

# Winifred O'Malley Sketch

*(Researched and written by Larry Lashaway, February 2020)*

Winifred O'Malley was born to a coal-mining family on February 18, 1881<sup>i</sup> in Scranton PA, the daughter of Patrick and Mary Gilmore O'Malley.<sup>ii</sup> She appears to be the next-to-youngest child of at least 14.<sup>iii</sup>

She presumably spent most of her childhood in Scranton, although there are indications that around 1896 she moved to Clinton MA to find work in the mills.<sup>iv</sup> Within a few years, she moved to Boston. The 1900 census for Boston lists her as sister-in-law to John W. Head, whose wife was Mary B. O'Malley Head. Winnie's occupation is given as "waitress." (She may have been working for her brother-in-law, who is listed in various city directories as "bartender," and was later listed as a "hotel manager" in the 1910 census.)

There is no direct documentation of her activities in the next decade. She may simply have continued living with her sister's family; since Boston city directories listed only heads of households, that would explain her lack of visibility. If she continued waitressing during that time, it suggests a scenario for how she met Oscar. During late 1909, after his wife died, Oscar was living at the Eastgate Hotel<sup>v</sup>, and probably eating out a lot. On the other hand, Oscar had a reputation as a man-about-town, and supposedly spent a lot of time in Boston's tenderloin district, so he may have met her in other venues. (A Butte newspaper in 1911 claimed that she had worked as an actress, and had even performed in Butte a few years earlier. It added she might then have been using the name Mallory or Gilmore.)

More speculatively, there are hints that she may have spent some time in California—Butte newspapers suggested she had spent some time there and might even own property in the region. And for whatever reason, she chose to go to the Los Angeles area rather than Boston after Oscar abandoned her in Butte. (The Los Angeles city directory for 1910 shows a Winifred O'Malley employed as a domestic servant, but there is no Winifred O'Malley there in subsequent directories or in the 1910 census<sup>vi</sup>. So whoever this Winifred was, she either got married or left.)

An unresolved question is their marital status. While in Butte, they claimed to be husband and wife, but no marriage records have been found in Massachusetts or Montana. The Boston Blue Book for 1910 shows Oscar living in the Eastgate Hotel with no wife mentioned, and members of Oscar's extended family expressed surprise (and a bit of skepticism) at hearing of a marriage. On the other hand, when Winnie testified before the Butte Police Commission, she was very specific about the marriage, saying it took place in October of 1909 in Somerville at a priest's parsonage.<sup>vii</sup> A Butte newspaper, discussing Winnie's age, cited information from her marriage certificate (it's not known whether the reporter actually saw a certificate or just heard about it from a relative.)

What also remains unknown is the exact sequence of events that led Winnie and Oscar to Butte. Oscar apparently fled Boston in a hurry, and seemingly alone. According to Winnie's testimony to the Butte Police Commission, she didn't arrive in Butte until mid-March of 1910 with Oscar preceding her there by some weeks. Did he randomly choose Butte and then ask Winnie to follow him? Or had they planned this in advance? Given Winnie's family ties in Butte, it's tempting to think the choice was no coincidence, but we have no way of knowing. In any case, her family connections seem to have protected Oscar when his real identity—and fugitive status—became

known to local police that summer. William O'Malley, her older half-brother, had died in 1906, but four of his daughters had married well-known local men—Charles Nevin (the mayor), Archie McTaggart (another city official), William McGill, and George Tichbourne.<sup>viii</sup> All four offered support during her year in Butte. While in Butte, Oscar and Winnie identified themselves as Mr. and Mrs. Rodney Merrick, and appear that way in the 1910 census.

After Oscar fled Butte on New Year's day 1911, Winnie stayed long enough to testify to the Butte Police Commission, but shortly thereafter left for California. She apparently stayed in the Los Angeles area for the next few months. Her activities there are unknown; possibly she was just staying with relatives to recover from her ordeal. In June, after the recovery of Oscar's body, she went to El Paso.

She apparently then returned to Boston, where she appears sporadically in various city directories until 1925, under the name Winifred Wheelock, living at 16 St. Botolph St. She also appears at that address in the 1920 census, misidentified as "Winifred R. Wheeler." She was employed as an usher in a theatre.

In 1925 she married Harry Patrick (or Patrick Harry) Moran in California. The wedding certificate lists her as a resident of Boston and him as a resident of Scranton. However, they settled in San Francisco for the rest of their lives. They are listed in the 1930 census living in an apartment at 947 Geary; she was employed as apartment manager; he was a carpenter. She was still at the same address in the 1940 census, by now a widow. No employment or other source of income is reported. She died on 14 November 1961. Her death certificate indicates she was living at Laguna Honda Home in San Francisco, a nursing home. Funeral records indicate the burial was paid for with public funds, suggesting she had no resources of her own. There were apparently a few family members present, but the funeral home had to hire professional pall bearers.

Unfortunately, there are no known photographs of Winnie. All we have are newspaper accounts that described her as "decidedly brunette" and medium height. One Butte newspaper reported that she was "charming and quite Bostonese in manner."

Note: The most inconsistent element of the above account is Winnie's birth date, which ranges from 1878-1895, depending on which document you want to believe:

Document	Inferred birth date
1900 census	July 1878
1910 census	1886
1920 census	1886
1925 marriage license	1890
1930 census	1895
1940 census	1879
Death certificate	February 1881

The most likely explanation for these discrepancies is that she had a tendency to shave a few years off her age from time to time. In 1911 a Butte newspaper made a rather pointed observation that she appeared to be older than the age she was claiming.<sup>ix</sup>

<sup>i</sup> No public or church birth records have been found; this is the date listed on her California death certificate. A rival date would be August 1879, which was recorded on the 1900 census (however, she is not listed among the O'Malley family in the 1880 census). In general, her age on various censuses and other documents fluctuates, indicating birth dates between 1878 and 1895. A Butte newspaper article in 1911 estimated her age as 28-30, which is consistent with the early 1880s.

<sup>ii</sup> Because she was born just after the 1880 census and because the 1890 census is not available, there is no documentation directly placing her in this family as she was growing up. The connecting link is the 1900 census for Boston, which places her in the household of her sister Mary Head. Massachusetts marriage records indicate Mary's parents were Patrick and Mary Gilmore O'Malley. (It's also worth noting that Winnie's death certificate gives "Gilmore" as her mother's maiden name.)

<sup>iii</sup> The 1910 census for Mary Gilmore O'Malley indicates she had 14 children, of whom 9 survived. Mary may have been Patrick O'Malley's second wife, since Winnie in Butte referred to her oldest brother William as her half-brother.

<sup>iv</sup> The Clinton city directory for 1896 lists a Winnie O'Malley employed as a mill worker and boarding at a local residence. Additionally, an item in the *Scranton News-Tribune* (27 Aug 1896, p 6 col 3) mentions her as a resident of Clinton who was visiting her mother.

<sup>v</sup> *Clark's Boston Blue Book*, 1910.

<sup>vi</sup> Presumably, the information for the directory was collected before March of 1910, by which time Winnie was in Butte.

<sup>vii</sup> An interesting account of Winnie's testimony can be found in the *Butte Miner* of 12 Jan 1911, p 1, p7.  
<sup>viii</sup>

Mary O'Malley (1874-1942)—m. William McGill

Charlotte O'Malley (1876-1966)—m. George Tichbourne

Matilda O'Malley (1884-1964)—m. Charles Nevin

Sadie O'Malley (1886-1918?)—m. Archie McTaggart

<sup>ix</sup> *Butte Miner*, 21 Jan 1911, p1, p6.