

In-Memoriam

Mary F. Ehrlander, Professor of History and Arctic & Northern Studies, 1953–2025

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Long-time University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) professor, a *Northern Review* senior editor, and my close mentor and friend Mary F. Ehrlander passed away on July 16, 2025, at the age of 72. In her career, Mary educated generations of Alaska and Arctic specialists; wrote biographies of pioneering Alaskans; and co-developed the Model Arctic Council, a simulation program that educates on the Arctic Council and pressing Arctic challenges.

While still raising her three boys Staffan, Wyatt, and Marcus with her husband Lars, Mary began her post-secondary education, earning a BA in Political Science and an MA in Northern Studies from UAF, and an MA and PhD in Government from the University of Virginia (UVA). At UVA, she received a James Madison Memorial Fellowship for graduate work on the U.S. Constitution. She taught at Lathrop High School in Fairbanks before embarking on a professorial career at the University of Alaska Fairbanks where she rose to professor of history and director of the Arctic and Northern Studies Program. She retired from UAF in 2020 as professor emerita.

From my vantage point, Mary was most passionate about three aspects of her work. First, she took great pride in leading and shaping the Arctic and Northern Studies Program for two decades. She especially loved working with graduate students, mentoring dozens over the course of her career. Having developed a strong reputation for her teaching and advising, she won UAF's highest teaching honour, the Emil Usibelli Distinguished Teaching Award, in 2016. Several of Mary's former students attended her celebration of life on August 11, 2025, which is testament to the legacy she leaves and the impact she had on their lives.

Second, Mary became enthralled with the story of Walter Harper, the Irish-Athabaskan man who was the first person to summit Mount Denali. She once joked while writing her celebrated book on his life, *Walter Harper: Alaska Native Son*, that she developed a crush on him. Her book was instrumental in the establishment of Walter Harper Day, which Alaskans celebrate on June 7, and for the commissioning of the bronze statue of Walter and his dog Snowball that sits outside Doyon in Fairbanks. For her book, Mary won the 2018 Alaskana Award from the Alaska Library Association and was named the 2018 James H. Drucker Alaska Historian of the Year from the Alaska Historical Society. She was so humble that she didn't even mention these awards, and I remember learning about them later on. She also wrote, with Hild M. Peters, *Hospital and Haven: The Life and Work of Grafton and Clara Burke in Northern Alaska*, which tells the story of an Episcopal missionary couple who devoted several years in the early twentieth century to the well-being of the Gwich'in Peoples of northern Alaska.

Third, Mary cared deeply about the UArctic Model Arctic Council, a program she co-developed, which brings together university students from across the Arctic to learn about Arctic issues, international relations, and the Arctic Council through simulation and role playing. She enjoyed running programs at UAF, Dartmouth College, and the University of Lapland in Finland. In this sense, she expanded her teaching beyond UAF to educate the next generation of students on the Arctic, a region she deeply loved.

Mary lived a full and meaningful life. She gave to everyone, and everyone loved her. She was a model on how to be a good person. Even at the end of her life, she exemplified dignity and grace. I will miss her terribly but knowing her has been a great gift in my life, and for that I am grateful.