a time), the fuse lit with a match, and as it burned Martin gingerly climbed out of the way as quickly as possible. After working in this manner for some

²³⁰ Augusta Radovan’s Journal.

²³¹ CLI

time he had a small tunnel with a ledge on which he continued to work. His goal was not necessarily to find the ore body itself, but to extract samples from the rock showing promising enough geology to attract the interest of large, well-capitalized mining companies.

After a day's worth of work, Martin climbed back down to the contact and made his way back towards camp, perhaps with a sample of ore if he found anything that looked promising. His drill steels would be dull and in need of sharpening. After having worked this prospect for a few years, Martin hauled a mattress and perhaps a few other small bits of gear to the ledge of the prospect, allowing him to work on the tunnel for several days at a time.

By 1933, USGS geologists were unconvinced that Martin had indeed discovered the next Kennecott-style "Bonanza." Alaska Director of USGS, Philip S. Smith, cautioned prospectors and investors alike that, "It must be remembered that the mines near Kennecott, which have contributed perhaps 90 percent of the Alaska copper, have been mining a unique deposit, not comparable with any other known deposit in the world, so that inevitably their mineral wealth is being depleted and there is no justification for expecting that their loss will be offset by new discoveries of equally marvelous lodes."²³²

Still, Martin remained hopeful. In 1935 he sent a letter to the U.S. Geological Survey in Fairbanks. "Gentlemen," he wrote, "I am sending three samples to be assayed. They are from the Triassic group of Claims on Glacier Creek." In the letter, he also noted that the "Augusta Radovan dike" was discovered that summer. It was covered with so much ice and snow that Martin had to pick about 30 feet of ice to get to it. The location of the dike was at the base of what he named Louise Mountain, to the left limit of Glacier Creek, about 125 feet above the greenstone/limestone contact. "Would like to know," inquired Martin, "if dike is Porphyry or not."²³³

Meanwhile, as Martin's mining fate appeared in the hands of an absentee agency, the Nizina mining district's economic engine, the Kennecott Corporation, began, as Smith warned, to show signs of decline as the Great Depression continued to stall the world's economy. The mine, railroad, and exploration work kept a majority of the area's population employed, but according to the Corporation's annual report forecast, the mill would eventually be closed if no new ore bodies could be found.²³⁴ In 1931, Copper prices fell to 5 cents a pound, and Kennecott Corporation reported a loss of two million dollars that year.²³⁵ A reprise appeared possible in 1935 with the passage of the National Recovery Administration that increased the price of copper from 4.5 cents to 9 cents a pound, but later that year, the Supreme Court declared the Act unconstitutional, and the price of copper declined by one cent per pound.²³⁶

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²³³ Martin Radovan, McCarthy, Alaska to USGS, College Alaska, November 29, 1935. Chititu Mines Co Records, Archives and Special Collections, Consortium Library, University of Alaska Anchorage, Box 1, Folder 1.

²³⁴ Graumann, 49.

²³⁵ Hunt.

²³⁶ Graumann, 49-50.

Besides plummeting prices, other factors contributed to the decline. In 1935, Kennecott Copper Cooperation acquired all of Utah Copper Company, reducing the need for its Alaskan mines. Also, a shipping strike, that disrupted transportation of Kennecott's ore, started in November and December on the Pacific Coast and lasted until 1937. The final straw came when the territorial legislature voted to tax all mining enterprising in Alaska.²³⁷ Even though Kennecott produced more copper in 1937 than in the last eight years, no new ore bodies had been discovered, so the Corporation decided "to discontinue all operation at Kennecott in that later part of 1938 upon completion of the mining of the remaining tonnage of ore."²³⁸

Following the closure of the mines, Kennecott abandoned the Copper River and Northwestern Railway. Then, the annual washout of the Copper River Bridge cut off the Nizina district. USGS's Philip S. Smith recognized the closure as a deathblow to Alaska mining. "The record of these great mines marks a series of brilliant achievements in the history of Alaska mining, and their closing forms a distinct loss not only to the mining industry but also to the development of the whole territory."²³⁹ As the town of McCarthy folded soon thereafter, "for Martin and Augusta," notes Edwards, "the isolation was almost complete."²⁴⁰

Drawing the Radovans from their seclusion were two family deaths. Augusta had traveled stateside before, presumably to visit her family in the Pacific Northwest. In 1925, for example, the *McCarthy Weekly News* reported that, "Mrs. Radovan leaves on the morning train for a trip Outside on November 28. The trip is expected to last for a couple of months."²⁴¹ Augusta left Alaska for a second time when her brother Charlie at age fifty-two died of a cerebral hemorrhage on April 22, 1934.²⁴² At the time, Charlie was working as a tile setter and living with their mother at the same address in southwest Seattle.²⁴³ Then, in 1940, the *Daily News-Miner* listed Mrs. Martin Radovan as a "Valdez passenger," sailing on the Alaska Steamship Company vessel, the S.S. *Baranof*, en route to Alaska from Seattle.²⁴⁴ Augusta had gone to Seattle because on August 2, 1939, her eighty-year-old mother Thora had died.²⁴⁵

Four years later, for unknown reasons, Augusta was in Valdez where she too succumbed to a cerebral hemorrhage. Augusta, who was a type II diabetic, was admitted into the Valdez Community Hospital on July 26, and died three days later. Although official records states that she was sixty, Augusta was actually sixty-four when she died. Martin, who apparently was not with Augusta when she died, signed her death certificate on August 14, 1944. Where she was buried, however, remains a mystery. No record of her

²³⁷ Graumann, 49-50.

²³⁸ Kennecott Copper Corporation, Twenty-third Annual Report, 1937, p. 6.

²³⁹ Philip S. Smith, *Mineral Industry of Alaska in 1938*, USGS. Bulletin 917-A (Washington, 1939), 87.

²⁴⁰ Edwards, 1965.

²⁴¹ The *McCarthy Weekly News*, November 28, 1925.

²⁴² Charles J. Iverson, Bureau of Vital Statistics, King County Department of Public Health.

²⁴³ US Census Records, 1930.

²⁴⁴ Fairbanks *Daily News-Miner*, Friday September 27, 1940.

²⁴⁵ Thora F. Iverson Death Certificate. Seattle King County Depart of Public Health Vital Statistics Section.

being buried at Valdez exists—neither a headstone nor any written records.²⁴⁶ Given his Catholic background and devotion to his wife, Martin surely would have provided Augusta a proper place to rest. Those who knew Martin claim that he charted a plane and had Augusta flown back to Glacier Creek, and supposedly buried her somewhere near their cabin.²⁴⁷ Years later Theodore Van Zelst of the Van Zelst Group, a prospecting company that held the Glacier Creek claims after Martin died, wrote a letter to Martin’s niece, Katherine Cesare in 1985, in which he confirmed local speculation:

Those who worked in the area after Martin Radovan passed away and who had a chance to inspect the area around his cabins, believed that she may be buried in the woods behind the cabin, along Glacier Creek. For some years there was evidence of a pathway leading out to the back of the cabin that led to “nowhere.” Those who knew Martin believe that this may have been the location of his wife’s grave.²⁴⁸

Martin and Augusta spent thirty years together in the Nizina country, and according to Jim Edwards, “found much happiness in the freedom of their great mountain country.”²⁴⁹ Throughout the decades, the Radovan’s marriage remained a solid and steady reality for Martin, for it was bounded by their seasonal movement between the two camps and the cherished partnership that germinated in the process. But with the loss of Augusta in 1944—the person who both supported and shared his vision and his dreams—Martin’s story as a copper prospector had taken a drastic turn.

By the end of World War II, unlike Martin’s marriage, Alaska’s mining industry had changed significantly. Besides the fact that the driving force of copper mining in the Nizina district—The Kennecott Copper Corporation—had abandoned its mines in 1938, most geologists agreed that the Kennecott-type ore that supplied the milltown was unique and no more significant copper lodes existed beyond the Bonanza Ridge. In 1943, USGS investigator Don Miller visited the Nizina district and reported that “None of the known deposits (including those at Radovan Gulch) is believed to offer sufficient promise of significant production or profit to warrant the cost of reestablishing a practicable means of transportation to the district solely for the copper.”²⁵⁰ As mining technology and methodology became more professionalized and expensive, the industry and government alike quickly began to marginalize prospectors like Martin Radovan.

Still, Martin appeared not to notice—or at least chose not to notice—significant change. Just as if it contained the same promise as it had in 1929, Martin continued to prospect for copper in the Gulch. In the years after “Gussie’s” death, he moved to Glacier Creek and lived mostly by himself.²⁵¹ Living a life of near-isolation, Martin’s innovation became legendary; he developed two new prospects, and made both furry and feathered

²⁴⁶ Communication with Valdez Parks and Recreation.

²⁴⁷ Green, Edwards, Geneva-Pacific.

²⁴⁸ Theodore W. Van Zelst to Mrs. Katherine Cesare, June 11, 1985. Martin Radovan Collection, Chico, California.

²⁴⁹ Edwards, 1965.

²⁵⁰ Don J. Miller, Copper Deposits of the Nizina District, Alaska, Bulletin 947-F, USGS, 1946.

²⁵¹ Thomas, 1945.

friends. As the world changed around him, Martin spent the next seven years seeking copper, but also comfort, in his mountain sanctuary, always tunneling towards his copper mountain and his dreams.

The Lone Prospector: Life after “Gussie” 1944-1951

For all his strength of character and physical endurance, he is, with animals, one of the kindest and gentlest of men.

~James Edwards on Martin Radovan
Alaska Sportsman, 1965

In the years after Gussie’s death, Martin made a lasting mark on the Nizina’s copper landscape, primarily with his name. By 1943, locals began calling the glacier-filled cirque valley on Glacier Creek Radovan Gulch and the glacier that filled it floor was called the Radovan Glacier.²⁵² Although he still maintained his Dan Creek residence, Martin started staying at the Glacier Creek camp for longer periods of time, sometimes, even remaining the winter.²⁵³ Season after season, Martin carried on with his prospecting work at Binocular, but even though his faith in the prospect remained strong, his patience had waned. When no ore body materialized, he began to redirect his exploratory activities. Between 1945 and 1951, Martin spent a majority of his time developing new prospects. He made a second foot-trail that paralleled the glacier’s lateral moraine to its steep terminus, and started working at a site about 150 feet above the contact zone in the northwest corner of the Gulch. Whereas Binocular was considered a “high-contact deposit,” because this new prospect was located where a prominent fault had dropped the limestone-greenstone contact 1000 feet vertically, it was fittingly called “Low-Contact.”²⁵⁴

Martin discovered the Low-Contact deposit in the mid-1930s, while prospecting near the lower part of the fault. In 1940, the Bureau of Mines established a program designed to aid exploratory development leading to the expansion of domestic copper output. The start of World War II in 1941 ignited an unprecedented consumption of the ore by the manufacturing of airplanes, tanks, and munitions, which caused a major copper shortage in the United States. Virtually all civilian needs for copper were cut off by 1945.²⁵⁵ Meanwhile, word of Martin’s Binocular discovery had made its way to the Bureau, and by the mid-1940s, federal representatives started visiting Radovan Gulch to investigate Martin’s claims. Besides the visit to Binocular, Martin also told a Mine inspector about a four-foot vein of “dense, hard, metallic sulfides” exposed in the bottom of the narrow steep ravine at the head of the Gulch.²⁵⁶ Martin’s description of the Low Contact prospect interested the Bureau’s man, but not long after Martin had made the discovery, a

²⁵² Don J. Miller, “Copper Deposits of the Nizina District, Alaska” in *Mineral Resources of Alaska, 1943 and 1944*, USGS Bulletin #947 F (1946) 114-117. Letter: Theodore W. Van Zelst, to Mrs. Katherine Cesare, June 11, 1985.

²⁵³ Photos of Martin at Cabin with Snow

²⁵⁴ Miller, 1946.

²⁵⁵ Bureau of Mines, 1945.

²⁵⁶ Radovan Tunnel Project, U.S. Department of the Interior, (circa 1944).

snow slide covered the vein in ice and rock, and still prevented the inspector from validating Martin's assertion.

Part of the problem was that the location of the Low-Contact prospect, although it was lower in altitude, was no less treacherous than the Binocular, which sat looming high on the north cliff-face above. A major obstacle was that Martin could only access the Low-Contact prospect in July and August. During the warm months, melting ice and rock avalanches broke from the perpetual ice cap and would crash down the narrow ravine almost every hour of the day, making tunneling work extremely dangerous.²⁵⁷ On a separate inspection, a USGS geologist described the perilously nature of the work environment at Martin's Low-Contact tunnels. "Frequent rock showers down the fault zone make it hazardous to venture to this prospect and force one to take refuge in the tunnels in the ice filling the lower part of the cut." He added that "it is unlikely that a lone prospector will ever be able to examine safely the outcrops in the zone above."²⁵⁸

Moreover, the geological conclusions of Martin's prospects were not promising. In 1943, USGS geologist Don Miller visited Radovan Gulch. Miller pointed out that all of the ore bodies supplying Kennecott were located in Chitistone limestone and the principal sulfide mineral was chalcocite. The Radovan deposits, though also in the limestone, differed in that bornite and pyrite were more abundant than chalcocite.²⁵⁹ Miller concluded that "no significant quantity of copper minerals was found" at the two exploratory tunnels at Low-Contact and, the outcrops at Binocular, "apparently do not contain a significant quantity of copper." Miller did not dismiss the prospect entirely, however, adding that, "they may indicate the presence of copper-bearing material of higher grade at depth."²⁶⁰

Undeterred, Martin, now well into his sixties, continued the search for the vein he had discovered years before at the head of the Gulch. He first chipped steps in the ice out to the site where he believed the ore was located. Then, in the middle of the slide area, he drove a tunnel into the snow and frozen muck. He removed all the rock by hand and drilled his blast holes with a hand steel and single-jack hammer.²⁶¹ Every few days he had to remove loose rock from the hole. Since everything was done by hand, Martin could only enter the tunnel on hands and knees. Jim Edwards explained that the Gulch's rugged environment was nearly impossible to overcome:

Because of the time it took to tramp four miles on snowshoes to the site, climb 40 feet up the loose snow slide, do the drilling and blasting, and return home, progress was slow. He could advance his tunnel only about six inches a day."

Adding to the slow pace of work was the extreme weather. Each summer melting ice, rocks and mud filled the tunnel, then freezing it solid. The cycle of freeze and thaw

²⁵⁷ Radovan Tunnel Project, U.S. Department of the Interior, (circa 1944).

²⁵⁸ G.L. Sainsbury, 1951.

²⁵⁹ Miller, 98, 1946.

²⁶⁰ Miller, 1946.

²⁶¹ Edwards, 1965.

rendered most forward progress useless. Still, Martin, who was never daunted by the task at hand, simply started a new tunnel the following spring and continued to dig, weather permitting, until the deep snow of autumn fell. Over the years, Martin dug a total of sixteen tunnels at Low-Contact, with one measuring more than 125 feet.²⁶²

Besides the Binocular and Low-Contact prospects, Martin had also discovered the Greenstone prospect. By 1943, he held twelve of the thirty claims he had staked on the north side of Radovan Gulch between 1929 and 1931. On July 30, 1948, Martin staked a lode claim of 1500 feet long by 600 feet wide along the Augusta Radovan vein, which he named for his wife in 1935.²⁶³ The deposit was located on the Gulch's southwest slope, four thousand feet up in the Nikolai Greenstone, approximately three thousand feet below the contact. Martin aptly named it the "Greenstone Prospect." To get to Greenstone, Martin crossed the Gulch's receding glacier, and then followed a switchback trail up the slope of the mountain. The vein produced other claims, as well. Adding to the "Agusta" claim in 1948 were the "Boots" claim, the "Ki-Ki" claim, the "Pongo Boy" claim, and the "Triassic No. 31" and "Triassic No. 32 claims."²⁶⁴

Meanwhile, Martin had sent geologists samples from the Augusta vein, which was assayed at 78 percent copper.²⁶⁵ After investigation of the mine in 1951, geologists conceded that Greenstone produced some native copper, but it was determined that the ore deposit was essentially chalcocite. Moreover, contrary to Martin's beliefs, they concluded that little similarity existed between the mineralization at Radovan's Greenstone and Low-Contact prospects and the Kennecott ore bodies, postulating that the minerals were deposited at different periods in geological time.²⁶⁶ Still, evidence of copper compounds clearly existed at Radovan Gulch. As a result, investigators recommended that the fault between Greenstone and Low-Contact "should be prospected in detail, and those sulphide occurrences near the zone warrant exploratory work."²⁶⁷ Martin was more than happy to accommodate them.

The 1950s was an extraordinary time of national growth, but in many ways, Martin maintained a nineteenth century preindustrial intimacy with the ecosystem that surrounded him. He employed simple, non-mechanical tools, had a "practical knowledge" of the Gulch's geology (he knew what he was looking for, in other words), and through hard and dangerous work Martin not only engaged but overcame the barriers presented by the Gulch's natural world. Unfortunately for Martin, the mining industry by World War II had placed a new emphasis on modern technology and expertise supplied

²⁶² Edwards, 1965.

²⁶³ Letter.

²⁶⁴ Filed at Cooper Center on September 13, 1948

²⁶⁵ C.L. Sainsbury, *Geology of the Nelson and Radovan Copper Prospects, Glacier Creek, Alaska*, USGS, 1951.

²⁶⁶ C.L. Sainsbury, *Geology of the Nelson and Radovan Copper Prospects, Glacier Creek, Alaska*, USGS, 1951.

²⁶⁷ C.L. Sainsbury, *Geology of the Nelson and Radovan Copper Prospects, Glacier Creek, Alaska*, USGS, 1951.

by academically-trained, degree-holding engineers.²⁶⁸ The copper industry, in particular, faced the reality that no other massive Kennecott-type lodes were going to be found in the Wrangell Mountains. If copper was to be discovered, it would surely be much lower-grade mineral deposits. To reap profits then, far more complex—and expensive—explorative mining techniques were implemented. Though more efficient, this rational approach to mining valued guidance from engineers and other scientists—many of whom had never stepped foot in a mine—and consequently, the industry began to marginalize the traditional knowledge and intimate experience of prospectors like Martin Radovan.²⁶⁹

Season after season Martin scoured the steep slopes that surrounded the Gulch for copper while the rest of the world seemed to pass him by. Americans across the nation were utilizing the commodities, conveniences, and opportunities brought by the postwar economy, yet in the Nizina district, the population had plummeted to numbers not seen in fifty years.²⁷⁰ Kennecott was abandoned, Blackburn long-since vanished, and McCarthy remained a shell of its former self with only a handful of residents remaining. Martin probably felt that he was entirely alone in his mountain wilderness.

One of the biggest hurdles Martin faced during his more solitary years was getting himself, as well as his supplies, across Glacier Creek in the summertime. On hot days, glacier melt causes the creek to flow swiftly at a depth of six to eight feet. Because the river changed its channel often, a bridge was no solution. Martin solved this problem by building a tram across the creek. According to his friend James Edwards, Martin obtained permission to use a spool of three-quarter-inch steel cable that had been left on a bar six miles from his camp. “Alone and unaided,” explained Edwards, “he cut off about 400 feet of the cable, rolled it up, and hauled it the six miles upriver on a hand sled.”²⁷¹ With only some rope and a single block, Martin stretched the cable a span of 325-feet across the creek.

The system Martin used to tighten the cabin underscored the type of resourcefulness he employed while living by himself. In an *Alaska Sportsman* article entitled, “Martin Radovan,” James Edwards described his friend’s innovative system:

With one end of the cable fastened solidly in the ground, the other end was passed over a post and tied around a log. The log was free to move up and down in a pit, but was held away from the pull of the cable by spacers placed against another log solidly embedded in the side of the pit. When a deck was laid on the moveable log and piled with a ton or two of rocks, it would pull the cable a few inches over the post. The cable then was secured with a rope while the rocks could be removed, the log retied, and the operation repeated.²⁷²

²⁶⁸ Hovis and Mouat, 429.

²⁶⁹ Hovis and Mouat, 429-430.

²⁷⁰ Edwards, 1965.

²⁷¹ Edwards, 1965.

²⁷² Edwards, 1965.

Accordingly, Martin's ingenuity became legendary throughout the Nizina district. It was also about this time that Martin became known for his unusual companions. Indeed, Martin may have been alone at Radovan Gulch, but he was never lonely. Continuing a passion he shared with Augusta at Dan Creek, Martin fed the local wildlife and the wildlife responded by providing Martin with constant companionship. He cooked rice and raisins for the local birds and fed them several times a day.²⁷³ A flock of gray jays became so tame that they would land on his fingers and take food straight from his mouth. Besides the jays, Martin fed Canadian sparrows, squirrels, and bears. His most beloved companion was a fox named "Bootie." Martin's recollection of the story of Booties was retold in an *Anchorage Daily Times* article from 1972:

"I first saw him one morning when I went down to the river to knock a hole in the ice for water," said Radovan. "I looked up to see him standing 15 feet away. He ran in a big circle, about 200 feet, and returned to the spot where he started." I said to him, 'Are you hungry, boy? Come with me for something to eat.' The fox followed Radovan into his cabin, where he immediately jumped up on Radovan's bed. Bootsie Boy became a member of the family, and would not go out of sight unless Radovan was with him. With the snow level up to the roof, it was easy for the fox to walk up there. He slept close to the stovepipe, where it was warm.²⁷⁴

Memories of Bootsie suggest a relationship that was extremely meaningful to Martin. "Whenever anything moved there in my valley, whether it be man or animal, Bootsie would scratch some bare boards next to my stove pipe until I came out to see what it was," said Radovan. "He was better than the best watchdog." "Animals know when you like them, they sense it," he said. "I think more of them than I do of myself."²⁷⁵ Underscoring the magnitude of the relationships he formed with the wildlife was the names he assigned his claims: Second only to his wife, Augusta, was the "Boots" claim named for his pet fox Bootsie; then he named the "Ki-Ki claim after the jays; and finally, "Pongo Boy" named for the bear he fed and befriended at his Glacier Creek camp.

James Edwards recalled that when Martin first met Bootsie, he had fed the fox "a can of clams," and the animal "moved right indoors to stay."²⁷⁶ The fact that Martin lured Bootsie with canned food suggests that as isolated as Martin appeared at Radovan Gulch, he did not exist beyond the reach of American industrial life. Martin's independence, while resourceful, was not enough for him to survive. In order to live at Glacier Creek, especially throughout the winter months, Martin remained linked to the outside world through a network of steamships, roads, and airplanes. Although he hauled his own supplies up the trail from Dan Creek and cut his own cordwood to heat his cabin, he still ate processed, mass-produced food shipped north from distant farms and industrial cities.

²⁷³ Edwards, 1965.

²⁷⁴ Casley, 1972.

²⁷⁵ "Venerable Sourdough," ADT Nov 4. 1972.

²⁷⁶ Edwards, 1965.

He consumed *Skippy* peanut butter, canned tomato sauce, and *Smucker's* blackberry jam. He drank *Nestlé's Quick* chocolate drink mix and *Hills Bros.* coffee. He prepared and seasoned his food with a variety of condiments, such as dried mustard, *French's* mustard, olive oil, *Epsom* salts, savory salt, black pepper, soy sauce, and *Tiger Brand* curry powder. Meals were consumed on a complete stock of dishes, saucers, coffee cups, lunch pails, knives, forks and spoons and cooked using pots, pans, cheese graters, muffin tins, and baking and roasting pans. His kitchen shelves were lined with wallpaper and contained sundry cooking utensils such as a wash pan and coffee pot. Keeping himself groomed was also important. He used *Aqua Velva* cologne, various lotions, and *Wildroot Cream Oil* hair tonic. He owned a .22 handgun and a 30-06 caliber rifle, and maintained an ample supply of flashlight batteries.²⁷⁷ Although Martin appeared to live a life of solitude at Glacier Creek, his clothes, supplies, even the materials for his cabin, connected Martin to distant people and places.

With the CR&NW Railway out of commission, Martin adjusted to new and far more complicated systems of transportation. In 1945, for fifteen dollars a ton, Martin could have his provisions hauled to Chitina, and then for another fifteen, to McCarthy. Steamships brought supplies from the Outside to Valdez, where they were freighted 120 miles to Chitina by truck. There, small "gas speeders" hauled freight to McCarthy over the old railroad which, due to a lack of maintenance, was almost impassable. Complicating matters more were floods that destroyed the Copper River Bridge at Chitina and the Kennicott Bridge near McCarthy that made the only method of crossing a small boat or by tram. Once across, a truck could still haul supplies to Dan Creek along the quickly deteriorating old wagon road. Then Martin could use a tractor or horses to carry supplies the remaining 20 miles up the Nizina and Chitistone valleys to Glacier Creek.²⁷⁸

Another mode of transportation that Martin became accustomed to using was the airplane. Mail carriers first employed air transportation in the Nizina district by the end of the 1920s. The Alaska Road Commission constructed an airstrip near McCarthy Creek in 1927, making air transportation vital to the area by the 1930s.²⁷⁹ With the erosion of both the Nizina River Bridge and the May Creek Road, those continuing to work in the Nizina mining district were increasingly compelled to use airplanes to haul heavy freight and transport ore across the rivers. In 1948, the Alaska Road Commission created a mile-long clearing near May Creek, used by Piper Cubs and C-47 cargo planes.²⁸⁰ By 1951, a landing strip about 3000 feet in length was constructed to facilitate cargo-carrying planes into the Glacier Creek area. Not only did this airstrip connect him to the modern world, but it reconnected Martin to the past in ways he completely unexpected.

In spite of canned food and airstrips, Martin was still very much alone. With only his pet Bootsie providing companionship, Martin remained the Gulch's lone prospector and was as determined as ever to find his copper mountain. It was sometime in the early 1950s, in

²⁷⁷ These items were found by park staff in two of the cabins at Radovan Camp. The original cabin was built around 1929 and the second was built in 1955. NPS, Site Inventory Form, Radovan Camp.

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²⁷⁹ Kirchhoff, 83

²⁸⁰ WRST HIS 1984, 133.

the latter part of fall, when Martin decided to hike to Low-Contact to look one last time for the copper vein. Feeling inspired, off he went, following the trail up the glacier, into the Gulch's gut. On a final surveillance of the drift, he struck his pick into the cliff and sparks flew. As the sun's arctic light quickly faded, Martin managed to pack out a few good samples. He placed them in his pocket, and picked his way down the glacier. On the way home, however, Martin slipped, sliding quite a distance down into the ravine. Sore and somewhat discombobulated, he returned to his cabin after dark. He lit a fire and lantern, and then made a ghastly discovery—the copper samples were gone.

Martin had once told this story to local resident Loy Green, who was working for Martin at the time. Green explained that weather had prevented Martin from returning to the site the rest of that season. Still, Green recalled that Martin seemed optimistic. "He knew where he had been and knew that he had found his Bonanza."²⁸¹ Martin told Green about a vivid dream he had later that night. He dreamed about his trip up the mountain, where he was again "looking at the wonderful samples of copper."

By summer 1951, however, Martin's life had changed dramatically once again. After nearly a decade, his period of solitude at Radovan Gulch came to an end. That summer he was miraculously reunited with long-lost relatives, while at the same time, the Alaska Copper Mine Corporation decided to lease his claims with option to buy, and even planned to use his camp as a staging area for exploratory work. It seemed that Martin had found his Eureka—his determination and hard work had finally paid off. After twenty-two years of working his prospects, surrounded by one of the most rugged and isolated places in Nizina country, with only Augusta, Bootsie, and his birds to keep him company, Martin—the lone prospector—was now completely dependent on the modern world for his dream to come true.

²⁸¹ Green, 1994.

Business Deals and Family Reunions 1951-1969

The passenger was a man about Martin's own height, built just as solidly and with the ruddy complexion of a man who spends a good bit of time outdoors. He wore a well fitting blue business suit. He greeted Martin and asked where he came from.

~“Brothers Reunited in Alaska After 50 Years”
Anchorage Daily Times, November 7, 1951

America's hostile relationship with the Soviet Union during the Cold War stimulated exploration and development by the mining industry in Alaska. Government assistance through the Defense Minerals Exploration Administration (DMEA) authorized government assistance for the purpose of exploring for strategic and critical minerals, including antimony, cobalt, mercury, nickel, tin, tungsten, and copper. One of those companies under contract for DMEA was the Alaska Copper [Mines] Corporation.²⁸²

By summer 1951, Radovan Gulch buzzed with activity, for extensive exploration had been progressing in the area for two seasons.²⁸³ As quickly as Martin staked his claims along the Augusta Vein in 1948, Alaska Copper Mines, Inc. (also known as Alaska Copper Company and the Alaska Copper Corp.) leased, with option to buy, six of them. Under the supervision of William O'Neill, the consulting engineer, the Alaska Copper Corp.'s crew consisted of nine employees, including a foreman, two miners, a mechanic, diamond driller, two helpers, and a cook. The employee hired to do the prospecting was none other than Martin Radovan.²⁸⁴

In order to establish a staging area and base camp, the company radically expanded Martin's Glacier Creek camp. In addition to his small cabin originally built in 1929, the company constructed two tent-frame structures (one of which was called the Radio Shack), a sauna/generator house, an outhouse, and storage shed. The Alaska Road Commission had loaned the Alaska Copper Company a Ford dump truck and a crawler-type tractor, which had been used on the Dan and Chititu Creeks roads. The company drove the vehicles up the flood plain of the Chitistone River to the Glacier Creek camp under their own power. Employees then used the tractor to bulldoze a road to the Greenstone prospect.²⁸⁵ The tractor road fronted the camp to the edge of Radovan Gulch,

²⁸² Alfred L. Ransome and William H. Kerns, *Mineral Yearbook Area Report*, U.S. Bureau of Mines, Vol. III, 1952. 65, 71, 82.

²⁸³ The Alaska Mines Report of the Commissioner, 9.

²⁸⁴ Saunders, 1952.

²⁸⁵ Memo: Report on the Prospecting Program of the Alaska Copper Company on Claire Creek, Copper River Region, Alaska. From Robert H. Saunders, Associate Mining Engineer, to Leo H. Saarela, Commissioner of Mines, Juneau, Alaska, Department of Mines, Territory of Alaska, March 3, 1952.

where it presumably crossed the Radovan Gulch glacier, and then made the steep trek up to the prospect. The road near camp was wide enough to serve as an airstrip.

With the airstrip in place, the Alaska Copper Corp. was able to fly all the other equipment in by air. Two jeeps were dismantled and flown in; one was used to haul supplies and men up the steep road to the Greenstone tunnels; the other was never completely reassembled. The equipment used at the tunnels consisted of a size 125 Jaeger compressor, a size 12-B Eimco mucker, and a jackhammer with vertical bar and carriage.²⁸⁶

While a majority of the employees that summer worked to built camp, blaze roadways from foot-trails, and bring in a barrage of machinery, Martin and one of the helpers worked persistently on the Binocular prospect. Their work, however, was cut short by a snow-slide that made the trail up to the prospect impassable.²⁸⁷ As weather grew worse, the Alaska Copper Corp. closed up camp, while Martin reclaimed status as the Gulch's lone prospector.

After Augusta died in 1944, Martin believed that he was completely without family. This must have been hard for a man raised by a large, close-knit, Croatian family. Although it had been fifty years since Martin left Žrnovo, he remained tied to his home country in distinct ways. Over the years he maintained his Catholic faith, spoke in broken English—never fully giving up his mother tongue—and most significantly, he had not yet given up his birthright to become a citizen of the United States. Underscoring Martin's homesickness is a story retold by Emily Aiken Campbell, whose parents Martin had befriended before she was born. Campbell explained that once a man walked into her family's store in Cordova speaking a language she had never heard before. Martin, who overheard and more importantly understood the man, "burst into tears of joy." The two men then went on to converse well into the evening, exchanging stories in Croatian about growing up in the Old Country.²⁸⁸

During the war Martin lost track of his Croatian family, some of whom were still in Yugoslavia when the Axis forces invaded in 1941. After the Allied victory, mail service to Yugoslavia resumed, giving Martin hope that he might locate his remaining family there. It was after Augusta's death, then, that Martin decided to send them a letter. He stuck a \$20 bill in an envelope and mailed it to Croatia. His sister had survived the war, and wrote Martin, informing him that his brother and sister were alive and well in Delano, California.²⁸⁹ She then forwarded the letter to his younger brother Jakov "Jack" Radovanovic.

²⁸⁶ Saunders, 1952.

²⁸⁷ Saunders, 1952.

²⁸⁸ Emily Aiken Campbell Interview

²⁸⁹ "Brothers Reunited in Alaska After 50 Years," Anchorage Daily Times, November 7, 1951; "Venerable Sourdough," ADT, Nov 7, 1972.

During the days that Martin worked on the CR&NW Railway, he had sent part of his paycheck back home so that his younger brother could come to the United States. Jack eventually made it. Just prior to World War I, he arrived to New York. On entry into the country, Jack's surname was shortened to 'Radovich,' unlike Martin, whose name was changed to 'Radovan.' After working for a while on the East Coast, Jack Radovich headed west. He found work in the copper mines in Arizona, and later joined the military.²⁹⁰ Jack served three years in France with the U.S. Army, and when discharged he moved to Delano, California where his sister lived. He started a shipping business that handled grapes and wine, and eventually grew into a successful vineyard. All the time, Jack never knew that his brother Martin was alive in the wilds of Alaska.²⁹¹

On a late summer day in 1951, as autumn colors transformed the Gulch from green to gold, Martin noticed a small plane buzzing over camp. The Alaska Copper Corp. was gone for the season and Martin was in the process of moving from Glacier Creek to his winter cabin at Dan Creek.²⁹² Martin recalled that the plane landed at the Glacier Creek airstrip and the pilot and one passenger headed for camp. The passenger greeted Martin and asked where he came from:

"They call it Yugoslavia now," Martin said. "Where are you from?"
"I came here just now from California," replied the passenger. "I ought to have a brother somewhere down in California," declared Martin. "What's his name?" inquired the other. "Jack Radovich," said Martin. "That's me," said the passenger and they fell in one another's arms, laughing and weeping together."

Another version of the story suggests some tension existed between the siblings. *Anchorage Daily Times* reporter Dan Casely described that Jack wanted his Sourdough brother to return to Delano with him, but Martin had some good claims and he was preparing for the winter. In an interview he gave in 1972, Martin explained that he told his brother, "I can't go, I have to lay in my winter supplies and lay out feed for the birds." Jack was not sympathetic: "To hell with that!" "To hell with you!" said Martin. In the end, Martin's need to reconnect with family won out. He agreed to go with Jack to California "after his supplies were taken care of."²⁹³

While in Anchorage, the brothers caused a bit of a stir. Martin, who had been at the Gulch all summer, decided that before heading south he needed a shave and haircut. The story of the reunion found an interested audience at the 4th Avenue barber shop and it quickly "became the talk of the town." On November 7, 1951 the reunion story made front page news in the *Anchorage Daily Times*. The unexpected arrival of a rich relative prompted the *Times* article to predict, "The reunion with his brother [would bring to an end] his mining days."²⁹⁴ Instead, Martin's reunion with Jack was the start of a new business: the Delano Mining Company.

²⁹⁰ Martin tells the story to ADT reporter Dan Casley in 1972.

²⁹¹ "Venerable Sourdough," ADT, Nov 7, 1972.

²⁹² "Brothers Reunited in Alaska After 50 Years," *Anchorage Daily Times*, November 7, 1951

²⁹³ "Venerable Sourdough," ADT, Nov 7, 1972.

²⁹⁴ "Brothers Reunited," ADT, Nov. 7, 1951.

In 1951, Martin left for California with his brother only to return to Glacier Creek two years later. By that time, the Alaska Copper Corp. had given up its Glacier Creek options for what it determined to be better prospects in Prince William Sound. While in California, Martin swayed his family to invest in his copper prospecting. On May 23, 1953, Martin entered into partnership with a “Marion Radovich,” (quite likely himself and backed by Jack) to form the Delano Mining Company. He then transferred the Triassic No. 30 to 32, Augusta, Boots, Ki-Ki, and Pongo Boy claims to the corporate entity. Together the claims consisted of one contiguous group of approximately 400 acres.²⁹⁵ That summer, under the auspices of the Delano Mining Company, Martin drove a drift along the Augusta Vein on the Greenstone prospect. Soon thereafter Martin added two new claims, the “Jack,” presumably named for his brother, and the “Sister” claim.²⁹⁶ By 1954, the company had one employee: Martin Radovan.²⁹⁷

The following year *The Cordova Times* reported that “Martin Radovan, who has been outside for several months, returned to Cordova on Saturday, and went on to his home in Glacier Creek.” The paper added that a young man named Jim Edwards had also moved through Cordova, heading out to work for Radovan at Glacier Creek.²⁹⁸ Edwards, a self-proclaimed “young buck in his twenties” first met the persistent prospector when Martin was seventy-three-years old. Edwards had flown in to the Glacier Creek airstrip with a second hire, Jack Craig, in February 1955.²⁹⁹ The men disembarked the plane and followed the fresh snow-shoed trail for about a mile. As they approached camp, a man greeted them with two questions: “Where are you from?” and “What can I feed you?”³⁰⁰

According to Edwards, Martin fed them “a stout meal of wild sheep meat, potatoes and freshly baked bread,” and then painted for the two young men the daunting task that lay ahead. Martin explained that they would live in one of the Alaska Copper Corp’s old tent frames and work at a prospect called “Low Contact.” Their work day began by traveling four miles on snowshoes up into a cirque, climbing a half mile in elevation on the way. The temperature for the first few weeks hovered between twenty and thirty degrees below zero, and there was always the possibility of high winds. They needed to break trail after each snow and wind storm. Martin tried to reassure them, “Sometimes, it takes me two days to break trail.” But as Edwards quickly discovered, even with the two them taking turns, the young men still needed two days to break the trail.³⁰¹ Edwards later wrote about his work experience and friendship with Martin in an *Alaska Sportsman* article, published ten years later in 1965.

²⁹⁵ Jasper, Alaska, Mines, Report of the Commissioner, 1954. 97).

²⁹⁶ Jasper, Alaska, Mines, Report of the Commissioner, 1954. 97).

²⁹⁷ Jasper, Alaska, Mines, Report of the Commissioner, 1954. 97).

²⁹⁸ Cordova Times, March 10, 1955.

²⁹⁹ Cordova Time, Martin 10, 1955, Edwards, 1965.

³⁰⁰ Edwards, 1965.

³⁰¹ Edwards, 1965.

Also working for Martin that summer were Calvin and Viola Aiken. The Aikens were long-time Alaskans and had residences in both McCarthy and Cordova. Like most Copper River Valley inhabitants, the Aikens in order to make a living engaged a variety of occupations. In the spring the couple dug clams for the large razor clam canneries in Cordova. In the fall and winter they trapped fur bearing animals along the Bremmer River, and starting in the summer of 1955 they worked for Martin Radovan at Glacier Creek. Cal helped the men prospect for copper at Low Contact and Viola cooked their meals at camp.³⁰² Although the couple's work for Martin was brief, they formed a lasting friendship with the aging prospector. In 1960, the couple gave birth to baby girl, Emily, and three years later, a boy named Scott. At the time the Aikens lived at the ____house in McCarthy, and wintered at their cabin in Hartney Bay in Cordova. Over the years, the family began to spend less time in McCarthy to focus on their growing family and grocery store business in Cordova. Martin began to spend his winter with them, and as Emily remembers, became a surrogate "grandfather" to the children.³⁰³

By 1955, the Supreme Court's landmark ruling on *Brown v Board of Education* had launched a nationwide Civil Rights movement, Senator Joseph McCarthy had made headlines with public accusations that more than two hundred card-carrying communists had infiltrated the United States, and statehood was clearly on the minds of most Alaskans. That year in Fairbanks a group of men and women forged a constitution, blazing the trail for Alaska to become the 49th state in 1959. And, for whatever reason, Martin finally decided to become a U.S. citizen. He was naturalized by the District Court of Territory of Alaska, Third Division at Cordova, Alaska on September 29, 1955. Citizenship was eventually issued on March 21, 1969 when Martin was eighty-seven years old.³⁰⁴

Alaska's admission into the Union did not seem to change Martin's life at Radovan Gulch. In 1956 and Alaska Mines report of the Commissioner stated that "Radovan, Martin, McCarthy, Glacier Cr., Nizina Dist., McCarthy, Copper lode prospecting, 1 employed" and by 1961, two years after statehood, Alaska Department of National Resources reported exactly the same thing: "Radovan, Martin, McCarthy, Glacier Cr., Nizina Dist., McCarthy, Copper lode prospecting, 1 employed."³⁰⁵ By the early 1960s, Martin was spending more and more time in California with Jack. Martin was getting older and it was becoming more difficult for him to negotiate the Gulch's treacherous landscape. It was probably at the urging of a worried younger brother that Martin met

³⁰² Cordova Times, Martin 10, 1955. Interview with Emily Aiken Campbell.

³⁰³ Interview with Emily Aiken Campbell.

³⁰⁴ Martin's Certificate of Naturalization (#7268326) dated March 21, 1969 was "naturalized by the District Court. Issued on March 21, 1969

³⁰⁵ **1956** Radovan, Martin, McCarthy, Glacier Cr., Nizina Dist., McCarthy, Copper lode prospecting, 1 employed (p. 89). Alaska, Mines, Report of the Commissioner, 1956.

1959 Radovan, Martin, McCarthy, Glacier Cr., Nizina Dist., McCarthy, Copper lode prospecting, 1 employed (p. 66). Alaska, DRN, Mines, Report of the Division, 1959.

1960 Radovan, Martin, McCarthy, Glacier Cr., Nizina Dist., McCarthy, Copper lode prospecting, 1 employed (p. 70). Alaska, DRN, Mines, Report of the Division, 1960.

1961 Radovan, Martin, McCarthy, Glacier Cr., Nizina Dist., McCarthy, Copper lode prospecting, 1 employed (p. 97). Alaska, DRN, Mines, Report of the Division, 1961.

Wayne Thomas, Harry B. Cannon Sr., Frances E. Cannon and his wife, all of Tampa Florida, and likely business associates of Jack Radovich.

On November 27, 1963, Martin entered into three party agreements with Thomas and the Cannons. A year later, on January 15, 1964, the Floridians incorporate the Radovan Gulch Copper Company, and acquired title to twenty six of Martin's contiguous claims known as the Triassic Lode Group.³⁰⁶ Under the terms of the agreement, Martin conveyed the fee simple real property to Cannon; Cannon could mine and take all valuable ore from the earth. In return, Cannon and the Radovan Gulch Copper Company had to pay Martin 5,000 dollars upon date of acceptance; 5,000 dollars on June 1, 1965; and 10,000 on each of the following dates: June 1, 1966, June 1, 1967, June 1, 1968, and June 1, 1969.³⁰⁷

By 1965, a supplemental agreement with the Radovan Gulch Copper Company added ten more Radovan Gulch claims: The Jack, Sister, and Triassic 39-46 claims.³⁰⁸ With the new company and what looked like serious backing, Jim Edwards returned to Glacier Creek to work on the Low Contact claims. Local resident Loy Green also started work at Glacier Creek as a camp cook for the exploration crew.³⁰⁹ Martin, not surprisingly, was hired on to the assessment work for the company.

Martin, however, was growing increasingly frustrated by the company's hired laborers, whom he felt, unlike locals like Edwards and Green, were ill prepared, untrustworthy, and unsafe. In an undated letter to the Radovan Gulch Copper Co., he provided the company an update of the 1969 season:

Gentlemen, I write to ask a few questions, if you have a time please....All men comes from Fairbanks to work here a just bunch of hoodlums never been off the sidewalk before, and getting \$1400, a month. These men don't know how to take care of themselves and no one here to tell them how, then one gets hurt then no one goes up again. That is the situation today.³¹⁰

Not only did all the employees leave camp on the Third of July to celebrate the holiday in town, they did not return for five days. By the time they returned, the weather had warmed, and the creek water had risen, and when these so-called greenhorns attempted to move the big bulldozer across Glacier Creek, they got it stuck, and the water eventually flooded over the vehicle. "And there she stands for the summer," wrote Martin. "I could see that this Summer is gone."³¹¹

³⁰⁶ Florida Department of State Division of Corporations.

³⁰⁷ Agreement between Martin Radovan and Harry B. Cannon Sr., State of Alaska Copper Center Recording District, November 27, 1963.

³⁰⁸ Supplemental Agreement, Martin Radovn and Harry B. Cannon Sr. November 22, 1965

³⁰⁹ Green, 1994.

³¹⁰ Letter: From Martin Radovan, to Radovan Gulch Copper Co, Tampa Florida, circa 1969.

³¹¹ Letter: From Martin Radovan, to Radovan Gulch Copper Co, Tampa Florida, circa 1969.

As promised, the Radovan Gulch Copper Co. had paid Martin 40,000 dollars by 1969, and all the while, Martin continued to do the assessment work for the company.³¹² Although the company held 172 claims, company manger, E.B. Anderson, wrote Martin in August 1969, requesting that he limit his work to 91 claims. Anderson provided to give Martin 50 percent interest on those claims. They authorized him to spend 3,000 in assessment work of the 91 claims, including his original 26 claims. The action, however, caused Martin to worry that the company intended to release claims that had not yet been “clearly defined.”³¹³

Anderson repeated the company’s instructions, and Martin responded with a handwritten letter admonishing Anderson and the company for not making a deal with Hana Mining Co.; a local contractor who, according to the prospector, “had seven men willing to work the properties.”³¹⁴ Martin, now eighty-seven years old, complained that, “I am too old to take that kind of job. This is a time to be mining and shipping ore, price is up to 46-pound.” Then Martin—who had made more money with this company than at any point in his life, added—“*Money is no good to me when I am dead.*” What mattered most to Martin was finding his copper mountain and validating his life’s work. He concluded the letter with a bill for \$173.86.³¹⁵

In September, Anderson sent Martin’s attorney a letter, reiterating the company’s position. “I strongly urge you to advise Martin that we will not support any work above the \$3,000 authorized,” wrote Anderson, adding that the company will not “be responsible for debts incurred by Martin Radovan.” Though sympathetic to Martin’s quest—“if Martin desires to spend his own money on the other 81 claims, we will give him a 50% interests in them”—the company was nevertheless “willing to run the risk of letting someone else stake them [the claims] when the proper time has elapsed.”³¹⁶

Loy Green, who was working for the company at the time, recalled, “They [Radovan Gulch Copper Co.] succeeded in cleaning out the gut at a cost of \$800,000 and found nothing....They suddenly stopped, transported everyone out and that was the END.”³¹⁷ According to Green, the company granted Martin a life time permit to live in his cabin. And although Martin had complete security and could live at Glacier Creek in the

³¹² Letter: Martin Radovan, To Mr. E.B. Anderson, Radovan Gulch Copper Co. June 5, 1966; Check 170 To Martin Radovan for 5,000 signed by Robert Thomas of the Radovan Gulch Copper Co. June 21, 1966; Check 207 To Martin Radovan for 1,000 signed by Robert Thomas of the Radovan Gulch Copper Co. May 29, 1967; Check 215 To Martin Radovan for 14,000 signed by Robert Thomas of the Radovan Gulch Copper Co. December 22, 1967; Check 221 To Martin Radovan for 10,000 signed by the Radovan Gulch Copper Co. June 22, 1968; Check 223 To Martin Radovan for 10,000 signed by Robert Thomas of the Radovan Gulch Copper Co. May 21, 1969.

³¹³ Letter: From Martin Radovan, To Mr. E.B. Anderson, Radovan Gulch Copper Co. August 4, 1969.

³¹⁴ Letter: From Martin Radovan, To Mr. E.B. Anderson, Radovan Gulch Copper Co. August 25, 1969.

³¹⁵ Letter: From Martin Radovan, To Mr. E.B. Anderson, Radovan Gulch Copper Co. August 25, 1969.

³¹⁶ Letter: From E. B. Anderson, Radovan Gulch Copper Company; To Mr. J.L. MCarrey, Anchorage Alaska, September 18, 1969.

³¹⁷ Green, 1994.

summer and winter at his choosing, “it was not fulfilling his dream.” He filed a law suit for breach of contract, claiming the company failed to “find the discovery that Martin knew was there.”³¹⁸ But the lawsuit went nowhere. Meanwhile, Radovan Gulch Copper Company voluntarily dissolved in 1971, and making good on his threat, Thomas sold the Glacier Creek claims to the Geneva-Pacific Corporation of Illinois.³¹⁹

³¹⁸ Green, 1994.

³¹⁹ Florida Department of State Division of Corporations, Radovan Gulch Copper Co.; Casely, ADT, 1972.

Tunnel Vision: Martin and Augusta's Legacy 1970-1975

The *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, reporting on mining activities for 1970, noted that Martin Radovan, at age eighty-eight, had “worked in the McCarthy area” that year.³²⁰ Earlier that year, Martin spent the winter in Cordova with the Aikens. There, he had seemed happy, surrounded by pets and children. When Martin arrived, Emily recalls that her mother, Viola, who was quite fond of Martin, helped him to unpack his bags that he had brought with him from Glacier Creek. “Mother started screaming,” laughs Emily. “Inside one of Martin’s bags was a rotting, smelly grizzly bear claw!” Dan Casley, a reporter for the *Anchorage Daily Times*, wrote about Martin’s bear encounter in a human interest article about Martin. In the 1972 article, Martin, who Casley described as a “venerable sourdough,” displayed the paw of the big grizzly that he had shot in the fall, after it had raided his cabin.³²¹

Though most self-respecting Alaska sourdoughs told “bear tales,” Martin found killing animals a necessity, when no option was available: “We only killed what we needed to eat here, or like the bear, where it was the only cure, explained Martin. But when he returned that spring to Glacier Creek he found all of his firewood burned, his cookshack pushed off into a creek, and shotgun shells everywhere. “Since those guys [Geneva-Pacific] set up camp all the animals have left the gulch,” lamented Martin. “My birds were tame, they went to them like they came to me, and last year they were killed.”³²²

The new company was Geneva-Pacific Corporation, a technical management company in the natural resource field, which had obtained the rights to several properties in the Peavine/Glacier Creek area of the McCarthy Quadrangle Radovan Gulch. As with the other companies that had worked at Glacier Creek, Geneva-Pacific’s main objective was to explore for copper, not mine it. In 1970s, Geneva-Pacific operated as research and development for its parent company, Belden Corporation. The Belden Corp. started with the wiring of American and grew to become a leader in the design and manufacturing of wire, cable, and cord products. In 1972, Geneva-Pacific, the wholly-owned subsidiary of Belden, launched a joint venture of exploration activities in Alaska. That year, Belden President Bob Hawkinson boasted, “The Alaska properties could be a big plus in our future.”³²³

On inspection of their Alaska claims, Hawkinson and Geneva-Pacific President Ted Van Zelst, visited the Glacier Creek Camp in 1972. There they met “the legendary prospector, Martin Radovan.” A later news release retold the prospectors story:

³²⁰ Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, May 26, 1970-A-3.

³²¹ “Venerable Sourdough,” ADT, Nov 7, 1972.

³²² “Venerable Sourdough,” ADT, Nov 7, 1972.

³²³ Tim Larimer, “Geneva Pacific: Belden’s Stake in Alaska,” Geneva Pacific Corp, Subsidiary of Belden Corporation, 1979.

An area named the Binocular Prospect was first explored by a legendary prospector, Martin Radovan. Not until recently could these claims be reached by exploration crews. Before, the site was only examined through binoculars, hence the name of the prospect. Radovan and his wife climbed to the site in the 1930s to stake their claims which are now owned by Geneva Pacific...

Radovan continued exploring the area well into his 80s. He sometimes climbed over the mountain and followed a narrow ledge only a foot wide, some 4000 feet above the valley floor. HE and his wife lived alone in this wilderness area after the Kennecott Mines were closed. After his wife died in 1944, Radovan stayed in Alaska by himself, continuing his search for copper he so strongly believed was there.³²⁴

After turning ninety in 1972, Martin could no longer hike into the Gulch, let alone tunnel into hard rock. Not being able to work allowed Martin to move between Dan Creek and Glacier Creek more often in the summer months. On one such trip, Martin left a note on his cabin that read, "Spt. 15th 71. Please do not [bunk] in my home. I will be back in a few days. Martin F. Radovan." By the early 1970s, Martin was thinking more and more about family and leaving Alaska. He told Casley in 1972 that his family in California worried about him. "They're so convincing down there for me to stay," said Martin. "I don't have to do anything there, and I travel all over with my brother."³²⁵

In September 1974, Martin left Glacier Creek for the last time, moving permanently to Cordova to live with the Aikens. In February 1975, Martin made the hard decision to move to Delano. At the time, Martin was asked if he would ever return to Cordova. The ninety-three-year-old prospector smiled and said, "Oh, maybe, I don't know. I like to help the kids there—All the kids, like me in Cordova."³²⁶

Three months later a two-man team from Geneva-Pacific, Corp. reached Binocular Prospect using a helicopter. The men took about 200 pounds of channel samples. A Geneva-Pacific news release printed in a Mines and Geology Bulletin optimistically declared, "Modern methods have opened up the hard-to reach areas of Alaska and given geologists and prospectors new frontier to explore."³²⁷ The news gave Martin hope that they would discover his copper mountain. Before Martin received word to what the geologists had found, on June 20, 1975, Martin Radovan died at a hospital in Delano, California.³²⁸

³²⁴ Tim Larimer, "Geneva Pacific: Belden's Stake in Alaska," Geneva Pacific Corp, Subsidiary of Belden Corporation, 1979.

³²⁵ "Venerable Sourdough," ADT, Nov 7, 1972.

³²⁶ "Venerable Sourdough," ADT, Nov 7, 1972.

³²⁷ *Mines and Geology Bulletin*

³²⁸ "Martin Radovan," Social Security Death Index.

Martin's obituary published in *The Delano Record* on June 24, 1975, reduced his life's pursuit to one sentence: "Radovan was a mining prospector in Alaska."³²⁹ Although Martin was a simple man, his legacy in the Nizina district is far more complicated than his obituary implied. During his many years working in the region, Martin not only acquired work practices of a skilled miner and prospector, but he developed an intimate relationship with and knowledge of the surrounding environment—far more than any recreationist who might visit the area today.³³⁰

The sampling team for Geneva-Pacific reported in 1976 that they were stunned to discover, at 7,000 feet, a rock hammer and pick-ax used in 1929 by Martin Radovan. Despite 47 years of weathering and mineralization, the hand-made hammer remained in "excellent" condition. Like his hammer and pick-ax, Martin Radovan's life in the Nizina mining district continues to stun audiences of frontier Alaska. The Binocular story has inspired numerous popular articles, chronicling Martin's life at Glacier Creek. In addition, every USGS report of Glacier Creek since 1931 has placed the site and trail, as well as his camp on all official maps. Each geologist sent to survey the area has retold the story of the Binocular Prospect, and has perpetuated the almost mythological story of the man in the collective imagination.

As impossible as Martin's feat was, it's important to remember that Martin did not accomplish the extraordinary alone—he had Augusta. Augusta not only helped Martin build the steep trail to the Binocular Prospect, which brought him local recognition, but it was her professional skills and steady income that allowed Martin to spend his time prospecting at Dan and Glacier Creeks. While Martin remained steadfast in working his surrounding claims, Augusta interacted with the larger community of miners and their wives. Augusta fished, baked bread, sluiced for gold, cut wood, called on neighbors and friends, traveled to town usually on foot, scheduled daily life around the mail, and had a naturalist's eye for wildlife. Besides working at Kennecott from time to time, she supplemented their earnings by running the Blackburn roadhouse with Martin during the Chisana gold rush, washing miners' laundry, and assisting as the local postmistress and notary. While making a small income, she still managed to send money to her mother in Seattle. Martin also took part-time jobs when money ran short. Although their daily work routine presented the couple usually with gender-specific, specialized tasks, Martin and Augusta shared a common vision. She not only made his dream possible, she believed in it, too.

Analytical tools forged by recent scholars of the American west have given us a new framework in which to better understand the role of women in places perceived to be inhabited mostly by men.³³¹ The new scholarship draws upon methodologies from western history and women's history, and suggests that a contradiction exists between idealized expectations of the past and the daily reality experienced by both women and

³²⁹ "Martin F. Radovan Services Today," *Delano Record*, June 24, 1975, pg. 3.

³³⁰ Richard White, "'Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?': Work and Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 171-185.

³³¹ Though there are many monographs that might be cited, an important book on this topic is *The Women's West*, edited by Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987).

men in the American west. This dual focus, therefore, has provided us with new ways to achieve a more complete historical understanding of the lives of women *and* men in frontier Alaska. By applying such an approach to the Radovans, Augusta's experience thusly moves from the margins of Martin's story, to a more central position in the historical narrative. Through Augusta's story, we discover that the Nizina historic was inhabited by a host of extraordinary women. Some climbed mountains, others transformed communities, and others, like Augusta, came to Alaska for their own desires and dreams.

In many ways, Martin's life at Radovan Gulch fits a nostalgic, frontier image of a 'rugged individual,' but Martin never acted independently from the architects of Americanization—big business and the federal government. Though Martin lived seemingly isolated in his wilderness home, he consumed processed canned foods, prepared by an industrial network that connected Radovan Gulch to distant markets. He used Gillette shaving cream, wallpapered his cabin, and seasoned his food with spices from around the world. He remained a creature of an industrialized economy, taking trains or planes to towns like Cordova, Chitina, Kennecott, Blackburn and McCarthy, towns that replicated the material, institutional, and ideological culture of rural America. Most significantly, Martin was completely dependent upon scientists to validate his claims, technocrats to mine them, and ultimately, absentee investors for the capital and ties to international markets to develop and sell the ore. Rather than evading civilization, Martin fully participated in an industrial process that transported twentieth century American life into the heart of the Interior Alaska.

Still, unlike many of the 'rugged individuals' who left Alaska with dashed dreams, Martin stayed. Even after Kennecott abandoned its mines and railway in 1938, after McCarthy deteriorated into a ghost town, and after Augusta's untimely death in 1944, Martin remained at Glacier Creek. Immersed in a perilous landscape day after day, Martin picked through tons of rock and, over time, came to know the natural environment between his creekside camp and his tunnels channeled deep into the mountainside. By employing only rudimentary tools and near-obsolete technology, Martin perfected climbing, construction and prospecting skills at Radovan Gulch that inspired awe and respect from people who knew him.

Time, however, was not on Martin's side. The rationalization and scientific professionalization of mining after World War II rendered prospectors with his "practical" knowledge outdated. While the modern industry was still willing to examine the old-timers' claims and prospects, it now sought the expertise of university-trained engineers and geologists to determine where and how to build mines in order to efficiently and profitably extract copper. Thus, Martin's mining experience, albeit frustrating and disappointing at times, is important because it reveals a transformation of work in the Nizina district, a process of incorporation that began to marginalize the so-called, "little-guy" in the mining industry throughout Alaska.

In the end, Martin came to Radovan Gulch because of a dream—a dream he shared with none other than Horatio Alger, who mythologized America's 'rags to riches' narrative.

Yet, in the seventy-four years he spent in this country, Martin never achieved his dream—he never got rich. Perhaps a more compelling question is, why did Martin stay? One clue comes from McCarthy resident Gary Green, who knew Martin during his last years at Glacier Creek. “Martin was a prospector,” notes Green, “and a prospector always has to believe there is something to find.” Likewise, Martin’s longtime friend Jim Edwards agrees, “He was a prospector; he had a prospector’s head...he never gave up.”

Perhaps the best explanation comes from Martin, who, in the twilight of his life, recalled the following story:

I started back to the camp, got tired, opened a can of beans, cooked some coffee, spread my blankets under a big spruce tree...Before I knew I was asleep, a vision came to me clear as a blueprint...I saw a great bed of ore in that mountain a thousand feet in—true solid rock—on both sides of the canyon....This is the vision of my dreams.³³²

Martin believed that his vision of copper would translate into “the greatest bonanza of all times.” Still, the vision that drove Martin for four decades at Radovan Gulch seemed to move beyond the want for riches and into religious realms. [Describe Radovan Gulch as a cathedral] His brother Jack was rich—Martin could have easily lived a life of comfort in California. Instead he remained at Radovan Gulch, as the infrastructure of industry collapsed around him. His friend Jim Edwards implied that over the years Radovan Gulch became Martin’s wilderness cathedral, confiding that in hard times the beauty and peace of Glacier Creek brought him comfort—a place Jim saw as his outdoor “church.” As he and Augusta carved the trail to Binocular, Martin later revealed that the work was “hard going and slow,” but that an “invisible hand, reaching out from the past, pushed us out to meet our environment, and guiding us in the start of our journey whispering into our ears, ‘Fear not! The Kingdom of God is within you, go on!’”³³³

Even when the institutions of government and business gave up, Martin maintained an unwavering belief that a massive “copper mountain” lay deep in the limestone. Like a Biblical knight, Martin’s hoped for bonanza became his Holy Grail. Perhaps he was reaching out to the Catholic up-bringing of his Croatian youth, or maybe he was filling a void left after Augusta died, but Martin’s vision over the years became more than a mere quest for copper. It became a search for meaning—meaning in a world that, in spite of life’s failings, still gave him hope, a reason to live. Ultimately a reason to remain at Glacier Creek looking for something that probably never existed.

It is true that Martin’s mining experience could be wearisome, but his time spent pursuing his dream was never wasted. Resident Loy Green pointed out that “Martin, even though disappointed that they had not found his discovery (and still insisting that it was there if they would just keep looking) was still a happy man, and blessed us with his stories and dreams.” Admittedly, Martin’s triumphs never produced great wealth, but for his Binocular feat Martin gained lasting fame; for his endurance and ingenuity he obtained

³³² Radovan Dream

³³³ Radovan Dream

local respect; and through his personal relationships—whether it was with his family, friends, wife or wildlife—Martin attained constant companionship. Rousing his sustained belief that copper lay buried deep within the mountains was a spirituality that, like any faith, inspired Martin to keep going each day. In 1985, Ted Van Zelst wrote that the memory of Martin Radovan will continue...by the designation of his operating area as Radovan Gulch, [while] the glacier in the gulch is called the Radovan Glacier.”³³⁴
[End with quote for Martin’s dream...]

³³⁴ Letter