



CLAY STREET CEMETERY COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING AGENDA – December 5, 2025, 5:00pm
HELD VIA [ZOOM WEBINAR](#) AND
IN FAIRBANKS CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
800 CUSHMAN STREET, FAIRBANKS, ALASKA



1. CALL TO ORDER
2. ROLL CALL
3. APPROVAL OF REGULAR MEETING MINUTES – November 5, 2025
4. APPROVAL OF AGENDA
5. CITIZENS' COMMENTS
6. COMMUNICATIONS TO COMMISSION
 - a) Letter from Dr. Robert A. Perkins, PE – Bender Mountain and the Life of James M. Bender
7. EVENTS & PUBLIC RELATIONS
8. FINANCIAL UPDATE – Report Attached
9. UNFINISHED BUSINESS
 - a) Cemetery Rack Card Redesign
 - b) Quiring Monuments Order
 - c) Bed Tax Grant
10. NEW BUSINESS
11. OPEN AGENDA
12. NEXT MEETING DATE – January 7, 2026
13. ADJOURNMENT



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The Clay Street Cemetery Commission convened at 5:02 p.m. on the above date to conduct a Regular Meeting in the City Council Chambers, 800 Cushman Street, Fairbanks, Alaska, and via teleconference, with **Chair Aldean Kilbourn** presiding and the following Commission members in attendance:

Members Present: George Dalton, Seat A
Aldean Kilbourn, Seat C
Janet Richardson, Seat D (remotely)
Julie Jones, Seat E
Amy Stratman, Seat G (remotely)
Jeremiah Cotter, Public Works Director (remotely)

Absent: Jessica Desmond, Seat B
Karen Erickson, Seat F

Also Present: Colt Chase, Deputy City Clerk

APPROVAL OF REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

a) Regular Meeting Minutes of October 1, 2025

J. Jones, seconded by **J. Cotter**, moved to APPROVE the October 1, 2025 minutes.

Chair Kilbourn took a voice vote on the motion to APPROVE the October 1, 2025 minutes and all members voted in favor.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

J. Jones added “d) Bed Tax Grant Application” under Unfinished Business.

J. Jones, seconded by **G. Dalton**, moved to APPROVE the agenda, as Amended.

Chair Kilbourn took a voice vote on the motion to APPROVE the agenda, as Amended, and all members voted in favor.

CITIZENS COMMENTS – None

COMMUNICATIONS TO COMMISSION – None

Chair Kilbourn asked if the unused grass collector attachment had been removed from the shed. **J. Cotter** confirmed that this had been completed before the snow had come.

EVENTS & PUBLIC RELATIONS – None

FINANCIAL UPDATE

Chair Kilbourn referenced the financial report and noted the current account balance of \$2,279.89. She proposed that, given the increase in shipping costs, the donation amount for any future monument requests should be raised from \$250 to \$325. All members present concurred with this adjustment.

J. Jones confirmed that the cost per unit on their last order came to \$308. She stated that she would also speak with the company about the large variance in shipping charges, which have ranged from \$500 to \$1,700 despite the actual orders being not drastically different in overall size.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

a) Cemetery Rack Card Redesign

C. Chase shared four design drafts, which had been produced by J. Desmond since the October meeting, on the overhead screen in the meeting room and for those on Zoom. The various iterations were reviewed and input regarding design preferences were discussed including color scheme, border styles, image selection, text and photo placement, and more formatting choices. It was unanimously decided that the inclusion of a hashtag would not be used in the design. **J. Jones** shared revised text that she had drafted for consideration and there was concurrence to adopt said language. She took specific notes on all input from various Commission members. **C. Chase** offered to complete an updated version of the rack card for consideration, using the initial draft produced by J. Desmond and incorporating the design preferences that had just been discussed. **Chair Kilbourn** requested that they have an updated draft to review at the December meeting.

b) Quiring Monuments Order

Chair Kilbourn confirmed that the most recent order had been placed, paid for, and should be received prior to the summer 2026 season.

c) Summer 2026 Groundskeeping

Chair Kilbourn asked if Public Works was expecting to have funds for additional labor in the coming year. **J. Cotter** stated that they should have money for extra help but that many budget decisions are still undecided. He reported that the mower attachment that had been in the shed all this time was in fact a sweeper and not a bagger. He shared that Public Works would be looking at getting a bagging attachment for the current mower. He expressed concern that the current model would attach to the side of the machine and may be too wide to fit between the rows of markers. He stated that they are considering purchasing a different mower with a bagging setup that would work for all areas of the cemetery.

Chair Kilbourn asked if the request for funds to cover contracted labor through the Commission had been included in the recent bed tax grant application. **J. Jones** stated that she had neglected to include this specific request and apologized for the oversight. She noted that the language of their application is broad enough that it could be justified to use any awarded amount for the purpose of contracted work but acknowledged that the requested amount was similar to the previous year, with nothing added for labor.

J. Cotter stated that while it would be nice to have the additional support with contracted labor handling some of the groundskeeping, it would ultimately be good to first see what the department could do with their plan for bagging grass with the mower. He added that he would also hope for the Commission to be unburdened of labor costs and thus able to use its limited funds for other important needs. **Chair Kilbourn** asked C. Chase to have this agenda item return as Unfinished Business for a spring 2026 meeting.

d) Bed Tax Grant Application

J. Jones reported that she had successfully completed the application and submitted it by the deadline. She shared that the requested amount was \$13,225 and that the Discretionary Fund Committee would soon meet to schedule the annual applicant presentation meeting. She committed to sharing the dates of any meetings for this process with the rest of the Commission, in case any other members would like to attend. **Chair Kilbourn** indicated that she would be out of town from the 19th to 28th of December but would be present if the meetings take place when she is otherwise available. J. Jones stated that she would attend the presentation meeting to provide testimony if Chair Kilbourn was unable.

NEW BUSINESS

a) CSC Marker Year Donations Through 2025

Chair Kilbourn referenced the pdf version that had been included in the meeting packet and asked if the original spreadsheet version could be shared. **C. Chase** stated that he would email them the original file.

OPEN AGENDA

J. Jones suggested they have a discussion in the near future about opportunities to solicit additional donations from the community and other organizations.

NEXT MEETING DATES – December 3, 2025 & January 7, 2026

Chair Kilbourn acknowledged that they sometimes cancel their regularly scheduled meeting for the months of December and/or January. She noted that she would be available for both meeting dates. All other members present confirmed that they too would be available.

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Kilbourn declared the meeting ADJOURNED at 5:40 p.m.

Aldean Kilbourn, Chair

Colt Chase, CMC, Deputy City Clerk

Transcribed by: CC

Bender Mountain and the Life of James M. Bender

Place Names and Local History

Before delving into the details of Mr. Bender's life, it's important to recognize how place names often reflect the stories and legacies of those who shaped local history. The naming of "Bender Mountain" is a testament to the impact that individuals like James M. Bender had on the community and landscape. These names serve as living reminders of the pioneering spirit that helped define Fairbanks and its surroundings.

The Origin of Bender Mountain

"Bender Mountain" refers to the hills just north of Farmers Loop Road in Fairbanks, Alaska. A portion of these hills was known as the "Bender Mountain Tract," which became a subject of controversy in the 1980s. Approximately half of that tract now constitutes the Fairbanks North Star Borough's Skyline Ridge Park. The identity of "Bender" is tied to James M. Bender, whose life and influence in the area are both fascinating and significant. This account, originally intended as a sidebar to a broader history of the land controversy, evolved into a more detailed narrative about Mr. Bender and his connection to the region.

When Did "Bender Mountain" Get Its Name?

The exact date when the term "Bender Mountain" was first applied to the area is unknown, though it was certainly used in the 1960s. The name itself raises questions—was there actually a Mr. Bender? Indeed, there was, and his story is compelling.

Reflections on Historical Research

Writing about individuals from the past often evokes a sense of nostalgia for people and events lost to time. Although James M. Bender was not a relative, learning about his life brings forth a similar wistfulness for the bygone era he inhabited.

The Mystery of the Cabin

There is speculation regarding whether Mr. Bender was the resident of a cabin on Bender Mountain. A metal object found there is likely a Yukon stove, further suggesting a connection to local gold mining history.



Mr. Bender's cabin? The metal object is a Yukon stove.

Summary of James M. Bender's Life

James M. Bender was a true Alaska sourdough. He was born in Lafayette, Indiana, on January 10, 1847, and served in the Nebraska Cavalry during the Civil War. Bender arrived in Alaska in either 1886 or 1887, seeking fortune during an early gold rush. After many years in various gold camps, he moved to Fairbanks in 1912. He passed away on April 20, 1932, at the age of 85, and is buried in the historic Clay Street Cemetery near downtown Fairbanks. His obituary in the Fairbanks News-Miner describes him as "One of the interior's earliest pioneers."

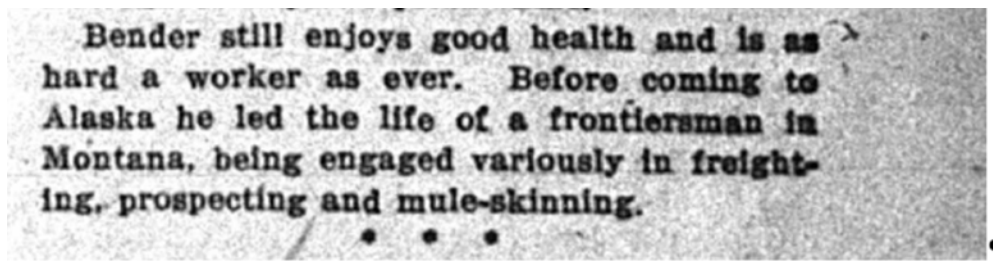
Early Life and Military Service

Bender was born in Indiana and enlisted in the Nebraska Cavalry during the Civil War at about 17 years old. Military records suggest he may have claimed to be a year older, possibly to meet enlistment requirements. The Nebraska Cavalry was not sent to fight the

Confederacy but instead secured Union territories in the West, engaging in battles such as the fierce Battle of Julesburg against various Indian tribes. Bender was mustered out on July 10, 1865.

Pre-Alaska Years

After leaving the army, Bender arrived in Alaska in 1886, twenty-three years later, at 41 years of age. According to a 1912 article in the [Seattle] Post-Intelligencer, before coming to Alaska, Bender worked in Montana as a freighter, prospector, and mule skinner—occupations that matched his later pursuits. Freighters typically operated as small businessmen, transporting supplies and equipment under contract.



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The Gold Rush Era

Alaska in 1886 was quiet compared to the Klondike Gold Rush a decade later. The rush began in 1897, peaked in 1898–99, and saw up to 100,000 people heading north, mostly through Skagway, Alaska, toward Dawson in Yukon Territory. Dawson's population grew from about 500 in 1886 to 17,000 by 1898, though most miners left after discovering that claims were already staked; only a few stayed to prospect elsewhere.

Before the rush, there was some mining along the Yukon River, supported by trading posts. In 1886, gold was found near Forty Mile River close to the US-Yukon border. Bender started mining in the area but moved with his group of 14 to Koyukuk after poor yields, staying two years before returning to Forty Mile for three more.

"Sourdough Sagas," compiled in 1927 by a former U.S. Marshal, provides stories based on interviews with pioneers from early Interior Alaska, including interviews with Bender. He and his companions passed through Juneau and landed at Dyea in 1886, then crossed the Chilkoot Pass, built boats, and traveled down the Yukon to the Forty Mile gold fields. Unlike later miners, they continued to the Koyukuk region and, after several years, returned to Forty Mile for three years before moving to the Circle district, where Bender settled.

Mining in the Circle District

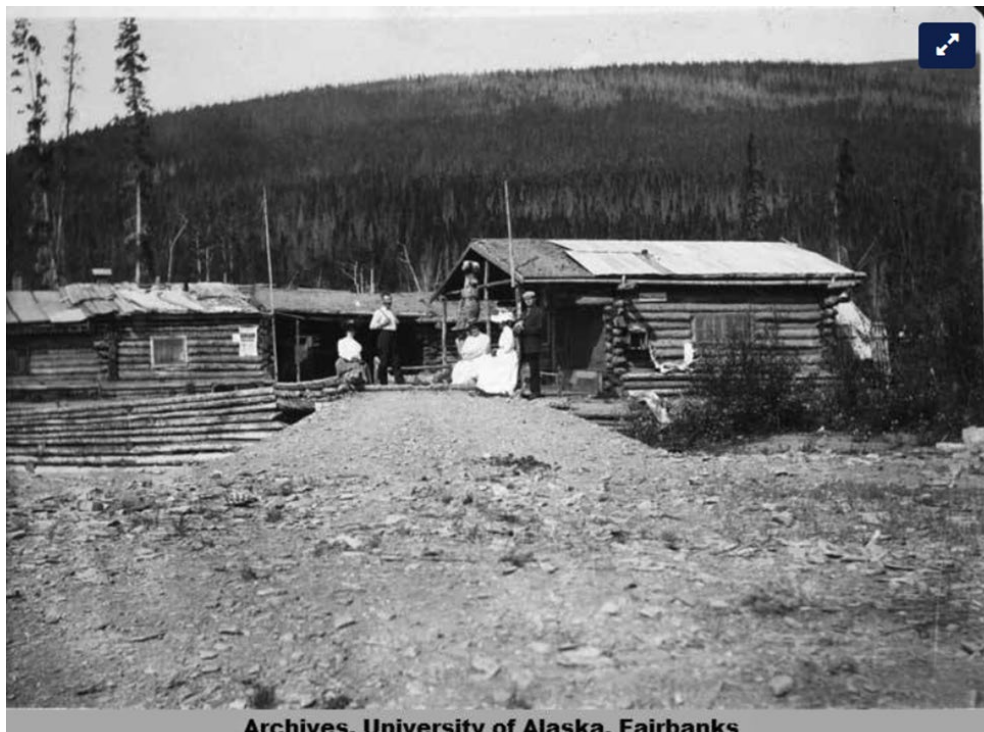
Although Bender began in the Forty Mile region, most of his mining days were spent in the Circle district. Circle City, located about 130 air miles northwest of Fairbanks, and its nearby larger center Central, served as headquarters for the Circle Mining District. Bender worked in the Mastodon and Deadwood creeks and was present in Circle during the Klondike Rush.

Community Ties and “Miner Justice”

Bender’s story includes accounts of “miner justice”—where miners held meetings and courts to administer rough justice. Bender often served as a juror, indicating his standing within the community.

Family Connections and Public Recognition

Newspaper coverage of Bender began with an inquiry from his brother in Oregon, J. A. Bender, who had lost contact with Jim and mistakenly believed him dead. J. A. wrote to the sheriff in Forty Mile, who published the inquiry in local papers. Eventually, a miner from the Circle district confirmed that Jim Bender—known as “Colonel Bender”—was alive and well, having spent many years freighting and prospecting near Miller House.



Miller House and Geographic Legacy

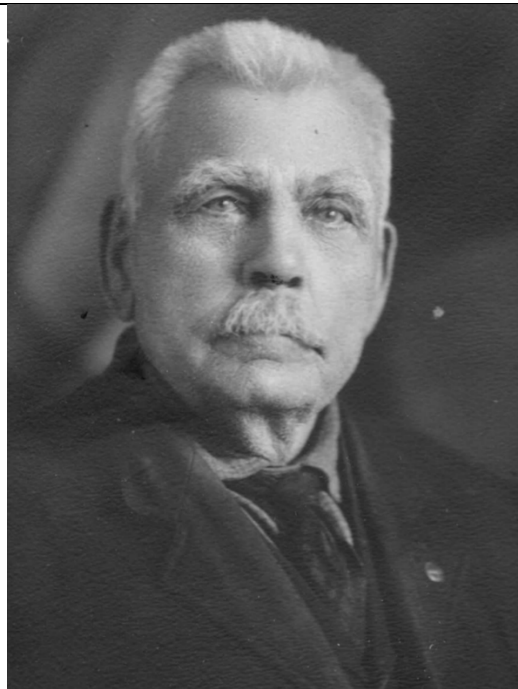
Miller House, located forty miles from Circle, was established in 1896 as a stopover on the sled dog trail between Circle City and Fairbanks. Nearby, a small stream named Bender

Pup—reported to USGS topographers in the 1950s—suggests Bender’s influence on local place names.

Bender Pup: *stream*, flows NW 1.6 mi. to Boulder Creek, 10 mi. SW of Central and 38 mi. SW of Circle, Yukon-Tanana High.; 65°28'-45'' N, 145°03'20'' W; (map 104).
Prospectors' name reported in 1954 or 1955 by USGS topographers.

Life in Fairbanks and Later Years

By 1911, at 65 years old, Bender was living and working in Central, prospecting, freighting, and laboring. In 1912, he was called to Fairbanks as a witness in a legal case. The newspaper described him as having resided in the Yukon Valley for 25 years and never having “made a trip Outside” since his arrival. (Note that Alaskans use the term “Outside,” to mean “outside Alaska. But here it means “outside of the Yukon Valley, i.e. Central.) On January 7, 1913, Bender was inducted into the Pioneers of Alaska, then returned to Central shortly after.



J.M. Bender, in 1912

Transition to City Life

Bender's visit to Fairbanks in 1913 was noted as his first to a "camp of metropolitan ways" since he arrived in the north. He returned in March 1916 seeking medical treatment for stomach troubles and likely remained in Fairbanks after that due to his declining health.

Pioneers of Alaska Membership

Bender's induction into the Pioneers of Alaska—a prominent social club—suggests his growing ties to city life and esteem within the community. Transportation between Fairbanks and Circle was feasible, so Bender may have traveled between the two. His eventual membership and status as second vice president in Igloo No. 4 of the Pioneers of Alaska indicate the respect he commanded in his later years.

Final Years and Legacy

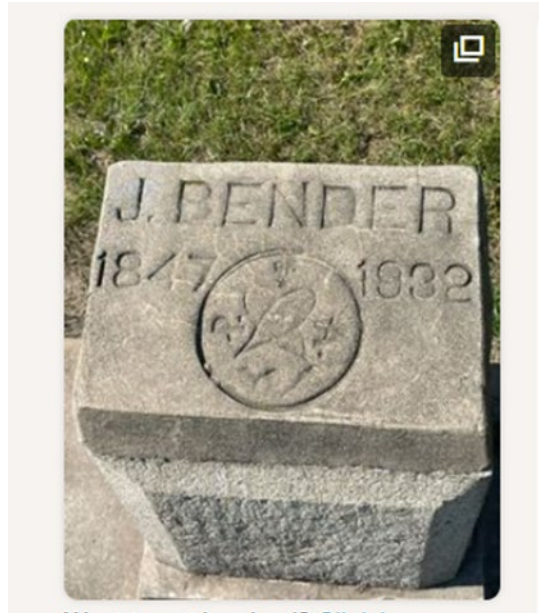
Bender is believed to have spent most of his time in Fairbanks after his illness, living on his territorial pension. He may have maintained a cabin on Bender Mountain and dug exploration pits in the area, which show evidence of gold prospecting. These pits, and the possibility that Bender himself dug them, further tie his legacy to the landscape.



Exploration pit. Now filled in with debris, originally went down to the schist below.

Resting Place

James M. Bender was laid to rest in the Clay Street Cemetery in Fairbanks. His grave bears the snowshoe logo of the Pioneers of Alaska, a lasting symbol of his pioneering spirit and contributions to the region.



CLAY STREET CEMETERY

EFF DATE	VENDOR NAME	DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT	BALANCE
01/08/24	CITY OF FAIRBANKS GRANT	CLAY ST CEMETERY GRANT	\$ 12,454.00	\$ 15,088.45
02/26/24	CITY OF FAIRBANKS CONTRIBUTION	CLAY ST CEMETERY CONTRIBUTION	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 25,088.45
03/28/24	QUIRING MONUMENTS INC	MONUMENTS SPRING 2024	\$ (8,275.00)	\$ 16,813.45
08/04/24	JANET RICHARDSON	REIMBURSE FOR CLAY ST CEMETERY	\$ (47.65)	\$ 16,765.80
08/21/24	JANET RICHARDSON	REIMBURSE FOR CLAY ST CEMETERY	\$ (65.10)	\$ 16,700.70
08/21/24	JANET RICHARDSON	REIMBURSE FOR CLAY ST CEMETERY	\$ (35.96)	\$ 16,664.74
08/21/24	FAIRBANKS BLOCK & BUILDING MATERIALS	CONCRETE PADS FOR CLAY ST	\$ (2,112.00)	\$ 14,552.74
08/21/24	QUIRING MONUMENTS INC	MONUMENTS SUMMER 2024	\$ (5,475.00)	\$ 9,077.74
09/09/24	ALDEAN KILBOURN	REIMBURSE FOR CLAY ST CEMETERY	\$ (121.64)	\$ 8,956.10
10/04/24	KATHRYN CLARK	DRONE PHOTOGRAPHY CLAY ST	\$ (600.00)	\$ 8,356.10
11/21/24	FAIRBANKS BLOCK & BUILDING MATERIALS	CONCRETE PADS FOR CLAY ST	\$ (5,200.00)	\$ 3,156.10
11/21/24	JILL MARSHALL	HIGH PRESSURE LAMINATED SIGN	\$ (550.00)	\$ 2,606.10
01/15/25	CITY OF FAIRBANKS GRANT	CLAY ST CEMETERY GRANT	\$ 11,712.00	\$ 14,318.10
03/07/25	PATRICIA CATHY	DONATION	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 15,318.10
03/20/25	FAIRBANKS BLOCK & BUILDING MATERIALS	CONCRETE PADS FOR CLAY ST	\$ (936.00)	\$ 14,382.10
05/01/25	QUIRING MONUMENTS INC	CLAY STREET MONUMENTS	\$ (5,575.00)	\$ 8,807.10
05/15/25	JULIE JONES	HAND TRUCK REIMBURSEMENT	\$ (129.00)	\$ 8,678.10
05/29/25	ALDEAN KILBOURN	REIMBURSE FOR ADHESIVE/SEALANT	\$ (273.69)	\$ 8,404.41
06/26/25	JANET RICHARDSON	REIMBURSEMENT FOR CSC SUPPLIES	\$ (106.56)	\$ 8,297.85
06/26/25	JANET RICHARDSON	REIMBURSEMENT FOR CSC SUPPLIES	\$ (21.08)	\$ 8,276.77
07/10/25	FESTIVAL FAIRBANKS INC	TOOL SHARPENING REIMBURSEMENT	\$ (36.00)	\$ 8,240.77
08/26/25	JANET RICHARDSON	REIMBURSEMENT FOR CSC SUPPLIES	\$ (35.88)	\$ 8,204.89
08/26/25	ELIZABETH ANN SHARP TRUST	DONATION	\$ 300.00	\$ 8,504.89
10/02/25	QUIRING MONUMENTS INC	FALL 2025 MONUMENT	\$ (6,225.00)	\$ 2,279.89