

# '...And All That Jazz'

## Changing Manners and Morals in Butte after World War I

by Mary Murphy

"Montana women are self-reliant,  
provided they get a chance."

—Mary O'Neill



After the war young women in Butte responded to many liberating influences, including Ethel Mays's romantic illustrations that appeared in the Butte *Daily Post*. This one from the series, "The Ten Great Loves in a Man's Life," appeared on September 16, 1925.



Butte-Silver Bow Archives, Butte, Montana

Many early-twentieth-century Butte women wanted a job, store-bought clothes, fun, and entertainment for a few years before settling down. These unidentified Butte couples, photographed in the 1930s, appear to be fulfilling the fun aspect of the ladies' expectations.

**E**arly in June 1920, a distraught Butte, Montana, mother reported to the police that she had been unable to get in touch with her daughter for more than a week.

Margaret had moved into a room uptown a month before but had kept in regular contact with her family. When the police investigated, they found Margaret in a rooming house on the edge of Chinatown. She was registered as the wife of a man named Chong Wing but was apparently living as his "paramour" in exchange for the \$6 a day she needed to support her cocaine habit. Wing was arrested, tried, and convicted of contributing to Margaret's delinquency, although he did not provide her directly with drugs. Those she purchased in a Chinese café on South Arizona Street. During the trial Margaret testified that she had been frequenting Butte's Chinese restaurants for six

months and had made friends with a circle of young women whom she subsequently learned were drug users. Margaret was arrested on charges of vagrancy but released in the custody of her mother.<sup>1</sup>

Such sensational reports of female delinquency, involving drink, drugs, and sex, alarmed Butte parents as well as civil and church authorities in the 1920s. Were young women in the post-World War I period abandoning the morals of an older generation? Without a doubt, the experiences of the war, combined with the defiant ambience of the Prohibition era, nurtured a revolution in public manners, a revolt led by a vanguard of young working women. But did changes in dress, cosmetics, dancing styles, and even drinking habits signal a profound shift in women's values and convictions about what their role in society should be?

**B**efore World War I, challenges to the model of “true womanhood” that dominated middle-class culture and stood as a public measure for propriety came from two directions. First, “new women,” educated, articulate, and often politically active, challenged the truism that woman’s proper—and most fulfilling—role was as wife and mother. Many new women consciously chose a single life, or a life with another woman, and a career other than homemaking. Through their examples and writings, these women sought legitimacy for an alternative model of womanhood. On a different front, working-class urban women challenged ideals of true womanhood by embracing a heterosexual and heterosocial culture outside the home. Working-class women in America’s larger cities had a long tradition of enjoying the commercial pleasures urban life offered. Many female workers, desiring the somewhat costly pleasures of cafés, dance halls, and theaters, dated men who paid their way, and in return they sometimes provided social and sexual favors. Reactions to their pursuit of amusement varied, depending upon the mores of their families and their religious and ethnic communities. However, by the middle-class standards most frequently held by contemporary observers of urban life—editors, reformers, and employers—working women’s actions bordered on the promiscuous. Not until the 1920s did this working-class social style gain acceptance within the middle class.

After the war it became harder and harder to say what was and was not ladylike and distinguish between immorality and frivolity. It is impossible to order the importance of various factors leading to that state. Greater opportunities for women to leave home and go to college; a wider variety of jobs in the white-collar sector; and the national distribution of technological delights such as movies, radios, Victrolas, and automobiles that generated new fashions, dances, and styles of courtship all contributed to changes in women’s behavior. The war experience and ensuing depression inspired a feeling of disillusionment, recklessness, and immediacy.

Change occurred most obviously and quickly in large metropolitan areas, cities with jobs that attracted girls from surrounding farms and small towns. These urban migrants lived in furnished room districts on their own. Or, if they lived at home, they sought their pleasures in places that were perhaps a trolley ride away

from their own neighborhoods and the judgmental gazes of parents and neighbors. Most of America, however, was not like Chicago or New York City. In small and middling cities—like Butte—there were fewer of the new commercial amusements, and few places women could go where someone would not know them. Thus, the bonds of cultural conformity were tighter in small towns and cities where anonymity was often impossible, where the eyes of family and neighbor monitored women’s behavior, and where tongues too easily labeled amusements immoral.

Change took place more slowly in the hinterland. In Butte we can chart the expansion of the boundaries of womanly behavior during the late 1910s and 1920s. Although increasing numbers of young women attended dance halls, in equal numbers and often the same women spent evenings at the movies and at church-sponsored card parties. In the 1920s most of Butte’s young women anticipated a future of a few years of paid work, then marriage and children. There were only a handful of “new women” in Butte, but there were many young working women. In the years between school and marriage, when they earned and could control their own incomes, they claimed for themselves new rights in the workplace, on the streets, and in arenas of commercial leisure. In the process they redefined the parameters of respectability.

**T**he first significant challenge to the ideals of true womanhood in Butte came from a nineteen-year-old native-grown iconoclast named Mary MacLane. Mary was the child of failed fortune. On the eve of her departure for Stanford University, Mary’s stepfather confessed that he had lost the family’s money in a mining speculation and could not afford to send her to college. Restless, unemployed, and trapped in Butte, Mary spent her days walking through “sand and barrenness” and confiding her thoughts to her diary. In 1902 she sent this handwritten text to a Chicago publisher. Herbert S. Stone issued the manuscript as *The Story of Mary MacLane* and sold eighty thousand copies during its first month in print. The Butte Public Library banned the book, and a daily paper denounced it as “inimical to public morality.” The New York *Herald* pronounced Mary mad and demanded that paper and pen be denied her until

1. Butte *Daily Bulletin*, June 7, 8, 1920; Butte *Miner*, June 8, 9, 1920; Anaconda *Standard*, June 6, 8, 9, 1920.

2. On Mary MacLane and reactions to her book, *The Story of Mary MacLane*, (Chicago, 1902), see Leslie Wheeler, “Montana’s Shocking ‘Lit’ry Lady,’” *Montana The Magazine of Western History* (hereafter MMWH), 27 (Summer 1977), 20-33; Penelope Rosemont,

“Marvelous Mary MacLane,” *Free Spirits: Annals of the Insurgent Imagination*, ed. Paul Buhle, et al., (San Francisco, 1982) 31-38; Carolyn J. Mattern, “Mary MacLane: A Feminist Opinion,” MMWH, 27 (Autumn 1977), 54-63; Gertrude Atherton, *Adventures of a Novelist*, (New York, 1932), 491-92; Barbara Miller, “Hot as Live Embers, Cold as Hail’: The Restless Soul of Butte’s Mary MacLane,” *Montana Magazine* (September-October 1982), 50-52.



Mary MacLane looked the proper young lady in this 1906 portrait, but her brash writing and the unorthodox life-style she promoted for women made Butte parents fearful of her influence on their daughters.

she regained her senses. The *New York Times* advised a spanking.<sup>2</sup>

What could a teenage girl in Butte, Montana, have written to provoke such responses? In an age when legs

were referred to as limbs, Mary boasted of her strong woman's body; in an era of moral absolutes, she claimed that right, wrong, good, and evil were mere words. In defiance of all the strictures of true womanhood, she pronounced that she was neither high-minded nor spiritual but instead "earthly, human, sensitive, sensuous, and sensual."<sup>3</sup>

Mary used her royalties to leave Butte and move to Greenwich Village, where she acquired a taste for cigarettes and martinis, attended the theater and prizefights, and reveled in the company of other free-spirited women. She returned to Butte in 1909 to remain for seven years, haunting gambling dens and roadhouses and writing another autobiographical book. Mary was a figure of both scorn and fascination, outrageous enough to become part of Butte's pantheon of characters but also considered a dangerous influence on women. In 1910 the *Butte Miner* invited Carrie Nation to comment on the phenomenon of Mary MacLane. Nation pronounced Mary "the example of a woman who has been unwomanly in everything that she is noted for" and admonished residents not to let their daughters read her books.<sup>4</sup>

Mary MacLane was unusual by any definition of early-twentieth-century womanhood, but she was not alone in contesting orthodoxy. Women in business and politics challenged stereotypes of women's proper place, seeking to exert female influence in commerce

and government. Brash, high-spirited working-class women assaulted conventions of feminine behavior, especially outside the workplace. Susceptible to the power of movies and the advertising industry, mass-marketers of glamour and romance, these women aspired to more than food and shelter, and they demanded that their behavior, rowdy though it sometimes was, be counted respectable.

Women who wanted to make changes in Butte faced the pervasive, dichotomous ideology permeating late-Victorian and Edwardian-Anglo culture that viewed woman as either "good" or "bad." According to this scheme, good and bad women occupied different universes and rarely if ever came into contact with each other. But in the reality of the American mining West, a combination of demography and geography brought the moral and immoral cheek to cheek. In early mining camps women were a minority, and frequently the first and most numerous female migrants were prostitutes. As the classic jingle related, "First came the miners to work in the mine / Then came the ladies to live on the line." In prairie towns "the line" might be literally across the tracks, off the beaten path of shoppers and casual strollers. But in mining towns like Butte, often perched precariously on hillsides or nestled in narrow gulches, town builders did not have the luxury of the prairies' wide-open spaces. Butte cribs and brothels started out on the main east-west avenue of Park Street, and their red light district eventually consolidated just two blocks south of the city center. Butte was not unique. In Helena, another Montana mining town, the Catholic orphanage and school, built on a hill above the main gulch, had a bird's-eye view of the red light district.<sup>5</sup>

Butte residents had mixed emotions regarding their red light district. Sordid it might be, but it seemed necessary in a town full of single miners. There was even a touch of braggadocio in comparisons to New Orleans's Corduroy Row and San Francisco's Barbary Coast. The city, in fact, was proud of both its good and its bad women—as long as they remained separate. The red light district was designed to guarantee that, and both men and women shared the belief that the presence of the district protected good women. Helen Raymond, in speaking of the district during the 1920s, expressed the common opinion that Butte streets were safe for women despite the presence of so many rough men. With the red light district flourishing, men "knew where to get their pleasures."<sup>6</sup>

3. MacLane, *The Story of Mary MacLane*, 17, 32, 46, 109.

4. Mattern, "Mary MacLane," 60–61; Atherton, *Adventures of a Novelist*, 491; *Butte Miner*, March 6, 1910.

5. Writers' Program, Work Projects Administration (hereafter WPA), *Copper Camp: Stories of the World's Greatest Mining Town, Butte, Montana* (New York, 1943), 175; Paula Petrik, *No Step Back-*

*ward: Women and Family on the Rocky Mountain Mining Frontier, Helena, Montana, 1865–1900*, (Helena, Mont., 1987), xviii.

6. WPA, *Copper Camp*, 177; Helen Shute Raymond, interview by Laurie Mercier, Butte, Montana, October 9, 1981, OH 196, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena (hereafter MHS).



MHS Photograph Archives, Helena

One of the jobs available to Butte women was clerking in stores. This view of Hennessy's grocery department pictures three young female clerks and one of their customers circa 1918.

During the war years, mothers began worrying that the lines of the district were dissolving. In 1914 Butte's Socialist administration bowed to pressure from the Florence Crittenton Rescue Circle and agreed to give special police powers to its female field missionary, Amanda Pfeiffer. Pfeiffer patrolled the red light district looking for "erring" girls out for a night's excitement, whom she took home to their parents. Attorney General Sam Ford aggravated parents' fears in 1917 when he ordered all the restricted districts in the state closed. Prostitutes merely moved into previously respectable hotels and boardinghouses and carried on their trade, making it easier for local girls to enter the ranks of occasional prostitutes without the conspicuousness of moving to or working in the district. One Butte mother told Ford that his reform was "one of the worst things you could of ever done." She complained that before the district was closed her daughters were "good girls" who stayed at home and worked. "Now they are never home never work and always have plenty of money."<sup>7</sup>

A few citizens' letters to Ford revealed the connection people drew between consumerism and prostitution. T. L. Blackman contended that closing the districts was futile because it was not their presence that caused the downfall of women, but "booze, dancing, low wages, human nature, and show windows in

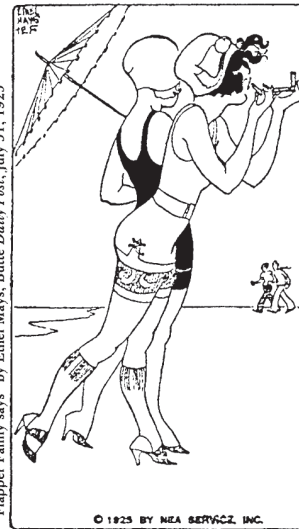
7. Anaconda *Standard*, January 4, 1914; Robert A. Harvie and Larry V. Bishop, "Police Reform in Montana, 1890-1918," *MMWH*, 33 (Spring 1983), 56; Anaconda *Standard*, January 14, 1917; Mrs. T. J. Fleming to S. C. Ford, July 1, 1919, file 30, box 24, RS 76, Montana Attorney General Records (hereafter AGR), MHS; Mrs. O. Caffery to S. C. Ford, October, 3, 1917, file 3, box 20, AGR.

8. T. L. Blackman to S. C. Ford, January 24, 1917, file 3, box 20, AGR.

all your big department stores." Parents feared that their daughters might be attracted to prostitution, not because they wanted sex with strangers but because they wanted money and the goods and entertainment it would buy. They suspected that the tenets of Judeo-Christian morality were not a strong enough defense against the allure of clothes, movies, dance halls, and the other enticements of a burgeoning consumer society.<sup>8</sup>

Ties between consumer culture and prostitution appeared particularly clear to the city's socialist newspaper, which charged in 1920 that the low wages earned by department store cash girls—the young women who ran change between customers and the cashier—drove some of them to prostitution. Averring that Symons's cash girls, who made an average of \$3.50 per week, could not support themselves unless they lived with their parents, investigators claimed to have positive evidence that some girls were "rustling" on the street. Symons's employees reported that the store routinely discharged girls after they served their apprenticeship, thus preventing them from becoming full-fledged clerks at union wages and forcing them into the streets to make a living.<sup>9</sup>

It is unlikely that many department store clerks turned to occasional prostitution to augment their wages. Ever since women had moved into low-paying public work, labor organizers and reformers had raised the specter of prostitution as the inevitable fate of underpaid female workers. Women certainly learned more about sex from their fellow workers than they did from their parents, however. Ann Pentilla recalled that neither she nor her sisters "knew enough about the birds and bees until we went to work." Butte's women workers were indeed conscious of the low wages they received and the discrepancy between what their paychecks bought and



"Flapper Fanny says" by Ethel Mays, *Butte Daily Post*, July 31, 1925

9. *Butte Daily Bulletin*, February 9, 11, 17, 1920; Anaconda *Standard*, February 17, 1920.

10. Ann Pentilla, interview by Ray Calkins and Caroline Smithson, April 27, 1979, p. 22, transcript, Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives, Butte, Montana (hereafter BSBA); Anna L. Rogers to Jeanette Rankin, August 3, 1917, file 9, box 1, MC 147, Jeanette Rankin Papers, MHS.

what the owning class enjoyed. One woman, Anna Rogers, described the life of shop girls as “keeping body and soul together on a mere pittance while Mr. Woolworth can live in a mansion with every luxury.” Undoubtedly, there were some women who did barter sexual companionship for entertainment they could not afford. But we do not know to what extent Butte’s female workers welcomed joyriding, drinking parties, and arranged assignations. In all probability it was a highly visible minority.<sup>10</sup>

What many studies have revealed is that working girls’ actions—whether forced, welcomed, or hazarded through ignorance—appeared to parents, the press, and moral guardians in the church to blur the line between prostitute and lady. Unladylike conduct, such as smoking, dancing, short skirts, and short hair inevitably elicited comparisons to prostitutes. Frederick Lewis Allen observed that in many minds of the decade, “Short-haired women, like long-haired men, are associated with radicalism, if not with free love.” Many young Butte women donned the accouterments of the jazz age simply for fashion and fun. Others embraced them as declarations of independence. The allure of new fashions and new freedoms, seemingly linked to consumer culture, transcended ethnic and even national boundaries. But parents were not comforted by the refrain “everybody’s doin’ it.”<sup>11</sup>

**D**uring World War I, society applauded young women’s willingness to trade in their skirts for overalls and do the jobs that needed to be done. But their after-work activities were frequently censured. Critics singled out their penchant for dancing and frivolous clothes, interpreting both as evidence of weakened moral fiber. Mrs. George Rose, a traveling evangelist, reminded Butte women that “in years gone by” telling daughters “that a thing was unladylike” was enough to make them desist. However, “now the motto seems to be ‘Be a good sport.’ Modern fashions, exposed necks, bare arms, yes, even exposed legs . . . you say they are worn innocently, with no thought of appeal to the lust of men. I wish I could think that this were so.”<sup>12</sup>

11. Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s*, (New York, 1931), 2.

12. *Butte Miner*, April 10, 1916.

13. *Anaconda Standard*, February 5, 1920; [Madeleine] *Madeleine: An Autobiography*, (New York, 1919), 209; [Butte High School yearbook] *The Mountaineer*, (Butte, 1924); *The Mountaineer*, (Butte, 1923) 78–79, 165.

14. *Butte City Directory*, 1917, 1931; see Butte City Council Minutes, October 18, 1930, p. 835, BSBA; Bernice Knierim, interview by Diane Sands, Glasgow, August 3, 1987, OH 1028, MHS.

The Butte press regularly published articles on other communities’ attempts to police women’s dress, perhaps hoping that someone in Butte would emulate them or that girls would take heed of warnings such as that issued by Denver high school boys, who proclaimed a boycott on bobbed hair, low-cut waists, flimsy hosiery, rouged lips, and “cheeks that bloom like a drugstore blush.” Even one prostitute considered Butte’s shop girls “overdressed.” The outcry against young women’s new look was exaggerated; not everyone adopted the provocative fashions. Judging by yearbook photographs, bobbed hair did not appear with any regularity at Butte High School until 1924. In 1923 Mary Josephine McGrath reigned as prom queen, a “true Irish type of beauty” praised for not being “the flapper type.” The girl voted most beautiful in the school was a freshman who had long ringlets adorned with silk flowers and bore a stronger resemblance to Mary Pickford than Clara Bow.<sup>13</sup>

Many Butte working women, however, felt that wearing fashionable clothes and using cosmetics were a sign of coming of age. Just as in other parts of the country, the acceptance of cosmetics and the increasing commercialization of beauty made its way to Butte. In 1917 there was no such thing as a beauty parlor in Butte, but by 1931 there were twenty-eight, and the city had enacted an ordinance to regulate them. Even more than fashionable hair styles and cosmetics, however, working women sought new clothes. Dresses did not have to be elaborate, just store-bought. Bernice Knierim recalled that one of the first things she did when she got a real job was to buy “a decent dress. . . . It was a flowered dress with kind of a lace trim, nothing fancy. But I felt like I was a millionaire in it.” Bernice had never had a new dress; her mother sewed all her clothes. “I don’t care what you say, a homemade dress is a homemade dress. And a boughten dress is a boughten dress.”<sup>14</sup>

Young women often entertained themselves, as these unidentified Butte girls seemed to be doing in the early 1930s.



Butte-Silver Bow Archives

For single, wage-earning women, store-bought clothes became a symbol of independence. Not only could women pay for their own clothing, but they could also choose its cut, color, and fabric and present to the world an image that they had chosen, not their parents, guardians, or school authorities. Mary MacLane recognized that women's dress was a stage for expression and improvisation. In her 1917 book *I, Mary MacLane*, she acknowledged that only a few women could express themselves through acting, painting, politics, or other work. "But there's not one—from a wandering Romany gypsy, red-blooded and strong-hearted, to an over-guarded over-bred British princess—who doesn't express what she is in the clothes she wears and the way she wears them. Her clothes conceal and reveal, artfully and contradictorily and endlessly."<sup>15</sup>

**T**he shorter, looser, skimpier clothes of the postwar period allowed women greater comfort and mobility and apparently sent a message of disturbing sensuality. In some cases it threatened athleticism to those who preferred to think of women as the "weaker sex." In a 1926 short story by that title, a man nervously contemplates the postwar generation of "sailboat-handling-she-Vikings," "skiing Valkyries," and "diving Venuses." In an effort to curb this Amazonian threat, Montana's Catholic Church took up the battle against short skirts. Bishop John P. Carroll visited Butte churches and enlisted Catholic women in a league to combat indecent dress and immoral dances. The bishop received an enthusiastic response from women, who pledged in the name of Mary Immaculate "to maintain and hand down the traditional and proverbial purity and modesty of Catholic womanhood."<sup>16</sup>

If appropriate dress was a contentious issue for the 1920s, so too were dancing and music, with jazz—a new form of musical expression—causing particular concern for those worried about guarding community morals. Jazz had moved upriver from New Orleans in 1917, when the United States Navy shut down Storyville and musicians dispersed throughout the country. Recordings of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band sold millions and inspired thousands of musicians, black and white, good and bad. Even in Butte, groups of young men formed

their own jazz bands, such as the Whirlwinds, while the Butte High music teacher forbade the addition of a saxophone to the orchestra because it was "too sexy." It was this link between sex and jazz that alarmed parents. When the Original Dixieland Jazz Band made its debut in New York, *Variety* reported, "There is one thing that is certain, and that is that the melodies as played by the Jazz organization . . . are quite conducive to making the dancers on the floor loosen up and go the limit in their stepping." That possibility must have appalled dance reformers, who had struggled to clean up the "tough dances" of the previous decade, which celebrated physical contact. Butte parents' concern that dancing led to immorality was perhaps understandable when they read in the newspaper that the latest popular tune was a "twinkling foxtrot" with the title "Snake Hips," or that the new band of all Butte boys playing at the Winter Garden was "sweet—lowdown and hot." From World War I to the mid-1930s prostitutes made blatant the connection between sex and jazz by propositioning men with the phrase, "How about some jazz?"<sup>17</sup>

Dancing was among the most popular forms of entertainment in Butte during the 1920s and 1930s, and there were dance halls to suit every mood: roadhouses with somewhat shady reputations, neighborhood speakeasies with small dance floors, the very respectable Winter Garden, and the romantic Columbia Gardens' pavilion, festooned with Japanese lanterns. All the fraternal lodges sponsored dances and rented their halls to other groups when they needed the space. Organizations as diverse as the Swedish-Finnish Hall, the Odd Fellows, the Butte Muckers' Athletic Club, the American Legion, and the Walkerville Social Club hosted "flower and basket" dances, marathons, and walkathons to raise money and entertain their members. Dances were occasions for dates; Pat O'Leary, who loved to dance, took his fiancée to the Winter Garden three times a week. But many men and women attended with friends of the same sex and waited to see what pairing might develop at the dance hall.<sup>18</sup>

While many lodge dances were patronized exclusively by members of the same ethnic associations, at public dances young people from many ethnic groups and all parts of town mingled. Julia McHugh and her girlfriends from Dublin Gulch were all "swell dancers," and they shimmied and spun at the Sacred Heart school basement every Wednesday, at the Hibernia Hall on

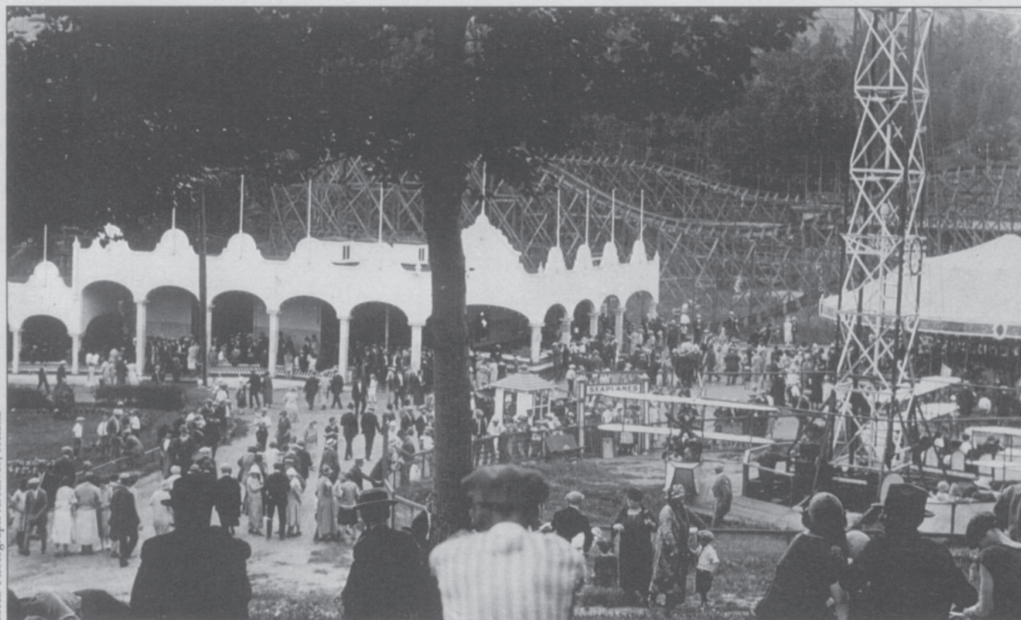
15. Mary MacLane, *I, Mary MacLane* (New York, 1917), 25–26.

16. Arthur Stringer, "The Weaker Sex," *Saturday Evening Post*, (December 18, 1926), 11; *Anaconda Standard*, February 16, 23, 24, 26, 1920.

17. Art Chappelle, unrecorded interview by Mary Murphy, Butte, July 29, 1988; Dorothy A. Martin, interview by Mary Murphy, Butte,

May 23, 1988, p. 8, transcript, BSBA. *Variety* is quoted in Marshall W. Stearns, *The Story of Jazz* (New York, 1956), 155. Butte *Miner*, May 11, 1923, September 6, 1928; Charles Winick and Paul M. Kinsie, *The Lively Commerce: Prostitution in the United States*, (Chicago, 1971), 41.

18. Pat O'Leary, interview by Ray Calkins, Butte, July 22, 1980, p. 18, transcript, BSBA.



MHS Photograph Archives, Helena

Butte's Columbia Gardens amusement park held dances in the pavilion that were popular with Butte's young adults, who attended as couples or in groups of friends. Pictured here, circa 1925, is the Arcade Building (left) with the roller coaster in the background. The pavilion is out of the picture to the left.

Friday, the Rosemont on Saturday, the Winter Garden in the winter, and Columbia Gardens on Sundays in the summer. They “knew kids from all parts of Butte . . . so as soon as we arrived, we would be asked for a dance and we would be four or five ahead. No dancing with the same guy all night. We didn't go on dates, but . . . someone would take us home.”<sup>19</sup>

Not everybody went right home. One woman remembered a night when “the boys ‘took’ a car. An old Ford. The doors on it and the floor boards missing in the back seat. No breaks, we practically used our feet . . . It was a wild ride coming down Harding Way. . . . Maybe we kept late hours but we shore had fun.”<sup>20</sup>

It was just such adventures that perturbed clergy and reformers. Authorities across the nation worried about the effect dance halls had on girls—presumably boys could fend for themselves. This attitude prevailed in Butte as well. In 1914 the Reverend E. J. Groeneveld, surveying “the amusement problem,” declared that “the dance hall is to the girl what the saloon is to the man. The public dance hall, with its promiscuous gathering, is an extremely dangerous institution.” Dance halls could be perilous, although the more common danger was sudden violence, not seduction, especially when alcohol was present. Drinking was not allowed inside

the dance halls, but there was usually a saloon or speak-easy downstairs or next door. Miners recalled that on weekend nights at the Butte honky-tonks you could “drink all you wanted to and dance and fight and everything else.” Fights often erupted over the “everything else,” which included sexual foreplay, not always with one's date. At times jealousy and rowdiness got out of hand. On the night of July 30, 1922, shots rang out at a small dance hall adjacent to a soft drink parlor on Second Street. In the aftermath of the shooting none of the participants, all Austrian immigrants, would talk to the police. But it was rumored that six men had quarreled over a pretty eighteen-year-old girl. One died from his wounds.<sup>21</sup>

Butte's ordinance governing dance halls embodied all the elements advocated by national dance hall reformers: each concession had to be licensed; its license could be revoked if disorderly or immoral activities took place on the premises; no liquor was to be sold or served; and minors under eighteen had to be accompanied by a parent or guardian and sign a register with their names, ages, and addresses. But enforcement of the ordinance was fitful at best, and citizens complained to the state attorney general of Sunday dancing, drinking, and fighting at Butte dance halls.<sup>22</sup>

19. Murel L. Roberts, interview by Ray Calkins, Butte, August 8, 1980, p. 23-24, transcript, BSBA; Julia McHugh, “The Gulch and I,” p. 8, [ca. 1986], typescript, BSBA.

20. Anonymous letter to John Hughes, September 27, 1982, BSBA.


21. *Anaconda Standard*, January 19, 1914; Gus Koski, interview by Kathy Tureck, Geysers, September 23, 1982, OH 490, MHS; *Butte Miner*, July 31, August 2, 1922.

**PEOPLES THEATER**  
*The Theater Beautiful*

SUNDAY AND MONDAY

First Time Shown in Butte!  
 Phil Goldstone presents

**The COWBOY  
 and  
 THE FLAPPER**  
*A Thrill-o-Comedy of East and West*  
 with **WILLIAM FAIRBANKS** and  
**DOROTHY REVIER**



The flapper problem is spreading. Little girls with bobbed hair and short skirts won't stay at home any more.

See What Happens When the Cowboy and the Flapper Meet.

William Fairbanks and Dorothy Revier do their stuff in a way that raises this picture into the ranks of really dramatic productions.

Comedy  
**"Itching for Revenge"**  
 More Laughs Than Heinz Has Pickels!

**Kinogram** ————— **News**  
 Continuous Show 11 A. M. to 11 P. M.

COME EARLY AND AVOID THE RUSH!

The allure of new fashions and new freedoms was a national phenomenon, as evidenced by this Butte *Daily Post* movie ad of September 12, 1925, which worries tantalizingly about how the so-called "flapper problem" is spreading.

In 1923 the Butte *Daily Post* reported that the county was "going after Butte dives . . . until disreputable 'joints' where youth is permitted to have its fling in its innocence and ignorance, are cleaned out. If the older ones that should know better want to go the route, let them hop to it, but they will not be permitted to smirch the young people." The provocation for what would turn out to be a short and narrowly focused "clean-up" of joints was a police raid on a New Year's Eve party at the Silver City Club, which turned up white women "dancing with negroes to the jazz music of a colored orchestra," and white men "jazzing it" with black women. Although the club, located on the edge of the red light district, was known as a hang-out for prostitutes, a gambling joint, and a place to buy dope and bootleg liquor, the police had previously ignored it. What was different and disturbing about this party was that the dancing women were not "denizens of the underworld" but white stenographers, clerks, and shop girls, daughters of respectable Butte families. None of the girls was arrested. Instead, the county attorney began proceedings to close the club. The issue was not settled then. In 1927 the tale of white women frequenting a roadhouse operated by blacks again made the front page. The paper claimed dancing was the attraction, and a judge threatened to close the place. The tiny number of African Americans in Butte—in 1920 only .5 percent of the population—and the fraction of them who patronized the Silver City Club or roadhouses could scarcely threaten the morals of overwhelmingly white Butte. However, they provided a convenient scapegoat for the police.<sup>23</sup>

Fears that young women's capers would land them in trouble seemed justified to residents who scanned the daily police reports. In 1920 the *Anaconda Standard* reported that annually nearly a thousand women spent time behind bars in Butte. The majority served time for drunkenness, vagrancy, and "incurability." In 1918 Mrs. A. J. Steele wrote to the state attorney general seeking to have her daughter put in the Good Shepherd Home until she was twenty-one and had "regain[ed] her health vitality and self-respect." Miss Steele drank and used drugs, and her parents sought her redemption. Her mother blamed the girl's condition on her frequent visits to public dances, noodle parlors (the colloquial name for Butte's Chinese restaurants), and "every 'dive' in town." The state of young womanhood appeared to worsen as the decade progressed. In 1922 a seventeen-year-old girl pleaded guilty

22. William E. Carroll, comp., *Revised Ordinances of the City of Butte, 1914* (Butte, [1914]), 416-19; L. A. Foot to Larry Duggan, July 31, 1925, file 19, box 26, AGR.

23. Butte *Daily Post*, January 3, 1923; Butte *Miner*, January 3, 1923; *Anaconda Standard*, April 16, 1927.

to incorrigibility and was committed to the Good Shepherd Home until she reached twenty-one. A regular at the dance halls, when she did not come home one night her mother called the probation officer, Mrs. O'Neill. O'Neill found her in a rooming house in bed with her sister-in-law and an unidentified man. In 1929 a series of raids on "resorts" in the central business district uncovered a score of girls drinking and dancing with customers "on a commission basis."<sup>24</sup>

**I**n 1926 a bizarre case threw into relief the jumble of fears and expectations some Butte residents had about women's changing roles. On November 23 Jacques Moret, considered "one of the gang" among a number of young men of the city," was arrested while standing on the corner of Park and Main, smoking a cigar and ogling girls. Moret was not arrested for loitering, but for impersonating a man. Jacques, in fact, was a twenty-three-year-old woman. Moret claimed to be a private detective in town working on a case, but she refused to divulge the name of her agency. She had been in the city for two months, dressed in "sheik's garb," gambling, squiring women to the Meaderville night clubs, and playing piano in a dance hall. When interviewed, she said she had worn male dress since she was thirteen and had "seen more life because of wearing men's garb than a thousand women have seen attired in dresses, but I have done no wrong."<sup>25</sup>

A large crowd, including many women, packed the police court when "Jack" was tried. Her attorney, former mayor William H. Maloney, argued that she had violated only an obsolete statute forbidding persons to appear in public "in a dress not belonging to his or her sex." He claimed that if Moret were subject to arrest merely on the basis of her apparel, then so was every female theater usher and a majority of women who rode in automobiles. Judge Daniel F. Shea, however, took a broader interpretation of the law and stated that there was a "decided difference" between a woman who dressed in mannish fashion and a woman who tried in every manner to give the impression that she was a man. For Shea, the issue was not trousers versus skirts, but the boundaries of gender. He fined Jack \$50—suspended if she donned garb "in keeping with her sex"—and ordered the police to arrest her every time she appeared publicly in men's clothing.

24. Anaconda *Standard*, February 15, 1920; Mrs. A. J. Steele to S. C. Ford, April 1, 1918, box 7, file 21, AGR; Butte *Miner*, November 19, 1922; *Montana Standard*, February 7, 1929.

Jack was not easily dissuaded from her habits of ten years, and within the week she was in jail again. Overstepping the bounds of the court's order, the police arrested her in her room at the Grand Hotel in the company of a nineteen-year-old cabaret singer. The girl was in bed; Jack was attired only in B.V.D.s. Jack claimed that she had rescued the singer from a "notorious resort" in Butte and was awaiting the arrival of Jack's wealthy mother, who was going to take the girl to Denver and "start her right along the road of life." Jack's mother never showed up, and Moret ended up serving out her sentence in jail.

Jacques Moret's antics, recounted on the front pages of Butte's dailies, undoubtedly provided hundreds of Butte readers nothing more than a titillating story and a good laugh. However, they certainly unsettled some, and her arrest and prosecution illuminated Butte's gender system. Jack had close male friends in the city who declared they had no idea she was a woman. The cabaret singer, who presumably knew the truth, only commented that Jack was a most attentive companion, "thoughtful at all times," "hiring taxis for short distances," and a "wonder at ordering dinners." While vowing that she would continue to wear men's clothing if she had to carry her case to the Supreme Court, Jack also claimed feminine sensibilities and announced her intention of alerting the Federation of Women's Clubs to the filthy condition of the jail. She pointed out the irony that prostitutes were fined \$10 for their activities, whereas she was fined \$50. Both her fine and the front-page headlines accorded to Moret's escapades, in comparison to the routine arrest and fining of prostitutes, underscored the fact that prostitutes' sexual transactions were an accepted part of the city's heterosexual practice. Prostitutes knew their place and were accredited members of the female pantheon; Moret was not. When Daniel Shea sentenced Jack, he was enforcing Butte's gender code. His judgment that her "masquerade detracts from the feminine genuineness of a woman" demonstrated that women's manners and morals were tightly braided.

If we accept the perspective of the press, male employers, and some parents, it appears that young Butte women in the 1920s were intent upon destroying long-held social, moral, and even racial standards. But from the viewpoint of working women themselves, their activities were hardly revolutionary. Compared to young women in Chicago and New York City, Butte women played out a muted sexual revolution; their activities constituted more of a "sensual revolution," to borrow

25. All quotations and material on Moret in this and following paragraphs are from newspaper articles: Butte *Miner*, November 24, 25, 29, 30, December 2, 1926; Butte *Daily Post*, November 26, 1926.



MHS Photograph Archives, Helena

Butte's Main Street bustled with activity on September 10, 1912 (left), but even so, in a small city like Butte one could not count on anonymity. Young people's "immoral" activities were therefore constrained by the risk of being recognized.

Lois Banner's phrase. Recent studies of women "adrift" may present a skewed idea of the sexual revolution in the United States because of the unique set of circumstances at work in large cities. By 1900, more than 20 percent of Chicago's working women boarded apart from family or relatives. That number increased steadily, and by 1930 approximately 49,000 women were "adrift" in Chicago. These thousands of female workers shaped the landscape of the "furnished room district," where women, out from under the watchful eyes of parents and neighbors, pursued both urban pleasures and dangers in relative anonymity. In most United States cities this was probably not the case. In 1920, the watershed year in which more Americans were registered living in urban (defined by the census bureau as a concentration of 2,500 or more people) than rural areas, only three cities—New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia—had more than one million inhabitants. Of the 288 cities with a population of 25,000 or more, 196 of them had fewer than 75,000 residents. The experiences of Butte women—living in a metropolitan area of 60,000—more likely reflected the lives of the majority of American urban women than did the experiences of those residing in Chicago, New York City, or Philadelphia.<sup>26</sup>

Butte women were, for the most part, enmeshed in a web of familial and neighborly relations. The 1910 census reveals that only a small proportion of single working women over fifteen did not live with their immediate families or relatives. By far the largest number who boarded were servants, but even then most were the only servants in private homes where they had lim-

ited free time and employers monitored their behavior. Butte's economy offered few opportunities for female workers other than domestic service, teaching, clerical work, and prostitution. Industrial or manufacturing work for women was practically nonexistent. Although more women worked in clerical jobs in 1920 than they had in 1910, servant was still the most common occupation for Butte women at the beginning of the decade.<sup>27</sup>

Butte's small size and women's living arrangements circumscribed their activities. Unlike New York City, where observers noted that patronage of dance halls was "hardly ever local" and men and women drifted from hall to hall in which "nearly everyone [was] a stranger to everyone else," Butte did not have that many dance halls or that many strangers. As Julia McHugh recounted, by the time she and her friends from Dublin Gulch were old enough to attend dances, they knew kids from all over the city. Girls found in disreputable roadhouses by the police were taken home to their parents, not brought to jail.<sup>28</sup>

While the actions of young vamps "jazzing it" in roadhouses drew the attention of reformers, many young women quietly spent their leisure in innocent pleasures revolving around church, family, and lodges. Butte was probably more like Middletown than New York City in its attitude toward new sexual mores. When the Lynds explored Middletown's sexual customs in the mid-1920s, they found the taboo against premarital sex "as strong today as in the county-seat of forty years ago." Catherine Hoy and other Butte girls knew the limits of acceptable sexual play. One woman's mother told her "not to let the boys fool around." So she "kissed a lot" but was not about to do anything

26. Lois W. Banner, *American Beauty* (Chicago, 1983), 264; Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago, 1988), 4-5; Francis J. Reynolds, ed., *New World Atlas and Gazetteer, 1924* (New York, 1924), 134.

27. Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1920*, vol. 4, *Population, 1920, Occupations* (Washington, D.C., 1923), 369; *Thirteenth Census, 1910, Montana*, vol. 16, *Silver Bow* (microfilm of manuscript).

28. Gregory Mason, "Satan in the Dance-Hall," *American Mercury*, 2 (June 1924), 180; Ella Gardner, *Public Dance Halls: Their Regulation and Place in the Recreation of Adolescents*, Publication 182, U.S. Department of Labor, Children's Bureau (Washington, D.C., 1929), 33-34.

29. Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in American Culture* (New York, 1929), 112; Anonymous letter to John Hughes, Butte, September 27, 1982; Catherine Hoy, interview by Ray Calkins and Caroline Smithson, Butte, May 11, 1979, p. 17,

that might lead to the censure dealt an unwed mother. Catherine stated that very few single women got pregnant. "They knew their bounds—in fact, they knew that the fathers and mothers would kill them." Yet she did not feel restricted. "We were allowed to mingle. We didn't think anything of going with the boys back and forth to school. They'd come to our house and stay there. We had an old phonograph, and we played that old phonograph, danced." Even in the dance halls, young women policed themselves. As Mae Mucahy recalled: "If you went in a dance hall and you seen a girl with a cigarette or taking a drink, you'd get in another corner, way way down in another corner. That was a no-no."<sup>29</sup>

**A**lthough dating was on the rise in the 1920s, young women often entertained themselves in their own company or with their families. Ice skating, movies, camping trips, card parties, and picnics provided an array of inexpensive leisure activities. Independent stenographer Beatrice Bray loved to go for automobile rides, especially in some gentleman's new car, but most of her free time was taken up with church and lodge work, and her dearest wish was to attend the Shriners' convention in Portland. For Nellie Tweet, going to card parties at the Catholic Church in the company of other servants was a real treat. Alma Hileman's parents forbade her and her sister to go to the dance halls, but she remembered, "You had your home parties and theaters and you had your little friends that you went out with." One of the most enjoyable and cheapest forms of entertainment was to walk uptown with other girls, window-shopping and stopping to flirt, just seeing and being seen.<sup>30</sup>

Ethnic and religious celebrations provided other opportunities for entertainment for young people and their families. Olga Sontum recalled that all the Norwegians would gather together and walk to the top of Big Butte to greet Midsummer Day. Serbians observed Serbian Christmas and Easter with rounds of visiting, special services, and meals. The Welsh celebrated St. David's Day on March 1, and the Scots observed Robert Burns's Day on January 25. The Irish staged plays, banquets, and parades in honor of St. Patrick's Day. Lodges and unions held picnics and dances.

transcript, BSBA; Mae Mucahy, interview by Gary Stanton, Butte, August 28, 1979, AFS 20,441, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

30. Beatrice Bray to George Sypher, July 2, 1918, Beatrice Bray Papers, World Museum of Mining, Butte, Montana; Nellie Tweet, interview by Claudia Claque Tweet, Butte, July 24, 1982, OH 555, MHS; Alma E. Hileman, interview by Ray Calkins, Butte, June 27, 1980, p. 9, transcript, BSBA; Pentilla interview, 29–30.

Until 1914, when the Miners' Union collapsed, Miners' Union Day was the summer's main event. All union members in the city paraded through the uptown, and then workers and their families adjourned to Columbia Gardens for a day of games, contests, picnicking, and dancing.<sup>31</sup>

Daughters of immigrants or of marriages between an immigrant and a native-born American formed the single largest category of female workers in Butte in 1920. These young women's experiences in high school and in the workplace—both powerful agents of Americanization—often created a desire to participate in activities frowned upon by their immigrant parents. Ann Pentilla remembered that her father, born in Yugoslavia, was very strict. He forbade her and her sisters to wear cosmetics. Nevertheless, when the girls left the house to go to work, they stopped to make up their faces because "everybody was." Still, they carefully wiped off their lipstick and powder before returning home. Two of Ann's sisters worked as live-in servants and were able to sneak out to dances without her father's knowledge, but she and her other sister "never went around too much." When they did get out, strict rules governed their conduct. She and her sister were mortified one New Year's Eve when their father came to collect them from a lodge party because they had not come home promptly at midnight.<sup>32</sup>

Many immigrant parents tried to balance Americanization with the preservation of their native culture. The process often reversed traditional paths of knowledge between parents and children. Mary Trbovich's mother sent her children to Sunday school so they would learn Serbian, and they in turn taught her to read and write English. In a study of Chinese immigrants in Butte, Rose Hum Lee cites the case of a woman who described herself as "a prisoner for ten years in a land that was hailed for its individual freedom." By custom she was forbidden to leave her home. When her children were grown, they defied their father and took her uptown to see the city. As a gesture of independence she began discarding her Chinese dresses and accumulating a Western wardrobe in spite of her husband's disapproval.<sup>33</sup>

When women had money for entertainment, they were more likely to spend it on a movie ticket than on admission to a dance hall. By 1931 there were more than seven thousand theater seats in Butte, and when a new

31. Olga Sontum, interview by Ray Calkins, February 1980, p. 36, transcript, BSBA; Anaconda *Standard*, January 14, 1917, February 20, 1920.

32. Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census*; Pentilla interview, 12, 21–22.

33. Mary Trbovich, interview by Mary Murphy, Butte, November 4, 1987, BSBA; Rose Hum Lee, *The Chinese in the United States of America* (Hong Kong, 1960), 193.

show opened at the Rialto the ticket line clogged the sidewalk for a block. Catherine Hoy recalled that for the clerks at Symons, sitting through a double feature with a sack of popcorn or candy was the “height of our amusement.” Nellie Tweet went to the movies and out for ice cream not with a beau but with the young daughter of her employers, and Julia McHugh’s eldest sister regularly escorted her siblings to the show. Although they might not attend movies with boyfriends, it was the vision of heterosexual romance that attracted young women. George Hodge, a strict Methodist from Cornwall, forbade his daughter Inez to dance, but he let her attend the movies. Inez went to the show every week and loved the romances best because she “could just sit there and dream.” Mary MacLane once told an interviewer that she had “paid 15 cents on several thousand afternoons in the far wilds of my native Butte in order to translate me from the somber colors of myself to the passionate prisms of life as presented by various directors.” Many of Butte’s young women shared MacLane’s desire to be transported from the daily life of a mining town to the romantic environs portrayed on the screen.<sup>34</sup>

Irish maids, Croatian bookkeepers, Serbian clerks, and Chinese schoolgirls—each awaited her own Rudolph Valentino or, even better, envisioned herself on the silver screen. Stardom did not seem outside the realm of possibility. Mary MacLane who made a movie in 1917, was too eccentric to be taken seriously, but Violet Bowen, a Butte girl who made good in Hollywood, fed youthful fantasies. In September 1926 the Butte *Miner* informed its readers that Bowen was about to have her back insured for \$100,000. The previous June she had won a bathing beauty contest in Dallas, in August she received a silver cup for having the most perfect athletic figure in Los Angeles, and a month later she won the Los Angeles “perfect spine” contest. Bowen starred in western pictures, acknowledging that her background had helped her career because Montana cowpunchers had taught her to sit a horse.<sup>35</sup>

Like movies, beauty contests also fed romantic fantasies. Summer visitors to Columbia Gardens cast their

votes for the Pansy Queen, and in 1928 the VFW announced that it would sponsor a Miss Butte contest. Contestants had to be sixteen years old and of good character. The Miss Butte contest had a distinctly western flavor. The winner received not only a new Graham-Paige sedan but also a trip to Tulsa, Oklahoma, and a chance to become Queen Petroleum. As it turned out, the winner was not the most poised, charming, and beautiful girl in Butte but the one who sold the most tickets to the “Siege of 1918,” a fireworks drama presented by the VFW to outfit its new drum corps.<sup>36</sup>

**T**he Miss Butte contest was emblematic, for romance ran up against reality time after time for young women of the 1920s. Even the films of the period bore a mixed message. Although they touted the independence of wage-earning flappers, they made it clear that this was but a short phase of a woman’s life. Glamorous heroines were “hot” but “chaste at heart” and always preserved their virginity until marriage, which was, after all, the point of all that flirtation. Women’s true happiness, according to the movies, came when she outgrew her youthful fling and married.<sup>37</sup>

Like the film flappers who found happiness in marriage to men of their own class, Butte’s young working women looked forward to marriage to miners or other working men. Marriage was both a joyous event and a sobering moment. Some women, like Ann Pentilla, took advantage of their economic independence and delayed marriage. Ann, the last of her sisters to marry, mused, “I think when you’re young . . . you don’t care whether you marry or not . . . you have a good job, buying your own clothes and you’re independent and you don’t care.” Others shared Catherine Hoy’s opinion that if a woman was nineteen and unwed, people considered her a spinster.<sup>38</sup>

The weddings of many working-class women were modest affairs, and the realities of housework and children quickly dampened the romance of courtship. Saima Myllymaki remembered that after she married

34. *Butte City Directory*, 1931; Frank Carden, “A Walk from 228 S. Gaylord Street to Park and Main Streets and Beyond in Butte, Montana, in the 1920s and 1930s,” p. 5, typescript, ca. 1987, BSBA; Hoy interview, 14–15; Tweet interview; McHugh, “Gulch and I,” 15; Inez Shifty, interview by Mary Murphy, Butte, October 14, 1987, BSBA; Wheeler, “Montana’s ‘Lit’ry Lady,” 31.

35. *Butte Miner*, September 13, 1926.

36. *Butte Miner*, August 8, 1922, September 21, 1919, July 29, September 13, 1928.

37. Mary P. Ryan, “Projection of a New Womanhood: The Movie Moderns in the 1920s,” in *Our American Sisters: Women in American Life and Thought*, ed. Jean E. Friedman and William G. Shade (Boston, 1973), 373–74.

38. Pentilla interview, 32; Hoy interview, 17.

39. Myllymaki interview; McHugh, “Gulch and I,” 11.

40. See Caroline Bancroft, “Folklore of the Central City District, Colorado,” *California Folklore Quarterly*, 4 (October 1945), 315–42; Joe H. Duffy, *Butte Was Like That* (Butte, 1941); Wayland D. Hand, “The Folklore, Customs, and Traditions of the Butte Miner,” *California Folklore Quarterly*, 5 (January 1946), 1–25, and *ibid.*, 5 (April 1946), 153–78; and Andrew Vázsonyi, “The *Cicisbeo* and the Magnificent Cuckold: Boardinghouse Life and Lore in Immigrant Communities,” *Journal of American Folklore*, 91 (April–June 1978), 641–56; Diane Sands, “Using Oral History to Chart the Course of Illegal Abortions in Montana,” *Frontiers*, 7 (no. 1, 1983), 32–37. Montana’s birth rate is charted in Montana State Board of Health, *1954 Annual Statistical Supplement*, tables 1, 3.

and began a family her husband went on contract work in the mines. At the end of his workday he was so tired that "there was no such a thing as wanting to go dancing." Julia McHugh shopped for her wedding dress on her lunch hour, and a few days before her wedding discovered that her parish priest intended to kill two birds with one stone by graduating the eighth-grade class at her wedding mass. She moved the ceremony to Friday, necessitating a change in the wedding feast. Guests toasted the newlyweds with moonshine and dined on tuna and cheese. She and her sister spent the morning of her wedding day cleaning the house, and after the reception she and her husband Tom drove to Great Falls for a brief honeymoon. They had to be back Sunday night for Tom to go to work.<sup>39</sup>

When daughters became wives and mothers they had to negotiate, with husbands rather than parents, the disposition of money, work, and leisure. Marriage brought a new set of pleasures, responsibilities, and choices. A rich Butte folklore concerning wives' infidelity and occasional newspaper accounts of women's adultery suggest that not all sexual experimentation ceased with marriage. Birth control allowed women choices in and outside the bonds of marriage. Catholic Butte frowned upon birth control and abortion, but some women chose to limit their family's size. Montana's birthrate declined steadily from 1915 to 1933. Throughout the interwar years there was at least one abortionist working in Butte.<sup>40</sup>

The generation of women who came of age during World War I and the 1920s brought new experiences to their adulthood. Some had stepped into men's shoes during the war, gaining a sense of self-confidence and a taste of economic independence. Nearly all had participated to some extent in the revolution of manners and morals that accompanied the war and the following decade. Yet few opted for roles other than wife and mother.

Of all the leisure activities that engaged young women in the 1920s, the one that attracted the least attention by concerned authorities was perhaps inherently the most revolutionary. Window-shopping and sidewalk flirting typified the changing

Mary MacLane (above, 1917) represented the most extreme challenge to the model of "true womanhood" in Butte, but most young Butte women lived life at the more "respectable" end of the scale, like the piano player in the jazz combo (right) that performed live at Butte's KGIR radio studio in the 1930s.

nature of urban life in the 1910s and 1920s and the role women played in that change. Dallying in front of display windows, women announced themselves as independent wage-earners and consumers. Their dress, their assertive presence on the sidewalk, and their flirtatious manners proclaimed their right to share the street—and by extension movie theaters, dance halls, restaurants, and nightclubs—with men and to do so on their own terms. Never as outrageous as Mary MacLane, still, their defiance of Victorian standards of modesty and manners inspired concern and protest. Behavior that at one time was labeled immoral, and even psychotic, became merely frivolous. Eventually, it became the norm, as it was adopted more and more widely.

As daughters of a mining city, Butte's young women knew the perils and pleasures of a boom-and-bust town. They were often rowdy and exuberant, absorbing the devil-may-care atmosphere of Butte. Yet, the trappings of flappers draped the frames of women who sought husbands, families, and stability. Most went on to marry and had little time for dance halls. New concerns occupied their energies, and they had to learn to deal with men on a different basis. Men would also have to learn to deal differently with women during the 1920s and 1930s, together forging a community more responsive to the needs of both sexes. *M*

MARY MURPHY, associate professor of history, Montana State University, Bozeman, is coauthor of *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (1987). She is also the author of a number of articles on Montana, western, and women's history. This article is drawn from *Mining Cultures: Men, Women, and Leisure in Butte, 1914-41* from the University of Illinois Press (December 1996).



Chicago Tribune, November 11, 1917



MHS Photograph Archives, Helena