

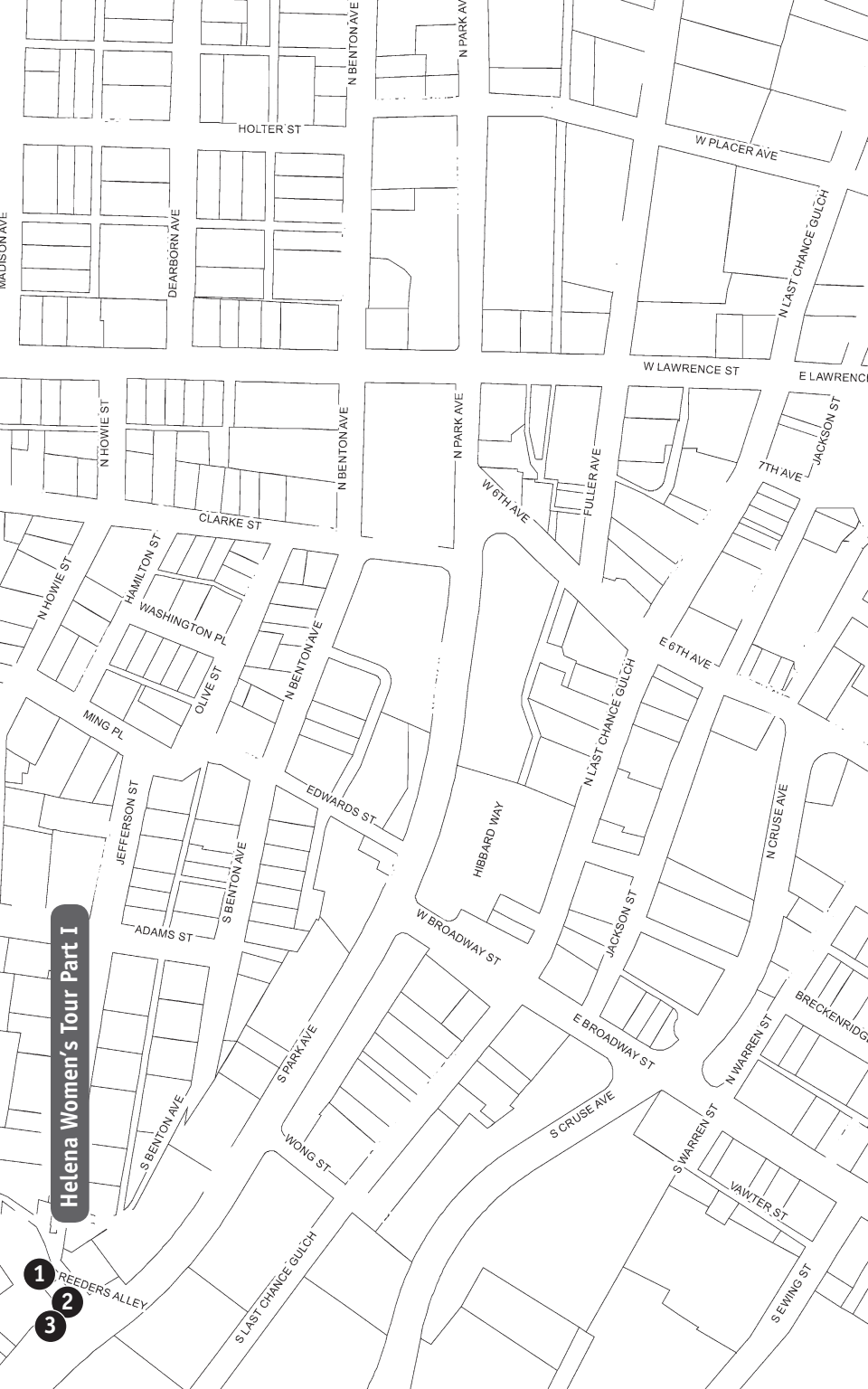
# *Historic Helena*

WOMEN'S WALKING TOURS



# Helena Women's Tour Part I

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# Helena Women's Tour Part I

## 1. Reeder's Alley/The Stone House (131 Reeder's Alley)

While Reeder's Alley's tiny apartments were always home to single men—first miners, then laborers, and finally elderly pensioners—one woman stands out in the alley's history.

Laura Duchesnay was born in France, and she and her husband collected rents from the tenants in Reeder's Alley. Duchesnay was known in the neighborhood as a bird doctor. She could heal the broken wings of wild birds that local children brought her. Duchesnay also bred and sold canaries by the hundreds, advertising "Canary Birds for Sale: Excellent Singers!" During her residence in Helena from 1919 to her death in 1933, Duchesnay apparently also worked with her husband selling moonshine, which they kept in a room beneath the building.

This was during Prohibition, and people knew to line up at the Duchesnays during certain days of the month. There was always the danger that the revenue officer would come around and ask questions. So on those days, Laura brought out her many cages of canaries. If anyone asked why there was a line to her place in the alley, her customers could say, "We are just here to buy Laura's canaries." Her little songbirds served as a convenient front for quite a different enterprise.

## 2. Pioneer Cabin (210 S. Park Ave.)

Louanna Butts traveled to Montana from Missouri with her husband and three daughters. Her brother-in-law, miner Wilson Butts, built the cabin's back portion in 1864. Louanna and her family followed in the spring of 1865 and built the front portion of the cabin.

Louanna Butts brought the first window glass, packed in sawdust, to Last Chance Gulch. She also brought a cow, all the way from Missouri, tied to the back of the wagon. Miners knew her as the best butter-maker in the region, and she sold

her product for \$2.50 a pound. She would pack the butter in salt and put it in a dugout cellar to keep it sweet.

The Butts family moved on in 1867, and the cabin's second occupants were newlyweds Louella Fergus and Stephen Gilpatrick. Louella planted the first non-native trees in the front yard, brought in coffee cans as tiny seedlings. Everyone told her locust trees would not grow in Montana. But she nurtured those little trees, and they became the parent trees of many in the region. In photographs of the area from the 1880s, the two trees provide the only shade in the neighborhood. Today the two huge locust stumps sit between the Pioneer Cabin and the Caretaker's House (see site 3).

Former Montana First Lady Grace Erickson rallied the community to form the Last Chance Restoration Association in 1938 to save the Pioneer Cabin. The Association purchased this cabin and the Caretaker's House next door. Mrs. Erickson spearheaded the efforts to clean up the property, solicit donated items, and open a museum that is still intact today, under state ownership. The Pioneer Cabin Museum was one of the first preservation efforts in the West, accomplished long before Charles Bovey's efforts to save Virginia City began in 1944.

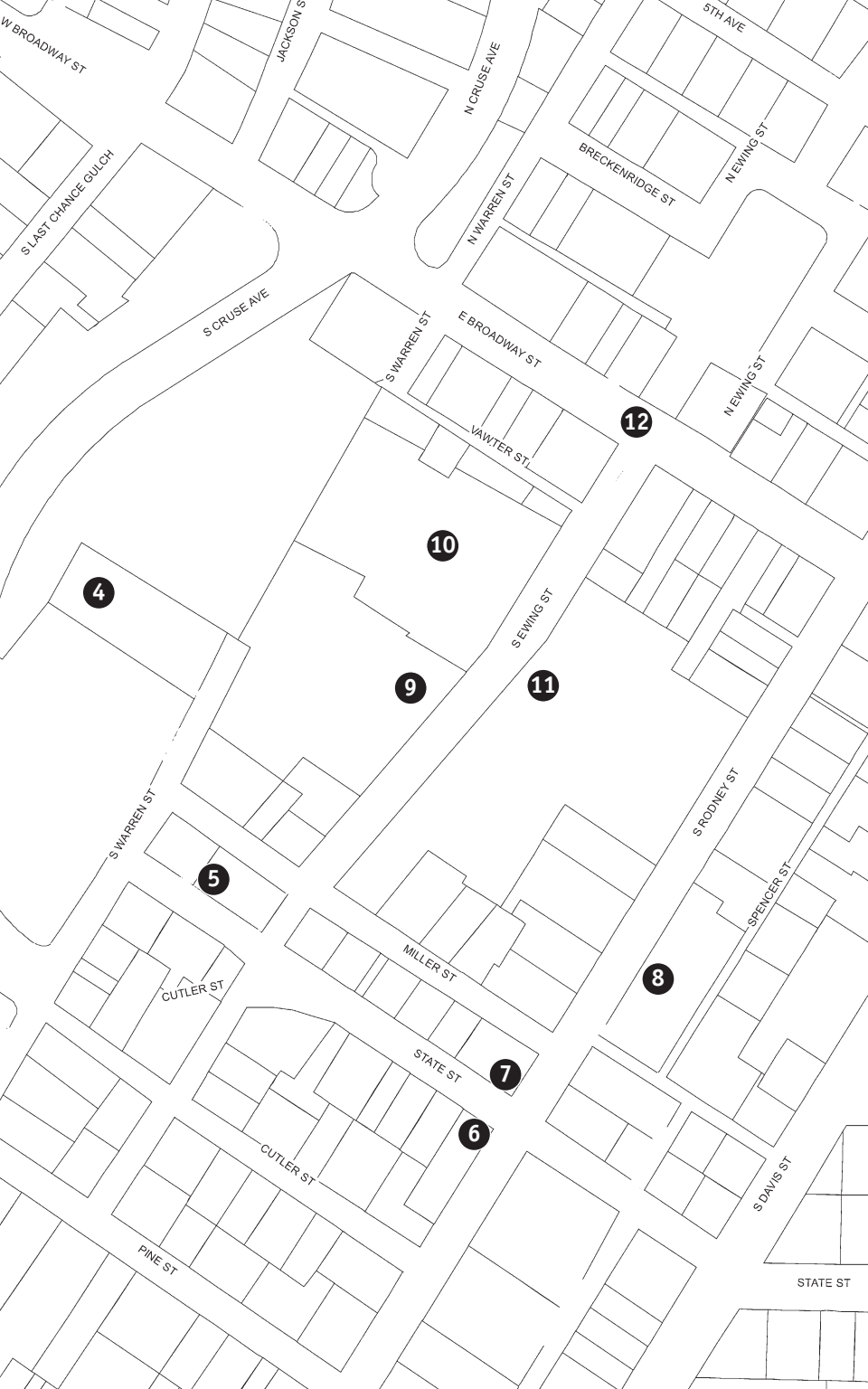


Courtesy Robinson family

Louanna Butts

### 3. Caretaker's House (212 S. Park Ave.)

Sallie Davenport, later Mrs. A. J. Davidson, was eight years old when her family arrived from Missouri at Fort Benton via the steamboat *St. Johns*. In a detailed reminiscence, Sallie tells how one sibling, Rice, died before the steamboat left Liberty Landing, Missouri, in the spring of 1865. Measles aboard the ship sickened many children, including Sallie, her brother



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S LAST CHANCE GULCH  
S CRUSE AVE  
JACKSON S  
N CRUSE AVE  
5TH AVE  
BRECKENRIDGE ST  
N EWING ST  
N WARREN ST  
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Willie, and sister Anna. Willie died as the boat docked. Her mother made Anna a bed in the freight wagon. They traveled to Helena and moved into this cabin that summer. Anna died in September, leaving Sallie, once one of four children, an only child.

Sallie recalled that the dirt roof “dripped for days” after a good rain. This and other cabins along the gulch served as temporary housing.

By the mid-1880s, the cabin had become the southern boundary of the low-rent red-light district, where cabins and cribs (one-room “offices” from which prostitutes worked) stretched from here to just north of the library. Dozens, perhaps hundreds, of anonymous women worked in the neighborhood. This cabin, rehabilitated for the Pioneer Cabin’s caretakers in the late 1930s, is the only nineteenth-century brothel still standing in Helena.

#### **4. Bluestone House (80 S. Warren St.)**

Lillie McGraw was a wealthy Helena madam who, along with Chicago Joe Hensley and Mollie Byrnes, vied for control of Helena’s red-light enterprises. Chicago Joe’s “Coliseum” was across Miller (then Wood) Street and just to the west, while Mollie Byrnes’s “The Castle” was kitty-corner across the street at Joliet and Miller.

McGraw attempted to build this residence in 1889 near her place of business. Her elegant parlor house, which she claimed was nothing more than a “hotel” for young women, sat below the Bluestone House at the base of the hill at the end of Joliet Street. The women Lillie McGraw employed were highly transient, moving from city to city via the Northern Pacific Railroad.

During the home’s construction, McGraw lost her fortune, and the architect, James Stranahan, died. The lien on the property fell to Stranahan’s widow, Leona Smith Stranahan. She immediately sold the house, which was never finished and never lived in.

McGraw died nine years later in 1898, soon after exploratory surgery revealed cirrhosis of the liver. Wood Street, now

known as Miller Street, had such stigma attached to it that the city renamed it circa 1972.

### 5. Mollie Byrnes House (212 State St.)

The flamboyant architecture of this 1887 duplex mirrors the life of its first owner, one of several wealthy madams who vied to dominate Helena's red-light district. Warren Street was the strict division between the high-class red-light district to the west and respectable residential neighborhoods to the east. Mollie Byrnes built her home so she could easily access her business, two blocks to the west, roughly where the apartment high-rise is today. Byrnes's elegant parlor house, "The Castle," was renowned for its beautiful women and luxurious furnishings.



MHS Photograph Archives, PAC 85-9

Molly Byrnes's parlor

Mollie Byrnes aspired to distance herself from the business. She sold The Castle in 1899, but she never gained the middle-class respectability she so desired. Byrnes died of acute alcoholism in 1900 at the age of forty-two. Her husband of only a few months inherited her property. Some believed that he plied her with alcohol and coerced her into signing the will leaving him her property. Despite its thirteen exterior

doorways, this building was always a home and never a house of prostitution.

### **6. Lucy Healy House (331 State St.)**

Lucy Healy exemplifies the pioneer spirit that allowed many women to survive when the odds were stacked against them. She and her husband, Humphrey, bought and settled on this piece of property at the corner of Bridge (now State) and Rodney Streets in the 1870s.

One day in 1876, Humphrey left Helena with a load of wood that he said he was taking to Fort Benton to sell. He never returned to Lucy and their seven children. Rumor had it that Humphrey went to Deadwood, South Dakota, where he took up with a lewd woman and moved with her to Colorado.

Although Humphrey every once in a while sent money to Lucy and the children, she never saw him again. In 1881, court records show that Lucy took the matter into her own hands and filed for divorce. The judge not only granted her request, but also decreed her sole owner of their property. Lucy promptly sold the land and made a new start.

As did many divorcees of the time, she thereafter represented herself as a widow. She and her children remained in Helena for several more decades, where each one grew to adulthood and established his or her own household.

### **7. Toole Residence #1 (102 S. Rodney St.)**

In May 1890, Montana's first governor, Helena trial lawyer and territorial statesman Joseph Kemp Toole, brought his bride Lily to live in the family home on Rodney Street. Despite her homesickness for her family in Ohio, under Lily's direction the executive residence became "one of the most delightful homes in Helena."

Lily Toole was a skilled horticulturist and planted some of Helena's first lilacs in the yard. They reminded her of her childhood home back east. She also planted an apple tree for each of her three sons. In 1898 the youngest boy, seven-year-old Rosecrans, died of diphtheria. Two weeks later, Lily's beloved father passed away.



J. K. Toole was again elected governor in 1900, and Lily's sister Anita Rosecrans became his private secretary. In 1903, Rosecrans died suddenly of pneumonia (see site 20). Lily was devastated, but remained a regal first lady and gracious hostess.



MHS Photograph Archives, 945-340

Lily Toole

### **8. May Butler Center (55 S. Rodney St.)**

May Butler was born in the little Carpenter Gothic cottage perched on the hillside at the end of South Benton Avenue. You can still see its pointy roof and delicate scalloped gingerbread trim from a number of vantage points.

Butler was a longtime School District #1 teacher. She was a formidable figure to students who misbehaved

and was known for whacking them when their attention wandered, but the children loved her. Her tiny hands and feet contrasted sharply with her three-hundred-pound frame. Former pupils claimed that when you were little and saw that hand coming at you, it looked huge.

Butler was genuinely ambidextrous, amazing students by writing on the board simultaneously with both hands. Any time a student brought goodies, she would make sure everyone had some, but she would always say, "Save the biggest piece for me." And she was fearless and daring. Butler was one of the first passengers to fly over MacDonald Pass circa 1912, at a time when passengers had to be strapped aboard the open airplane.

Butler taught at Emerson School, in one of Helena's poorest neighborhoods, for thirty years. She ran it like a mission, doling out donated clothing to those who were truly in need, even buying dresses for girls who couldn't afford them.

May Butler died in 1954, and in 1957 Helena remembered her by naming this building, formerly Emerson School, after her. The May Butler Center now houses the offices of School District #1.

### **9. Immaculata Hall (32 S. Ewing St.)**

Originally built as St. Aloysius Boys School in 1890, the curious juxtaposition of school and red-light district allowed the boys a bird's-eye view of the comings and goings below. By 1900, the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth (see site 10) taught the boys' classes.

In 1940, the sisters opened a school of nursing on the upper two floors under the auspices of Carroll College. At this time the college was for men only. Women were not allowed to take classes on campus, and so the school and dormitory were housed in Immaculata Hall. The sisters took turns patrolling the halls at night, making sure no student nurses got into mischief.

This was the first effort at introducing a coeducational curriculum at Carroll. The nursing program, which operated into the 1960s, served as a preclinical training program for student nurses, who then took their practical courses at Montana's several Catholic teaching hospitals.

### **10. Tower Hill Apartments (24 S. Ewing St.)**

Five Catholic Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, Kansas, arrived in Helena by stagecoach in 1869. They came at the urging of newspaper editor Peter Ronan and local Catholic priests who all believed that the rough mining camp needed a positive female influence.

The sisters' three-fold mission was to teach children, tend the sick, and care for orphans. The first Catholic institutions in Montana Territory soon spread over this gentle hilltop, beginning with St. Vincent's Academy for Girls (1870). St. John's Hospital (1873) and St. Joseph's orphanage (1881) were among the other institutions they founded on Catholic Hill. The 1935 earthquakes destroyed the hospital and infants' home as well



as the sisters' convent and girls' school across Ewing Street (see site 11).

The sisters were a long-standing presence in Helena, fulfilling all three of their missions and touching many Montana communities. The health care system they founded today serves patients in Catholic hospitals across the West, including in Butte, Billings, and Miles City in Montana.

### 11. St. John's Building (25 S. Ewing St.)

The Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth established the first boarding school for white girls at this location in 1872. The school, student dormitory, convent, and gardens covered most of the block. The sisters accepted both day and boarding students, and, as early Helenans had hoped, they were an important influence in the lives of girls for more than sixty years.

The girls were just getting ready for bed when an earthquake struck the Helena valley in October 1935. Loss of electricity plunged the building into total darkness. The sisters safely led the girls from the second floor in the pitch dark. All the girls reached the street without incident. The next morning, the



MHS Photograph Archives, 955-522

St. John's Hospital, 1897



sisters were stunned to discover that the path they had taken was the only safe way out. One wall had fallen away, and had they taken the other route, they would have stepped out into nothing. The sisters believed that Providence guided them.

The earthquakes claimed most of the buildings on Catholic Hill, including St. John's Hospital, which the sisters immediately rebuilt on this site where the girls' school once stood. The new St. John's Hospital opened in 1939 and served the community until the 1960s. Today it houses offices, but the building is a reminder of the important work the Sisters of Charity performed for the community.

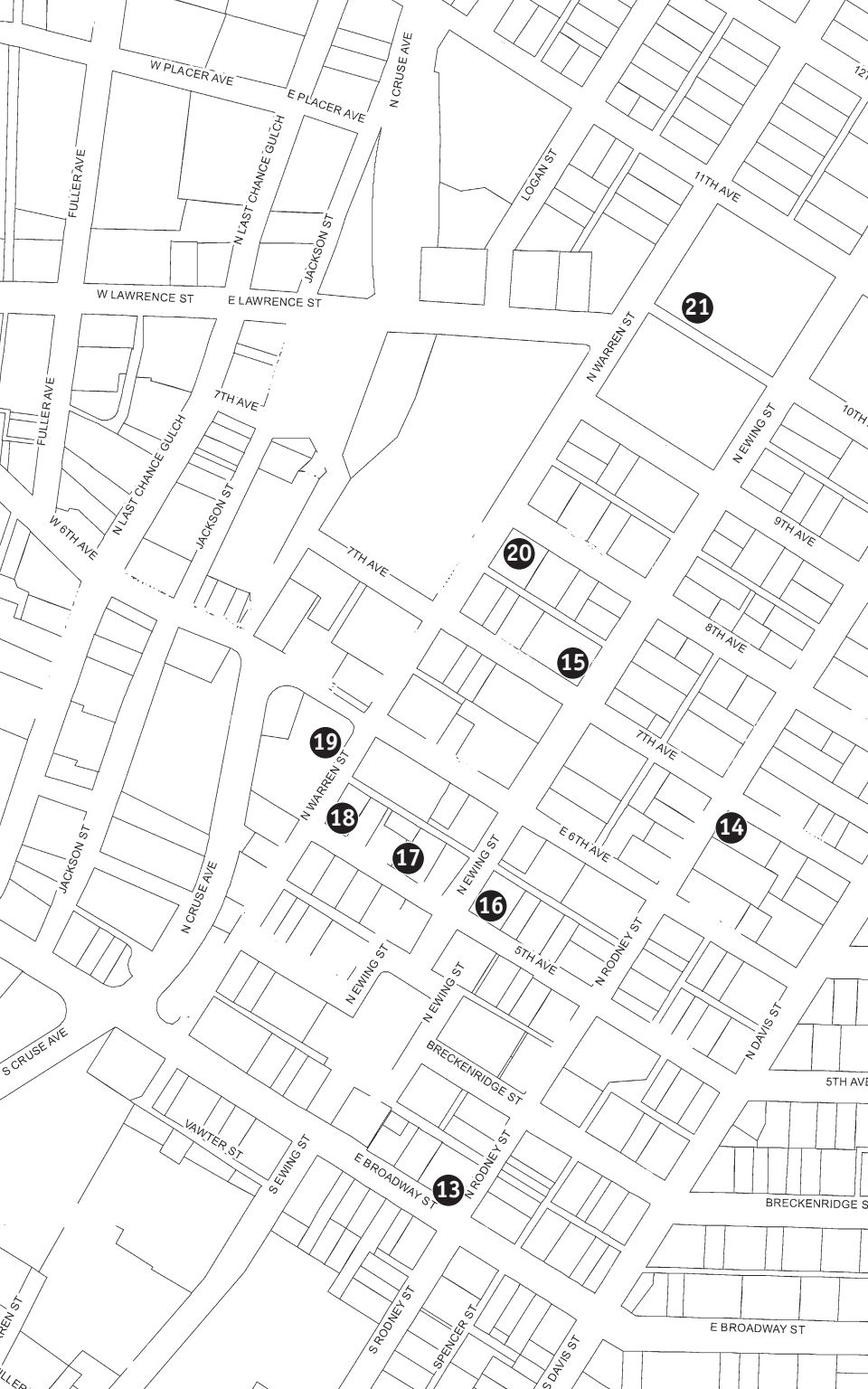
## 12. Broadway Hill (Ewing and Broadway Sts.)

Mary Ronan, in her reminiscence, *Girl from the Gulches*, left wonderful descriptions of Helena from 1865 to 1869. She discusses sledding and how that was a sport forbidden to girls, especially on public streets. Mary remembered one special Christmas Eve. She and her friends brought evergreens to the Catholic church that stood along South Ewing Street where the Tower Hill Apartments are today. After an afternoon of decorating, they came back out into the frosty air. Charlie Curtis took hold of a branch of one of the cut fir trees and invited Mary to coast down the Broadway Hill. She stepped onto the thick branches while a young man on each side took her hand to steady her. Charlie pulled the tree to the top of the hill, hopped on, and away they went on a forbidden ride. For Mary, it was an exhilarating adventure and the best Christmas present she ever received.



Mansfield Library, UM

Mary Ronan



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### 13. Hedges Residence (320 Broadway St.)

Masons formed the backbone of early Montana Territory, and Cornelius Hedges is credited as the father of Masonry in Montana. Less well known is his wife, Edna Hedges (1836–1912), who made equally important contributions to the Order of the Eastern Star (OES), the women’s Masonic counterpart. OES was one of the early, strong women’s organizations that bound women and communities together. Edna L. Hedges is considered the mother of the OES in Montana, founded in Helena in 1880. She and others signed the petition for dispensation to found Miriam Chapter 1 in 1881. Rachel Davenport and her daughter Sallie Davenport Davidson (see site 3), Mary Pauline Holter (see site 37), and numerous others signed the original charter.

In 1898, the women of the OES adopted a resolution to found a home for aged and afflicted Masons, their families, and their orphan children and began raising funds.

Still operating today, the Masonic Home in the Helena valley accepted its first patient on November 2, 1909. Although portraits of two men hang in the foyer, the home is an important legacy of the Eastern Star and the women—including Edna Hedges—who laid much of the groundwork.

### 14. Robert and Elizabeth Fisk Residence (319 N. Rodney St.)

Elizabeth (Lizzie) Chester Fisk came to Montana as a bride in 1867. Her husband, Robert, was a partner in the local newspaper, the *Helena Herald*. The couple “met” while Robert was serving in the Union army. Lizzie Chester, then a Connecticut schoolteacher, pinned a note to a blanket to send to the Union troops. The quartermaster gave the blanket to Robert Fisk, who found her note. After the war, he sought out its author and thus met his future wife. The Fisks were Yankee Republicans, and both Robert and Lizzie were at the forefront of Helena’s political and social scenes.

Lizzie Fisk’s many detailed letters to her family back east provide minute details of life in nineteenth-century Helena. Her copious correspondence offers a look at middle-class



mores, Helena's social scene, and the effects of the frontier on an educated, middle-class woman.

Lizzie Fisk worked hard to reproduce a Victorian-era ambience on the Montana frontier. She was active in the Women's Christian Temperance Union, visited the poor and destitute, and was active in the Methodist Church. However, her husband's frequent absences, isolation, and rearing six children essentially alone changed her views from an opponent of woman suffrage to a supporter of the cause. Her letters have been edited and published by Rex Myers in *Lizzie: The Letters of Elizabeth Chester Fisk, 1864–1893*.

### **15. Sanders B&B (328 N. Ewing St.)**

Harriet Sanders, wife of attorney and state senator Wilbur Fisk Sanders, came to Montana in 1863. Her colorful commentary on the early mining camps at Bannack, Virginia City, and Helena—found in *Biscuits and Badmen*—are a valuable record of primitive conditions and pioneer adaptability. Her enthusiasm is contagious, and her adventures make for good reading.

Harriet Sanders was an advocate for women's rights and a strong voice in the early Montana suffrage movement. She believed that suffrage made women better mothers. Better mothers kept better homes, and their children were better educated. Better homes and educated children in turn improved the nation.

Sanders was such a staunch suffrage supporter that Susan B. Anthony wrote a personal letter of thanks to her for supporting women's equality.

### **16. Toole Residence #2 (203 N. Ewing St.)**

The Toole family moved into this residence in 1904. It was said that Lily Toole dreaded the move because the house was in a vulnerable location, two blocks north of the Lewis and Clark County courthouse and the county jail.

Her fears were justified. The family had been in the house only six months when an inmate, being escorted from the courthouse to the jail, escaped. Isaac "Ike" Gravelle was a three-



time criminal, most recently convicted of extortion against the Northern Pacific Railroad. A gun battle ensued, and Gravelle took refuge in the Tooles' basement stairwell. Lily and her youngest son were home at the time. Gravelle tried to get in through the basement door, but it was fortunately locked. Authorities claimed Gravelle committed suicide, but others believe the authorities killed him. Either way, he died on the Tooles' basement stairs. It was an unpleasant housewarming.

During this time, the Montana State Capitol was receiving its finishing touches. As Governor Toole oversaw the interior art, Lily Toole played a significant role in the landscape design and saw that many of her favorite lilacs were planted over the grounds. The last of those historic bushes were removed in the 1990s. But the lilacs Lily Toole brought to Helena provided cuttings for many others, and that sweet perfume floating on the breeze in spring is her special gift to her adopted community.

### **17. YWCA (220 Fifth Ave.)**

The Helena chapter of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) organized early in 1911, determined to "serve all Helena women by offering them an opportunity to help themselves and others." By the end of March, three hundred members had paid their dues. The women founders raised funds and rented downtown office space. Dr. Maria Dean, a key founder, hired Frieda Fligelman as secretary. Fligelman was a prominent young member of the Jewish community (see site 19). It was her job to find safe lodging for girls and women, collect information, and counsel girls who were away from home.

The Helena "Y" quickly outgrew its rented office and relocated here to Mrs. Norris's boardinghouse. Once a single-family home, by 1889 this French Second Empire residence was a boardinghouse serving busy courthouse square. Boardinghouse keeper was one of the few employment opportunities for women. In 1910, Marcia Norris was the landlady here. Seventy-year-old Mrs. Norris, a widow, provided meals to her nine boarders, who each had their own sleeping room but shared the two parlors, common dining room, and one bathroom. It was the perfect place for YWCA headquarters.



Women immediately filled its nine sleeping rooms, and members opened a public cafeteria in the dining room. It became a popular, income-generating venture.

When the Helena YWCA incorporated in 1912, members decided not to affiliate with the national YWCA but to remain an independent organization. At that time, the national YWCA allowed only Christian members to participate in chapter management, but not all of the Helena YWCA's founding members were Christian. Frieda Fligelman especially had already done tremendous work for the Helena Y—and remained active after its incorporation. The YWCA was at home here until 1916 (see site 33).

### 18. Harvard Apartments (305 N. Warren St.)

The first three students to graduate from Helena High School in 1879 were all women. The class chose “No Step Backward” as their motto. One of these students, Mary C. Wheeler, went on to become an accomplished artist. She studied at the Boston Conservatory and in Paris under Impressionist masters.

Wheeler returned to Helena, became a high school art teacher, and eventually headed the department. She exhibited her work in New York City galleries. In 1911 she lived in an apartment in this building, but for many years she shared the home of her good friend Dr. Maria Dean (see site 32).

During the 1890s, as Helena's Episcopal women struggled to keep St. Peter's Hospital afloat, a stray mutt, attracted to the smell of good cooking, appeared at the hospital's kitchen

door one day. Dr. Dean directed the women to feed him, and he became a back-door regular. They called him Roger St. Peter. Dr. Dean was so enamored with this stray and his sunny disposition that she persuaded Mary Wheeler to paint his portrait.

The painting was long exhibited in a New York City



Courtesy Peggy Stebbins

Roger St. Peter

gallery, but finally came back to Helena. The lively portrait shows Wheeler's artistic skill. It still hangs in a hallway of St. Peter's Hospital.

### **19. Analeaigh Apartments, (320–348 N. Warren St.)**

Frieda Fligelman was a longtime resident of this apartment building. Fligelman was the first woman admitted to the study of political science at Columbia University. In 1917, she passed her doctoral exams, but Columbia denied her the degree because her field of study—sociolinguistics—was not recognized as a formal discipline. It was a bitter disappointment, but Fligelman went on to study in Paris, London, Berlin, and Palestine and learned to speak three languages.

Fligelman realized that Helena, Montana, on her name tag at scientific conventions repelled those who thought that great minds were only found in big cities. So she invented the Institute of Social Logic. Her own two apartments long served as Institute headquarters, where she worked at a tireless pace.

Downtown, wearing her purple beret, she would “hold court” with friends and neighbors gathered around her for scholarly conversation. It was her conviction that the news media was a great conspiracy to make us a nation of nitwits. Perhaps this is why she was especially well known to the *Independent Record* reporters who, after working late, made a habit of glancing up at her window, where the light always burned far into the night.

Fligelman translated several books used in university graduate courses, and she wrote more than a thousand poems, published academic articles, and taught social statistics at Mills College. In 1976, when Fligelman was eighty-six, her lifelong field of study gained international recognition, and a volume of essays, published in Belgium, was dedicated to her.

She loved her chosen path and never considered herself a martyr in the intellectual community, but felt it was her moral obligation to follow what she believed in. Fligelman said, “I didn't learn anything that anybody else couldn't learn. I just consider it fascinating, and they consider it work.” Frieda





Frieda Fligelman's Grave, Home of Peace Cemetery

Fligelman died in 1978. Her tombstone in the Home of Peace reads simply, “Academe.”

## 20. First Baptist Church (201 Eighth Ave.)

Women were prominent and active members of the early Baptist church that organized in 1880. Along with Hattie Haight, who operated the Immanuel Mission (see site 34), Frances Bliss worked on South Main Street, ministering to Helena's substantial Chinese population. She organized a school where she taught Chinese immigrants English, history, and other subjects. In 1894, Miss Bliss traveled as a Baptist missionary to Shanghai, China, where she remained for several years.

Among the prominent Baptists were former territorial governor Preston Leslie, his wife Mary, and their children. The Leslies' daughter, Emily, served as church organist. When she died of pneumonia in 1900, the congregation purchased a very fine Barckhoff Tracker organ, which was dedicated to Emily's memory in 1901.

Anita Rosecrans, sister of Lily Toole (see sites 7 and 16), was a gifted musician and served as organist after Emily Leslie's death. Rosecrans was a former Ursuline nun and devout Catholic. On Sundays she played the celebrated Barckhoff



Mary Maupin Leslie

Tracker organ after attending her own Catholic services. In 1903, Rosecrans's sudden death from pneumonia devastated the entire community. In addition to a Catholic funeral, a special service was held at the Baptist church. Hundreds attended the memorial. In his eulogy, Reverend James McNamee called Anita Rosecrans's passing "a public loss."

### **21. St. Helena Cathedral (Lawrence and Warren Sts.)**

Mary Margaret Cruse, fondly known as Mamie, deserves mention because Helena can thank her for one of its most beautiful ornaments. Her father, Thomas Cruse, the mining magnate who donated much of the money that built St. Helena Cathedral, married Margaret Carter in 1886 and, ten months later, became a single parent when his wife died following the birth of their daughter.

Cruse so overprotected his only child that she rebelled in the worst possible ways. When Mamie was young, Thomas kept her with him constantly, taking her to his bank where she played under his desk instead of going to school. At the end of the day, Thomas would take her to the Montana Club, where she would do a quaint little clog dance on the bar. In return, at her father's request, the bartender would pour her a thimbleful of crème de menthe. This proved to be an unfor-

tunate reward, for when she grew up, Mamie spent the better part of her time in roadhouse bars.

Mamie was married, divorced, and married again. Thomas, a strict Catholic, refused to acknowledge her divorce or her second husband. In 1913, police plucked Mamie from a Butte roadhouse and sent her home to Helena. Thomas gave her into the care of the sisters at the House of the Good Shepherd, a home for the rehabilitation of “wayward” girls. Folks speculated that she was there for something worse than alcohol addiction. After several weeks in the sisters’ care, they returned Mamie to her father’s Benton Avenue mansion, where she died a few days later. Bright’s disease, a respectable illness, is what is listed as the cause of death. But everyone knew better, and Thomas was heartbroken.

Mamie’s estranged husband dragged Thomas to court contesting her will. Amid scandal and speculation that involved testimony from the mother superior of the House of the Good Shepherd and Bishop Carroll himself, the judge ruled in Thomas’s favor, allowing him to keep Mamie’s pitifully few possessions. The following year, 1914, the St. Helena Cathedral was nearly complete when Thomas Cruse bestowed one last gift in memory of his lost daughter. He died soon after, but not before the bells that today ring out from the cathedral spire had been paid for. Cast into each of the fifteen bells, which together weigh nearly nine tons, is this inscription: “in memory of Mary Margaret Cruse by her father, Thomas.” And so the cathedral bells that ring so sweetly over Helena today were long known as “Mamie’s Bells.”

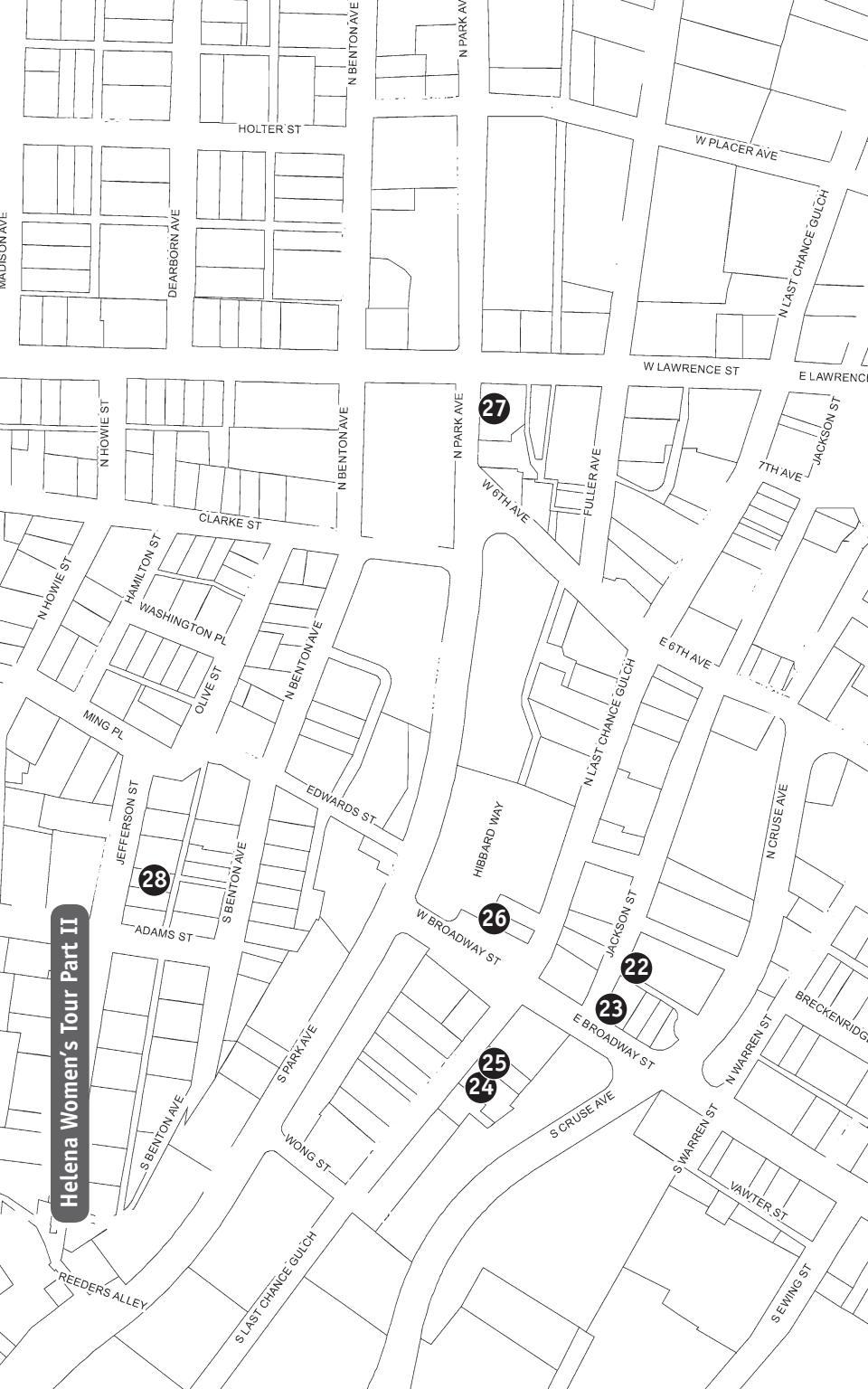


MHS Photograph Archives, 941-807

Mamie Cruse



**Helena Women's Tour Part II**



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## Helena Women's Tour Part II

### 22. Consistory Shrine Temple (15 N. Jackson St.)

John Ming's Opera House was the dream and brainchild of his wife, Catharine, who intended it as a legacy and saw that it happened. The opera house became renowned throughout the West.

Now the Consistory Shrine Temple, in its heyday the Ming Opera House hosted many famous actresses. Among them was Katie Putnam, the reigning theatre queen of stages from New York City to San Francisco in the 1870s and 1880s. She was a longtime sweetheart of the traveling troops that came often to Helena in the early days. When the Ming Opera House opened in 1880, Putnam gave a stunning performance in a dual role in *The Old Curiosity Shop* that brought her back for several curtain calls. During the dedicatory ceremony, Putnam read an original poem recalling the days of primitive accommodations for traveling troops who came to Helena first by steamboat to Fort Benton, then by wagon or stagecoach:

*When first a Pilgrim to this town I came—  
A very fresh and tender-footed dame—  
A Bridge Street cabin was the only stage  
Where Farce could roar, or Tragedy could rage;  
An earthen floor, the sides of unhewn logs,  
We charged for men—admittance free for dogs,  
Where tender love scenes in the tragic lay  
Were interrupted by the pack mule's bray,  
And the prima donna's warble clear  
On the high "C" and upper register,  
Was ruined by the Sunday auctioneer.*

Putnam had a special place in her heart for this difficult-to-access place in Montana Territory. Other famous women performers appearing here included Lillian Russell, acclaimed Shakespearean actress Helena Modjeska (who performed in Polish), and the renowned Sarah Bernhardt.

### 23. Masonic Temple (104 Broadway St.)

Ella Knowles was Montana's first female licensed attorney. Upon statehood in 1889, a statute prohibited women from taking the bar. After much debate, Montana lawmakers amended the statute, allowing Knowles to take the bar exam. She passed and opened her first office here in the Masonic building, where she practiced successfully for several years.

In 1892, Knowles ran on the Populist ticket for attorney general, the second woman in the nation to run for that office. She didn't win—partly because women couldn't yet vote. Her opponent, Henri Haskell, was so impressed with her that he appointed her assistant attorney general after he was elected. They were married and later divorced. In 1902 Knowles moved to Butte, where she became an expert in mining litigation. She died of blood poisoning from a throat infection in 1911. In the spring of 1997, Ella Knowles Haskell was inducted into the Gallery of Outstanding Montanans in the West Wing of the Capitol.

### 24. St. Louis Block (19 S. Last Chance Gulch)

Beginning in 1927, Ida Levy ran one of several red-light establishments in upstairs lodging houses in this block of Last Chance Gulch. Federal laws had closed brothels in 1917, but across Montana, “working” women reemerged in “furnished rooms.” Montanans like to point out that such places never mentioned exactly what was “furnished.”

After Prohibition ended in the 1930s, Ida's Silver Dollar Bar on the ground floor, where the Windbag Saloon and Grill is today, was a favorite hang-out. And her place upstairs never lacked customers. Marks of partitions in the flooring reveal that Ida's included a row



Ida Levy

Courtesy Susan Bazaar



of tiny cubicles called cribs, the least prestigious of all carnal accommodations, ultimately banned by federal law in 1943. Dorothy Baker, known as Big Dorothy, took over the place in the 1950s and eventually owned the building. Customers visiting Dorothy's Rooms entered via a back gate and followed a series of steps down to the back door. Dorothy's accommodations included seven bedrooms and five sitting rooms, connected by long hallways. Each plush bedroom sported a different color velvet bedspread and thick carpeting. A bar she operated on the sly was a favorite after-hours hangout for Helena's bartenders.

At Big Dorothy's infamous back door, paperboys received five-dollar tips and schoolchildren selling fund-raisers—if they dared knock—could count on a sale. Parents used to wonder if the nuns at St. Helena School knew from whence many donations came. Each year at Christmas, Baker bought a hundred dollars' worth of used children's books to donate to the local children's homes. She wrote countless checks to charities and anonymously paid for more than one young person's entire college education. She loaned money without question and tipped off the police to drug pushers. Besides that, she had a clientele that would make more than a few legislators blush.

Dorothy Baker died in 1973, shortly after a final raid. Her bathroom, a 1960s showplace done up in black plastic tiles, green fixtures, and a square tub accommodating Dorothy's ample proportions, survives intact.

## **25. Site of the Novelty Block (13 S. Last Chance Gulch)**

Many Helenans mourned the 1972 demolition of the Novelty Block, which stood roughly where the State Fund Building is today. By the 1920s its upper floors housed shady characters and red-light activities. At a time when the escapades of infamous gangsters like Al Capone dominated the media, this site became the epicenter of Helena's own dramatic crime.

In December 1929, Bobby Kelly and her partner Jean Mills were conducting "business" in their rooms in the Novelty Block. Recently exonerated as an accomplice to a widely publicized bank robbery in Ronan, Kelly probably knew something

others didn't want her to tell. In a gangland-style assault, Mills was shot twice in the face and Bobby Kelly was killed. Helena headlines read: "Gang Silences Girl."

Townsend soft drink parlor and pool hall owner Nick Jancu, a convicted bootlegger, was charged with the murder. During a spectacular trial, women packed the courtroom, swooning over the stylish and handsome defendant. Jean Mills, barely recovered from her injuries, gave dramatic testimony. In the end the jury acquitted Jancu, and Kelly's murder was never solved. Historian Dave Walter wrote the story of Bobby Kelly, "The Woman in White," in *More from the Quarries Volume II*.

## **26. Women's Mural (Broadway St. and North Last Chance Gulch)**

Painted in 1979, the Women's Mural has been a long-standing presence in Helena. Funding came from the Montana Arts Council, the Helena Indian Alliance, President Carter's CETA program, and other sources. Designer Anne Appleby worked with eight teenage girls, teaching them all aspects of research, planning, and design. Many Helena women added their brush strokes to the mural.

The figures include an old woman and a little girl who are the same person, representing the true pioneer as well as time and change in Montana. There's a schoolteacher who brought education and culture to the far reaches of the frontier. Fanny Sperry Steele, the famous bronc-buster on her favorite pinto, stands for independence, grit, courage, determination, and the freedom to be what you want to be. The suffragists, ladies of the evening, a modern housewife, and two musicians underscore the diversity of Helena's women.

The sleeping mother with her newborn baby is central to the mural. The model was Helenan Debi Corcoran and her son Eli, who was born as the mural was being designed. They are wrapped in the quilt of the past, a symbol of things handed down from mother to child and of women coming together in the spirit of community at quilting bees. An eclipse of the sun occurred during the mural's creation, and was such a profound experience that the designers included it. The last panel illustrates the unspoiled wilderness of Montana, the pristine



country loved by everyone who has lived here, and the generations of women who have gone before us.

This history from a feminine point of view was meant to last no longer than twelve years, but thirty-five years later, it still graces the side of the Livestock Building.

### **27. Grandstreet Theatre (325 N. Park Ave.)**

Many prominent women, including Dr. Maria Dean, were members of the progressive Unitarian congregation that built this lovely stone church in 1901. Unitarians believed their churches should serve the community, and so they were usually designed to double as theaters or auditoriums.

Clara Bicknell Hodgkin and her husband, Reverend Edwin Hodgkin, arrived in Helena in 1903. Rev. Hodgkin was the newly appointed pastor to the Unitarian church. Although the Hodgkins had no children, Clara's love for other people's sons and daughters quickly endeared her to the community as she took charge of the Sunday school program.

Clara Hodgkin directed her small students in many dramatic presentations on the stage in the new church. When she died after an illness of several weeks in 1905, her friends took up a collection and commissioned a Tiffany window in her memory. The window hung in the sanctuary until 1933 when the church became the public library. It was removed and forgotten until, by coincidence, it was rediscovered in 1976 and reinstalled in the new Grandstreet Theater. But the story doesn't end there. The strange occurrences and unusual



Clara Hodgkin Wedding Portrait

energy associated with the theater have been written about in several publications and have prompted Grandstreet's inclusion in *Haunted Places: The National Directory*. Many believe that Clara Hodgkin still feels a strong attachment to the theater and watches protectively over the many children who attend its theater school.

### 28. Florence Crittenton Home (22 Jefferson St.)

Helena's second Florence Crittenton Home opened here in 1927 in the abandoned mansion that once stood on this block. Helena women founded the home in 1898 on the city's west-side limits in Kenwood as part of the national Florence Crittenton Mission. It provided a refuge for women and girls in need: prostitutes wishing to start new lives, orphans, unmarried pregnant women—any woman who either wanted to reform or had nowhere else to go.

Montana's first Crittenton home opened in Butte in 1896, but national rules did not allow placing a girl in a Crittenton home in her own community. Butte had so many girls in trouble—working as prostitutes or in danger of joining that lifestyle, or who were pregnant—that its home closed and reopened in Helena. As needs changed and communities matured, the home became a haven for young pregnant



Courtesy/ Florence Crittenton Home



POWER ST

30

HOLTER ST

HARRISON AVE

31

MADISON AVE

DEARBORN AVE

N BENTON AVE

HAYES AVE

MONROE AVE

W LAWRENCE ST

29

HARRISON AVE

N HOWIE ST

CLARKE ST

CURTIS ST

N HOWIE ST

HAMILTON ST

WASHINGTON PL

OLIVE ST

N BENTON AVE

MING PL

MING PL

EDWARDS ST

S HARRISON AVE

S HOWIE ST

ADAMS ST

JEFFERSON ST

S BENTON AVE

SPARK AVE

W BROAD

CARRIAGE LN

REEDERS VILLAGE DR

S BENTON AVE

WONG ST

S EAST CHANCE GULCH

women. By 1927 when the home relocated to this building, the facility included a dormitory, maternity hospital, and day-care program serving as many as thirty local children.

Lena Cullum served as the Crittenton home's beloved matron from 1907 until 1945 and was a fierce protector of the girls and their anonymity. Residents included pregnant young women and wives and widows of servicemen. The FCH, now at 901 Harris Street, continues to provide services for pregnant and parenting teens.

### **29. Marie Ericke Residence (302 N. Harrison Ave.)**

Marie (Madame) Ericke Zimmerman Richards was born in Pressnitz, Bohemia, on October 31, 1867. She arrived in Helena in 1890 with her first husband, Ernest Ericke. She was a noted musician, orchestra leader, and music teacher. In her youth, "Madame" had played before kings and queens across Europe. She came to Helena at a time when musical talent was scarce and money plentiful. Madame played in all the local musical houses and theatrical venues and in the private homes of Helena's elite. She had several orchestras, including one that was all women. No social affair was of any consequence without the presence of Madame Ericke and the haunting strains of her violin.

Madame outlived three husbands and died alone and impoverished in 1945 with only her Stradivarius violin and her memories. Long after her death, her name was spoken in hushed tones—not because of the fates of her three husbands—but with reverence for the beloved teacher who inspired hundreds of young Helena musicians.

### **30. Prescott Residence (512 Harrison Ave.)**

Mary Prescott (1864–1934) was a beautiful, soft-spoken woman who hardly ever raised her voice in anger. She raised five children and, even during those busy years, was always active in the community. She held her own as the first woman to serve on the Helena Public School Board and was on the first board of the Montana Children's Home, today's Shodair Children's Hospital. For thirty years, one of her jobs was to

sign the adoption papers placing children of the home. She and her husband donated the land upon which the old Shodair Hospital on Helena Avenue sits. After Mary Prescott died in 1934, her daughter found a worn newspaper clipping among her things, which captured Prescott's personal philosophy: "One ship sails east, another west, propelled by the selfsame blow/It's the set of the sails and not the gales that bids them where to go."

### **31. Kirkendall Residence (407 Madison Ave.)**

Isabella Kirkendall was one of Helena's little known, unsung heroes. No woman was more active in the community, nor more sensitive to the needs of those less fortunate. Kirkendall was a charter member and pillar of the Helena chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), a founder of the Florence Crittenton Home, and the home's first president. She and secretary Anna Boardman often paid maternity fees out of their own pockets and walked from their west-side residences to the home, then on Hauser Boulevard out in Kenwood. They spent hours doing laundry, cleaning, and other household chores.

Isabella was a devout member of the First Baptist Church (see site 20), a matron of the Order of the Eastern Star, and a provisional president of the Woman's Relief Corps of the Grand Army of the Republic. She was also a member of the National Red Cross and a friend of its founder, Clara Barton.

Kirkendall died in 1919 after an exceptional and long career of volunteer service to the Helena community.

### **32. Maria Dean Residence (626 N. Benton Ave.)**

Dr. Maria Dean graduated from the Boston School of Medicine in the early 1880s and further trained abroad, where she endured great prejudice from her male classmates. She came to Helena in the mid-1880s to join her sister, Adelaide Dean Child.

At the end of 1885, a diphtheria epidemic raged throughout Helena. Dr. Dean was the newly appointed head of the local board of health. As newspapers observed the Christmas



season, they encouraged everyone to “let the churches be crowded.” Dr. Dean understood contagion, but it was a new concept for the community. Amid much public outcry, Dr. Dean placed quarantine flags on houses where diphtheria was present and prohibited the outdoor airing of bedding. She imposed fines on those refusing to comply. The public resented these extreme measures, but countless lives were saved. Mary Dunphy (see site 35) was one victim of this epidemic.

As a member of St. Peter’s Church, Dr. Dean soon joined the cause to build a Protestant hospital, and she became a cornerstone of that institution (see site 37).

Upon statehood in 1889, Maria Dean became the twenty-seventh physician licensed to practice in Montana. She maintained a large private practice specializing in the diseases of women and children. In 1900, one-fourth of all children in Montana died before age five. Medicine was not so much a science as it was the practice of healing and compassion. At this Dr. Dean excelled.

Maria Dean was always civic minded. She was a founder of the Helena YWCA (see sites 17 and 33) and worked tirelessly for legislation requiring female juveniles to be separated from



MHS Photograph Archives, 95-11.2







males at the state industrial school in Miles City. Partly due to her efforts, Mountain View School for Girls opened seven miles north of Helena in 1919. Dr. Dean died that same year, just weeks before the cabin bearing her name was completed on the new campus.

The epitaph on Maria Dean’s tombstone at Forestvale Cemetery reads simply, “The Beloved Physician.” When St. Peter’s board cast about for a name for its facility dedicated to women’s health, they rightly chose to name it after Maria Dean.

### 33. YWCA (501 N. Park Ave.)

Many Helena women worked to see this building completed in 1919. Founded by women from most of Helena’s churches and the synagogue, this local chapter was the only Independent YWCA in the nation until 1987, when it affiliated with



the national organization (see site 17). The YWCA strived to improve conditions for working women. At a time of dramatic change in traditional roles, this building welcomed young women with safe housing and practical classes such as typewriting and sewing machine operation, as well as intellectual courses such as astronomy and physiology.

Adelaide Child, Dr. Maria Dean's sister, was chairman of the Finance Committee during the YWCA's early fund-raising years. She was the financial rescuer during the building of this facility and at trying times when the Y ended up in the red. Her personal contributions offset the deficits many times over, and they amount to the largest donations made to the YWCA Independent.

Throughout its long history, the home has sheltered and offered occupational skills to hundreds of women, served as a gathering place for service clubs, and housed dance studios and a preschool.

#### **34. Haight/Bridgewater Residence (502 Peosta St.)**

Suffragist Hattie Haight, wife of a Helena physician, purchased this property separately from her husband in 1891, taking advantage of laws designed to protect a family's wealth. The family lived in the house, and Haight operated the Immanuel Mission of the First Baptist Church (see site 20) from their home. In 1894, her husband, Vincent, died of Bright's disease, leaving twenty-seven-year-old Hattie with one child and another on the way.

Single mothers were not guaranteed custody of their children, and Haight had to prove to the court that she could support her family. The court required a \$5,500 bond. Sale of the Peosta property helped her raise the necessary funds to gain custody of her young son and leave the state.

By 1916, Mamie Bridgewater rented the property; she bought the house in 1927. A vital member of Helena's small African American community, Bridgewater was the widow of a Spanish American War veteran and a single mother of five children. Mamie Bridgewater and, later, her daughter Octavia owned the house for most of the twentieth century.





Octavia Bridgewater graduated from the Lincoln Hospital School of Nursing in the Bronx in 1930, one of two all-black nursing schools in the United States at the time. In Helena, she was refused employment at St. Peter's Hospital due to her race but found work as a private duty nurse. During World War II, Bridgewater became one of only fifty-six African American nurses accepted into the U.S. Army. She lobbied the army to stop discriminating against black nurses; the quota system finally ended in 1945. When Octavia—now Lieutenant Bridgewater—returned to Helena after the war, she found





Mamie Bridgewater, far right, with daughter Octavia and two of her three sons

positive changes at home as well; she found a job at St. Peter's Hospital, where she worked on the maternity ward as a pediatric nurse into the 1960s.

### **35. Benton Avenue Cemetery (1800 N. Benton Ave.)**

The history of this pioneer cemetery begins with women. Owners Rachel and Elizabeth Brooke sold the property to the county in 1870 for use as a burial ground. From 1875 to 1890, it served as Helena's main Protestant cemetery. With statehood in 1889 and the opening of the beautifully landscaped Forestvale Cemetery, this simple burial ground gradually fell out of use. Among the women who lie here beneath the sod are some of Helena's earliest residents.

Calista Gay Ingersoll is one of the most intriguing pioneer women buried here. A large monument bears her name, just north of the cemetery gate. The wife of Helena's first homeopathic doctor, Cyrus Stone Ingersoll, Calista traveled to Helena with the first wave of settlers. A single reference to her is all that hints at the service she performed for the early

community. As was often the case for women, the newspaper did not carry an obituary when Calista Ingersoll died in 1875. One early pioneer, however, remembers her as a midwife, who “bathed the fevered brows of her patients in the soothing waters of Last Chance stream.”

Tululah Allen, daughter of Joseph S. Allen, may have been one of the babies Calista Ingersoll delivered. According to her obituary, Allen was the first white female child born in the immediate Helena vicinity on April 5, 1865. She died at fifteen in 1880.

Gussie Bach lost two babies and died in childbirth delivering a third in 1889. She was buried with the newborn in her arms. Her beautiful tombstone has this epitaph: “Thus clinging to that slight spar within her arms, the mother drifted out upon the dark and unknown sea.”

Mary Dunphy, whose tall monument can be found just northwest of the Connor Mausoleum, died on December 24, 1885, during a devastating diphtheria epidemic. Mary Dunphy was a victim of her own selfless goodwill. Nursing the two little Kuehn children through the epidemic, she contracted diphtheria and died. Both children also died.

Near the Dunphy monument, Mary Agnes Merrill, a business partner of madam Lillie McGraw’s (see site 4), is buried in a wrought-iron enclosure with an elaborately painted gate bearing her name. Merrill died using the name Belle Flynn. Probate records list her possessions, which included real estate, furnishings, and many items of clothing. Her wardrobe included a mink fur cloak, boa, muff and pair of cuffs, silver toilet set, black velvet cloak, and many other expensive accoutrements suitable for a lady of the evening.

Many unmarked graves in the northwest quarter include anonymous women and babies from the early Florence Crittenton Home (see site 28).

### **36. St Albert’s Hall (Carroll College Campus)**

Lovely St. Albert’s Hall, built in 1924, accommodated the first women allowed on the Carroll College campus: twelve Dominican sisters, led by Mother Bonaventura Groh, who arrived



from Speyer, Germany, in 1925. They, along with the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth and their nursing program (see site 9), helped the school transition in the mid-twentieth century into the coeducational institution it is today.

The sisters cleaned the classrooms, faculty living quarters, and student dormitories, and they prepared all the meals on campus until services were contracted out in 1961. These selfless sisters spoke little English. Despite their homesickness, they were known as particularly caring and nurturing women. Perhaps this is why many students living in the campus dormitories today report a calming presence at their bedsides when they are homesick, ill, or stressed.



MHS Photograph Archives 953-531

St. Peter's Hospital

### **37. Site of St. Peter's Hospital (Guardian Apartments, 520 Logan St.)**

When Montana's Episcopal missionary Bishop Leigh Brewer first proposed establishing a Protestant hospital in Helena in 1881, it was the women of the church who made his dream a reality. Although many Helena women contributed to the effort, Henrietta Brewer, Mary Pauline Holter, Georgia Young, and Dr. Maria Dean were the cornerstones of today's St. Peter's Hospital.





37

38

Henrietta Brewer, wife of Bishop Brewer, embraced the crusade. She and her circle of friends immediately began to canvass for funds. The first donations and supplies came from the Women's Auxiliary of the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut. Mary Pauline Holter donated her former home at Jackson and Grand Streets for the new hospital in 1883. There were 225 patients that first year, 80 of them smelter workers sick with lead poisoning.

None of the women had administrative experience, so Henrietta Brewer recruited Georgia Young, a graduate of the New Haven, Connecticut, nurses training school, to manage the hospital. She arrived in Helena in 1885 and stayed for the next thirty years. The Connecticut Episcopal Women's Auxiliary appropriated \$400 to pay her annual salary.

In 1887, St. Peter's moved to this location. The first photographs show the building starkly resting upon tailing piles, a remnant of the gold rush. The hospital couldn't afford to hire help, so under Georgia Young's direction, Henrietta Brewer and Mary Pauline Holter organized their friends. These "lady visitors" inspected the facility weekly and did much of the cooking and cleaning.

The hospital endured fires and earthquakes, but emerged strong due to the women's leadership. Episcopal ownership transferred to the community in 1931, and in 1968, St. Peter's moved to its current north-side location. The former nurses' dormitory, now offices and the education center for St. Paul's Methodist Church at 512 Logan, is all that remains of the former hospital complex.

### **38. Winestine Residence (105 Eleventh Ave.)**

Belle Fligelman Winestine was as remarkable as her sister Frieda (see site 19). A graduate of the University of Wisconsin, she was a dedicated suffragist. In 1914, on the corner of what is now Sixth and Park Avenues, Belle made the first of many speeches supporting suffrage. When Montana sent Jeannette Rankin to Washington as the first woman elected to congress, Belle went with her as personal secretary and ghostwriter for a syndicated newspaper column. Marriage to Norman Wine-





stine and the birth of three children didn't stop the diminutive activist, who lobbied for many causes, from child labor laws to a woman's right to serve as a juror, which finally came in 1939. During the Depression, Winestine ran for the U.S. Senate under the slogan "Smaller and Better Senators." As she campaigned door-to-door, she was shocked to learn that many would not vote for her because she had a husband to support her and didn't need a job. Winestine lamented, "I thought running for office was to help somebody."

A prolific writer, Belle Winestine published stories and articles in the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Coronet*, and *Montana The Magazine of Western History*. Like her sister, her mind was never still. She invented cardboard picture frames, Kleenex boxes, and Cheerios shaped like numbers. She always wore a sprig of green in her hair to symbolize a tree and the "branching out" that makes each life so individual.

Regarded as the "elder statesman for the Equal Rights Amendment," Winestine responded to ERA opponents in a letter to the editor in the *Independent Record*:

The women who oppose ERA are lucky indeed that they don't need these rights. But they shouldn't ask the legislature to rescind the rights of less fortunate women throughout the country who need to claim these rights.

At ninety-two, Winestine had this to say about equality: "What we want is the time when men and women work side by side together to get things done together without worrying about which one is better."



Belle Winestine

MHS Photograph Archives Plc 85-31





### 39. Montana Children's Home (730 Eighth Ave.)

Like Dr. Maria Dean, Dr. Katherine Holden was a licensed physician with a large, successful practice specializing in women and children. She graduated with a medical degree from the University of Michigan in 1889 and came to Montana in the 1890s. She was involved in the founding of the Montana Children's Home Society, a non-denominational Protestant organization initially established to aid children who arrived in Helena via the "orphan trains." The Montana Children's Home was Montana's first licensed adoption agency.

Dr. Holden owned this property on Eighth Avenue when the society was founded and donated its use as the first home for all the children who reached the end of the line homeless. Isadora Dowden was its first matron. The house served as the orphans' home until the early 1900s.

The Montana Children's Home eventually relocated perma-



nently to Warren Street and Helena Avenue and evolved into today's Shodair Children's Hospital.

#### **40. House of the Good Shepherd (446 N. Hoback St.)**

A small colony of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd arrived in Helena from St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1889. They came at the invitation of Bishop John B. Brondel to establish a safe, non-denominational haven for troubled girls and young women. Five nuns and a young girl named Veronica, their first charge, settled into the Second Empire-style convent at the corner of Hoback Street and Ninth Avenue. St. Helena's Catholic Church across Hoback was built soon after, and construction of the frame dormitory followed in 1890. The sisters' Gothic Revival-style chapel was built to adjoin the convent in 1895.

Four separate two-story additions enlarged the dormitory, which also served as a school. By 1900, nine sisters cared for twenty-seven residents between the ages of eight and thirty-six. In the dormitory basement, a state-of-the-art commercial laundry, added in 1904, provided job training and income for the home.

The sisters moved to a larger facility on the west edge of town in 1909 and operated a Catholic girls' school there until the 1960s. The only piece left of the west-side campus is now St. Andrews School at 1900 Flowerree Street.

#### **41. Montana Deaconess School (Dept. of Corrections Bldg., 1539 Eleventh Ave.)**

Montana Deaconess School opened in 1909 as an alternative to the many Catholic schools across the West. It first located on the former Wesleyan University campus on Sierra Road. At the time it was the only Protestant boarding school west of the Mississippi. Deaconesses from the Chicago Training School originally staffed the facility. These women served as Protestant counterparts to Catholic nuns and also wore distinctive garb. Chicago-trained Louise Stork was the school's first administrator. The school took in children from rural areas where there were no schools and children whose parents couldn't take care of them.







Montana Deaconess Schools Teachers

The community perceived the school as an orphanage, which it was not, but the women did sometimes take in destitute children. The school accepted students through eighth grade. Helen Piper, longtime teacher and administrator, worked tirelessly to give the students love and memorable experiences.

When the 1935 earthquakes destroyed the Sierra Road campus, the school moved to this building, and the campus spread out across Eleventh Avenue to where the Capital Hill Mall is today.

The school evolved into today's Intermountain Children's Home, which treats severely emotionally abused children. The shell of the Van Orsdel building on the original campus, off Montana Avenue on Sierra Road, still stands.

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Visit [montanawomenshistory.org](http://montanawomenshistory.org) to learn more about Montana women's rich and complex history and to celebrate Montana's woman suffrage centennial.



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