

Founding Father John Maloney

By the time John Maloney Sr. founded Skykomish he was in his late 30s and had already done more than most people do in a lifetime. The only one of five Missouri brothers to leave home, in 1876 he headed west as a 20-year-old to seek his fortune working in mines and on claims in four western states before spending eight profitable years developing a copper claim in Utah. By 1889 he was prospecting in Alaska and had worked several claims before he and a partner floated the Copper River to the sea in a moose-skin canoe, ironically passing over ground where famous copper mines were later developed. The story goes their rations ran low and they subsisted on fish and game for the final two months of the journey before arriving in Ayak. Being too late in the year to head back inland, Maloney took passage on a steamer to Seattle.

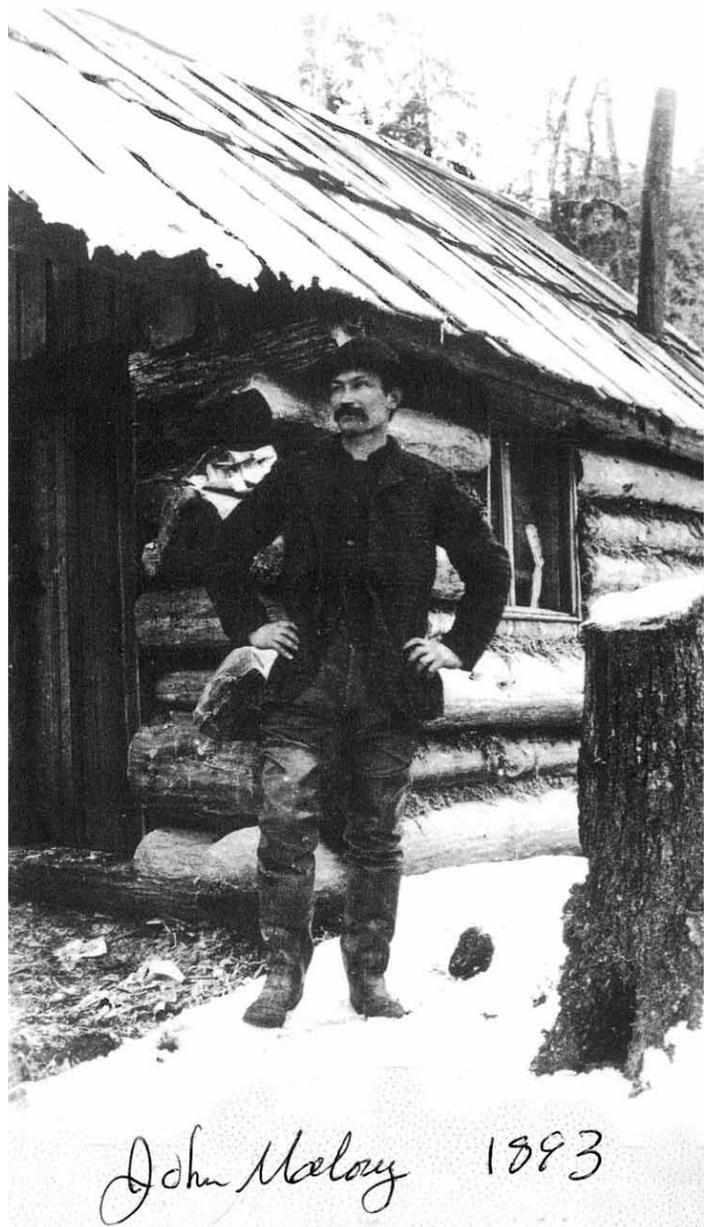
Within two days of arrival he headed north and quickly found work for J. J. Donovan as an axe man on a railroad survey crew running a line between Marysville and Sedro Wooley. (Decades later Donovan, a principal in Bloedel-Donovan Lumber Co., bought Skykomish Lumber Co. from Maloney and his partners.)

When the rail survey ended Maloney went east and located a ranch at the head end of Lake Chelan, where he soon encountered John F. Stevens, chief locating engineer for Great Northern Railway who was seeking a route across the Cascade Mountains.

Maloney signed on as part of a survey crew. The ultimate route chosen was Stevens Pass. Whether he saw the opportunity on his own or was advised by Stevens or other engineers he worked with, about the time the decision was made to route the line along the Skykomish River, Maloney "claimed" the flat section of land along the river where the Sky now stands.

There remains research to be done as to how the claim was "staked" in early 1891, and how he financed clearing the old growth Douglas Fir that covered it. Given the tools of the day, clearing old growth fir four feet across at the stump and 200 feet tall wasn't something that could be done without a fair sized crew of men and probably oxen, but however it was accomplished, when the railroad arrived in 1893, Maloney's claim was ready to provide services.

At left a strapping John Maloney standing by his cabin in light snow. Winters were long and hard in a place with 100 inches of precipitation annually. A bachelor at the time, one can only speculate what day to day life must have been as he cleared land in anticipation of the arrival of the railroad. Was the fire in the cook stove ever allowed to go out? His work would have been a short walk from his cabin, so did he go home every few hours to stoke the stove? Did he cook each evening or was there a pot of beans and sowbelly on the stove for a week at a time. Other valley towns were just getting started as well, so the nearest store might have been Index, half a day away by foot or horseback. Until a lot of trees were gone, even growing something simple as potatoes would have been a challenge. People were tough in those days.



John Maloney 1893

Various historical accounts mention "Maloney's Siding," but historical evidence is unclear if this term was an informal name for the place, or perhaps later it was the spur rail that ran alongside his warehouse. Early GNRy maps called the place as Foss Creek. In February of '93 GNRy established the place name as Skykomish, and the stream as Maloney Creek. That June a post office was established with John Maloney as postmaster.

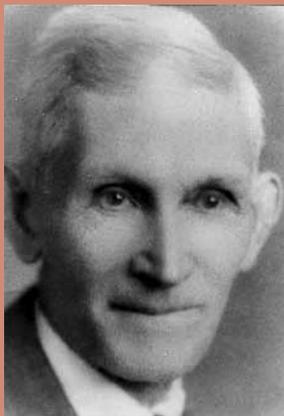
For the next four decades John Maloney was perhaps the dominant commercial figure in the upper valley and beyond. In addition to being postmaster for 30 years, he owned or was a principal in timber holdings, sawmills, shingle mills, mines, granite and limestone quarries, at least one pack service, and Maloney's General Store. One of his partners in several enterprises was John F. Stevens, the man ultimately credited with engineering the successful Panama Canal route after the French had gone broke twice trying to do so.

And Maloney's name had cachet well beyond the valley. Skykomish Historical Society has copies of telegraphs and postcards to suppliers in Everett and Seattle saying nothing more than "Ship 2 crts 20d nails & 6 xyz ax handles. J.M." While his home was always in Sky he maintained a suite of rooms in Seattle and was a well-known business figure in the city.

Ever the supporter of the entire Skykomish community, in 1922 when the GNRy roundhouse

A Respected and Benevolent Man

The funeral held for John Maloney Sr. at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Monroe on a March Monday morning at 9 o'clock drew between 500 and 600 attendees, per the **Monroe Monitor** account. It is high tribute that on a Monday morning work day in a place 32 miles from the town he built more than 500 people came to pay their last respects.



John Joseph Maloney Sr.

The obituary that appeared in the **Monitor** began: *One of the best known and best loved of Skykomish Valley pioneers John Joseph Maloney, 82...*

Among many other noteworthy comments are these:

- *During the early days when the Great Northern was pushing west, Mr. Maloney was probably the most extensive landholder in the upper valley. He owned the granite quarry at Baring, timber and mineral land and in 1900 he started the first lumber mill at Skykomish in partnership with John F. Stevens, Chief engineer for the Great Northern.*
- *Mr. Maloney was not only a personal friend of James J. Hill, ... the Empire Builder, but a close advisor as well.*
- *Without question he was the most picturesque of the old pioneers who prominently figured in the upbuilding of the territory around Skykomish. His generosity was known to hundreds who had occasion to benefit thru his kindly, charitable disposition. He was regarded as a friend to any one in need and many are the stories of his timely assistance to miners, timber claim homesteaders and railway workers.*

Several accounts in the Skykomish Historical Society's oral history book "**Upriver Voices**" tell of receiving provisions throughout the Great Depression at Maloney's Store with the proviso, "Pay when you can."

relocated from Gold Bar back to Sky, the Masons wanted to establish a chapter there. Masons have a long history of railroad affiliation and still today Lodge 259 is considered a Railroad Lodge. As a Catholic, John Maloney could not at the time be a Mason, yet as a person who cared about all aspects of his community he donated the land where their lodge was built and still stands.

Per his grandson Ralph Hildreth, Maloney believed in business cycles, having endured and ultimately recovered and prospered through numerous downturns starting with the Panic of 1893. During the Great Depression he continued to operate as he always had, trusting that things would "come back." As a result by the time he passed away in the late 1930s, he was essentially broke, while dozens, perhaps hundreds, of local citizens still owed him small amounts of money for credit he advanced them to feed their families during the Depression.

It is hard to say if it is serendipity, symmetry, karma or just what, but the fact Skykomish Historical Society Museum is now located in the historically designated Maloney's Store building in Sky is from almost any standpoint a very natural place for it to be.

Portions of this article by Warren Carlson were originally written for and appeared in *The Index Wall*