Tony Canonica, who grew up on Butte's East Side, began working at age nine. He attended Sacred Heart School, served as an altar boy, and belonged to the choir, but he claimed his real education came from the Butte streets. At various times in his young career, Tony was a newspaper boy for the *Free Press, Eye Opener, Butte Daily Post,* and *Montana Standard.* He also worked for People's, Belway, Liberty, Ansonia, American, and Rialto theaters as ticket seller, usher, janitor, advertiser, and film carrier. He became an iconic figure in Uptown Butte as he carted heavy cans of film to theaters in his little red wagon.

Many children juggled the demands of work and school in order to contribute to their family income. Accounts of children's paid and unpaid work are inflected with both pride and resignation. These are not stories of victims forced to toil against their will or of Dickensonian maltreatment. Rather, they speak to the complex economic lives of children. Children were players in a family and community economy, both contributors and consumers. And for many working-class children, there were harsh lessons learned early in life about the value of hard work. Despite the grinding efforts of their fathers and mothers in mines, smelters, garages, stores, boardinghouses, hospitals, and restaurants, economic security often remained an elusive goal.

Historical Perspective

Child labor had become an issue of public concern by the turn of the twentieth century. At that time, nearly seven million children were engaged in some form of paid labor in the United States. Children worked in mines, mills, factories, agriculture, and on the streets.[3] Social reformers who were coming to view children as a special group in need of protection took up the cause of child labor. Labor unions also championed the cause, although not necessarily for the altruistic purpose of protecting children. From a union perspective, child labor could be exploited by industry to undercut wages and protections for adult workers. Thus, the cause of child labor reform also served as a means of protecting the rights and gains of adult union workers.

Montana took up the issue of child labor early on. Otto Schoenfeld, the first director of Montana's State Bureau of Child and Animal Protection, addressed the issue in his first biennial report to the state legislature in 1904. He noted that the law was very clear in prohibiting the employment of children under fourteen years of age and that no children under the age of sixteen could be employed in the mines. He addressed the importance of compulsory education, making the point that children deserved the right to an education and that parents had

the obligation to protect them from work that would interfere with their schooling. Schoenfeld concluded: "It is not the object of the law to bring children up in idleness, and no one objects to teaching children at a very early age to be useful. Every person of good judgment will approve training children in habits of industry and usefulness, but child labor, as meaning work injurious to the bodies, minds, and souls of children, is a wholly different matter and one the people of this State will not tolerate."[4]

While reformers voiced concerns over the exploitation of children's labor, educators championed innovations in manual labor training to prepare youngsters for careers in the trades and domestic service. Both of these adult preoccupations seem somewhat disconnected from the on-the-ground realities of many young people in Butte. The homes, streets, and businesses of Butte provided many children with hands-on work experience well before they had reached their fourteenth birthdays. Children contributed to household work and family income starting at a young age. They sold newspapers and magazines, filled miners' lunch-buckets, and worked in stores, restaurants, and private homes.

Newsboys

Many a Butte boy earned his first dollars selling magazines and newspapers on the city's busy streets. Boys purchased the papers at two for a nickel and sold them for a nickel a piece. They established their street corner turf and defended it with their fists as necessary. Once established, the rights to the corner might be passed along to younger siblings as an older boy moved on to other employment. By 1903 newsboys hawking the *Anaconda Standard,* the *Butte Daily Post,* and the *Butte Miner* numbered in the hundreds.

That year, a curious combination of temperance advocates, businessmen, and union leaders joined forces to form the Butte Newsboys Club to provide organized recreation and supervision of these young entrepreneurs who "roamed the streets" of Butte. The weekly meetings of the club soon drew upward of one hundred participants to conduct formal business, hear guest speakers, and enjoy a variety of entertainment. On one memorable occasion, the boys were treated to an inspirational speech by "Noodles" Fagan, honorary national president of the newsboys club, at the Majestic Theater on Broadway Street.[5] The club was designed on the model of a miniature city, with boys elected to positions of mayor, city council members, and aldermen charged with oversight of the social and moral discipline of the members. The Carpenters' Union provided free use of its union hall as a meeting

This circa 1890 photograph of two young paper carriers came from Daniel W. Tilton, who ran a bookstore in Butte that also printed and sold newspapers.

space. Other community members donated apples and candy for snacks at meetings. Members of the Women's Christian Temperance Union were also on hand to intervene with boys deemed in need of "reclamation."[6] In addition to regular business meetings, the organizers arranged outings to Columbia Gardens and Gregson Hot Springs and annual banquets in their efforts to mold streetwise youngsters into "future citizens." They presented each member with a club badge to attach to the lapel of his coat and wear with pride. The club also sought to represent the boys in the business dealings with the newspapers.

However, the newsboys developed their own sense of political organization as well, adopting strategies of collective action from Butte's unions. For example, as Dale Martin described, Butte newsboys went on strike on January 5, 1914, when the *Butte Daily Post* changed the rates it charged boys for the papers. Carriers with regular routes did not join the strike, and they were subject to attack by the striking newsboys. "The striking newsboys cast about the business district, seizing the *Post* from sellers who were still working, from carriers, and even customers. . . . City police eventually acted to clear the areas around the newspaper office. Two truant officers had little effect on the rambunctious newsboys, many of whom stayed on the streets after curfew."[7] The next day, the *Post* refused to reduce its wholesale prices and halted street

sales. In the afternoon, the boys marched through Uptown Butte with banners supplied by the IWW that read "An injury to one is an injury to all" and "Direct action gets the goods," among other slogans.[8]

The *Daily Post* would not negotiate. Local elders, who had played key roles in the organizing of the newsboys club, urged the boys to end the strike. Club officials claimed that members were not responsible for the sporadic acts of violence and that those acts were incited by IWW activists and carried out by youth who were not members. The boys soon voted to go back to work, but they called another strike in 1919, resulting in a one-day disruption of delivery.[9] The next day, soldiers garrisoned in Butte took over the delivery.

The Butte Newsboys Club remained active until 1931, when it was officially disbanded by Judge Frank Riley, who ruled that it had outlived its usefulness. According to Riley, the club had been established at a time when organized recreation for Butte children was sorely lacking. With organizations such as the YMCA to provide recreational outlets, Riley contended, the club was no longer needed.[10]

Many men who grew up in Butte had powerful memories of their work on the streets selling newspapers and magazines. Their efforts to establish their turf, their sense of place in the city's social and economic

A curious combination of temperance advocates, businessmen, and union leaders joined forces to organize the Butte Newsboys Club to provide recreation and supervision for the young entrepreneurs who "roamed the streets" of Butte at all hours. Above, members wear lapel pins issued by the club circa 1905.

life, and their dedication to long hours were formative childhood experiences. However, membership in the Butte Newsboys Club was not often part of their stories. Perhaps the club meant more to the adult organizers than to the boys themselves.

John Sheehy began his career in newspaper sales at age eight. His earnings went to help support his family. He recalled taking part in one of the fabled newsboys' strike.

> Whatever I did make, I turned everything over to my mother. Twenty-five or thirty cents. I sold the *Butte Daily Post* until I was about a sophomore in high school. I don't understand how [the strike] got started. There were all kinds of us. I remember that we all gathered in front of the *Butte Daily Post.* This was the alley side of the *Butte Daily Post.* And going down these stairways, the presses were down in the basement. And on the other side going down, it was Galena Street, Galena and Main Street. We all crowded around the front of that building, making all kinds of noise. We got two papers for five cents. And you sold them for a nickel, so you made two and a half cents. For a dime, we got four newspapers, so you got two for a nickel. And we struck for three for a nickel. And there were two hundred or so newsboys. [I was] not quite in high school but coming close to it. The police came down in what they called the "Black Mariahs." That's another name for the paddy wagon. Well, the Black Mariahs came down, which were actually just trucks with a section in the back with two seats on each side. They same down, and we all crowded around the Black Mariahs and said, "Take us all." And they gave up. The policemen left. They didn't take anybody because they couldn't figure out who to take.
>
> There was a Dr. Staples in Butte, who was a generation later than mine. Dr. Staples's father was the head security guard for the Anaconda Company. Dr. Staples once told someone in my family that his father had told him that I was leader of the newsboys. I really don't think that's quite accurate, but, anyway, that is what he was told. The older Staples kind of remembered me as being a radical, I think. He told his son that. But the newspaper strikes, there were probably two of them. We never did get three [papers] for a nickel.[11]

John Sheehy's work as a newsboy made him intimately familiar with mines, miners, and the street corners of Uptown Butte.

I had the Terminal Drug corner. It would be on the corner of Park Street and Dakota. The J.C. Penney Company was next door and across the street was the Terminal Drugstore. Across Dakota Street was Symon's store, and across from it was a bank. One of the banks was a Yegen Bank. . . . What I remember about it, neon signs had come out—it was the early days of neon signs—and on the top of that building they had a great big "6," which meant that they'd pay you 6 percent for your savings deposit. . . .

[I would sell the paper] in the afternoon. It was an afternoon paper. It came out at 4:00 or 4:30, something like that, right after school. [I would earn two bits or so] if I sold them all. Now, what made that possible—you've got to remember this—that all around the downtown area were places where the tenants were the men who worked in the mines, who were bachelors, where one room was enough for them. They lived in one room, went to a boardinghouse for a meal or one of the restaurants in town. That was your market for the newspapers because if they had a house, they would be on a regular newspaper route. There was a large number of bachelors, and they were the ones who'd buy those papers. And any time of the day or night Butte would be busy because those streetcars I mentioned brought them up to the mines before automobiles were so prevalent. So they ride up to the mine and come back. If they were on day shift, they'd come down into Butte. The day shift got off at 4:30, and they'd come pouring down from the Hill, hundreds of men. Every corner, all through Park Street and Broadway, had newsboys on them. We claimed those corners as our property. [You established your corner] with your fists. Once it was established, it was pretty much yours then. My brothers then worked that corner. [It got handed down.]

And the Sunday paper, there was an afternoon edition of that as well. There was an afternoon edition of the *Butte Miner.* The Sunday edition of that paper would come out on Saturday night. The first edition, which they called the "bulldog edition," came out about 6:00 P.M. And we got those papers and stayed all night, until about 6:00 in the morning, out on the street selling those papers. And the reason we would do that is the day shift was getting off at 4:30. The night shift began at 6:00 and got off at 2:30 in the morning. And so, even at that morning hour, there would be another whole shift

coming out of the Hill. Hundreds of men. So that would be the market for Saturday night and Sunday morning.

I do remember as a newsboy a special time was Christmastime. It was quite a joy to see. It was made joyous by the downtown merchants. They kept their stores open until nine o'clock at night from Thanksgiving to Christmas itself. They usually closed at 6:00. At that particular time, there were all kinds of people downtown shopping and so on. By that time, they had developed [phonographs], [and] people could listen to records. Music stores had loudspeakers outside their stores blasting out music. That's how I became a fan of Bing Crosby singing some of those Christmas songs. And there was a store not far from my corner, the Dreibelbis Music Company. It was about in the middle of this long block between Main Street and Dakota Street.[12]

John Mazzola started selling *Liberty Magazine* and the *Saturday Evening Post* when he was nine years old.

I would make one and one half cents on each magazine that I sold for a nickel. So, I sold fifty *Liberties* a week, and that was seventy-five cents. And I sold fifty *Saturday Evening Posts,* and that was another seventy-five cents. That was a dollar and a half. Big money. I'd bring that home to my mother. That wasn't my money. I'd bring that home. I never had to bring it home. I did it because I knew they needed it. I knew that, yes. I was proud to do that. My mother would hold out her apron, and I'd put the money in there. She managed to give me something, too, you know.

If my mother was alive today, she'd kill me. I used to go all through the red-light district and sell them to the prostitutes. I thought a prostitute was a telephone operator. I didn't know what they were. They were good about it. And once in while they'd give me an extra nickel even. I'd go all through there. I'd go to Chinatown. I'd go to the bars—the M&M, Walker's, all those places—and sell my magazines.[13]

Kevin Shannon began selling newspapers when he was eight years old.

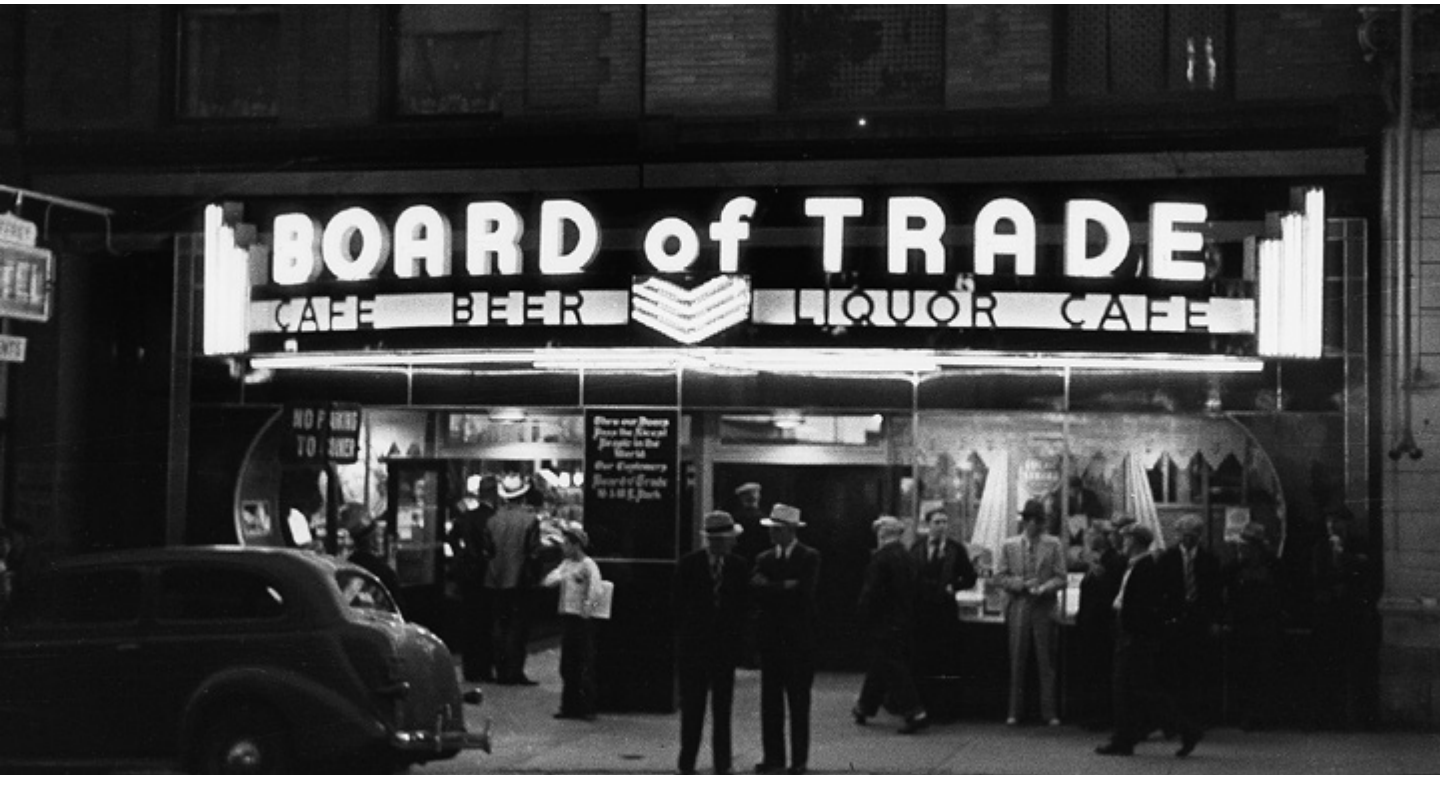
You'd go down and you'd buy two papers for a nickel at the *Butte Daily Post. . . .*

The miners' night shift began at 6:00 P.M. and ended at 2:30 in the morning, when newsboys would sell papers to the hundreds of men pouring down off the Hill. The young man above is carrying his newspapers past the Park Theater in Uptown Butte in 1939.

Sometimes [you would] only buy two, and then you'd sell them and go back for more. You sold 'em for a nickel apiece, you made two and a half cents a paper. After [the miners' shift change] was [when] you sold the papers. I sold my papers at Hamilton and Broadway. [I had to fight for that spot.] I'd say that's what made us all aggressive. And you heard of Butte kids [being] tough. Well, to me that was one of the reasons. You had to physically fight him if you sold a paper in his district. . . . Naturally, the toughest kids had the best corner. Gus Carkulis had Park and Main. He was tough. He was tough. The Murphys had Dakota and Park. All the Murphys. It was up to the brothers to hold it. They had St. James Hospital in the morning. You had to be an independent [and establish your own corner]. [I sold papers] after school and then on Saturday night. The Sunday paper would come out early, and you'd go down and get them on Saturday night.[14]

Micah Downs's first job was also selling papers.

Most of my customers were in the Board of Trade and down to the Greek store on the corner across from Sundberg



The Board of Trade was part of Micah Downs's territory. "I'd sell one hundred papers a night," he recalled. "[I made] two and a half cents a paper."

Electric and sometimes as far down as Sewell Hardware. Some of my best customers worked in the mines. They'd buy three or four papers from me. I'd sell one hundred papers a night. [I made] two and a half cents a paper. I'd go down there and flip my earnings with that guy that ran that Greek grocery store—big, tall, lanky guy. He'd flip for a dollar. I got onto him, though, because he'd cheat. He'd take my whole night's earnings.[15]

Buckets, Boardinghouses, and Baby-Sitting

For many Butte girls, childhood chores were training grounds for service work. Older children often bore care-giving responsibilities for younger siblings. While their fathers toiled in and around the mines, their mothers, too, often sought to juggle paid work with family responsibilities. Girls learned quickly to turn domestic and care-giving skills into paid labor. Catherine Hoy recalled her early childhood training that prepared her for boardinghouse work:

I came from a family of six, and we each had our chores to do. My older sister had the two front rooms—we had six rooms—that consisted of a bedroom and a front room. My other sister had the kitchen, which was the hardest one of all, and I had the dining room area to do. And in that dining room we had a great big, long table. It was always set, and on the table we ate our meals. You know, we'd sit around that. At one time, we'd have from ten to twelve at that table. We always had a cousin or an uncle or an aunt or somebody living with us, you know. Just the old Irish tie. . . . That area was mine. I had to do that. And every Saturday, whether it needed it or not, we had to scrub the walls down. . . . And we didn't slipshod it. We used soap and water, Naptha soap and water. Walls and woodwork and that. And that table had to be scrupulously clean or else you didn't get your supper. It was just too bad. . . . We were assigned the chores, and that was it. You didn't hesitate about it. My mother . . . ruled the roost. . . . And when she said it was to be done, it was to be done.

The boys had to chop wood and the coal. You know how we'd get our coal sometimes? The coal cars would run back and forth on Anaconda Road. So, one kid would get in a coal car and throw out all of this coal. Then the rest of us would go along and pick it up and take it home. And the same with the mines. The mines would throw a lot of wood out, you know,