

Romancing MONTANA

Frances Parker, Western Writer



Albert Niedringhaus, photographer, courtesy Lee Niedringhaus

Devastated by the death of her mother and stung by the remarriage of her father just four months later, sixteen-year-old Bertha Frances Parker agreed to spend the summer of 1891 in the Assiniboine settlement of Wolf Point, Montana, visiting her uncle Sherman T. Cogswell, a clerk for H. M. Cosier & Co. On the Fort Peck Indian Reservation, Frances observed a world very different from the one she had known in Detroit. She met and was courted by N Bar N Ranch foreman C. M. Jacobs, eighteen years her senior, marrying just five months later. The picture above was taken in front of the Jacobs's house at the ranch headquarters on Prairie Elk Creek. Unfortunately, the true love Frances imagined proved illusive. In the 1890s, she began writing romantic western adventures populated by characters drawn from the circumstances of her life under the pen name Frances Parker.¹

BY MARY L. HELLAND

BERTHA FRANCES PARKER was born January 17, 1875, in Detroit, Michigan, to Dayton and Ida Cogswell Parker.² Her father was attending medical school and, after graduating, began his medical practice in Blissfield, Michigan, where Frances and her four siblings attended school. The year Frances was born, her mother's kid brother, ten-year-old Sherman Cogswell, came to live with the family during school terms, as he would until he graduated.³

Little Frances first heard stories of the Assiniboiné and Sioux at the feet of her uncle and aunt, Burton and Fannie Parker. In the fall of 1884, Republican president Chester A. Arthur appointed Parker, an attorney and a member of the Michigan legislature, as Indian agent at the Fort Peck Agency in Poplar, Montana Territory. Burton and Fannie encouraged Sherman Cogswell, now nineteen, to accept a teaching position at the Presbyterian mission school at the Wolf Point subagency. Although Cogswell would live in Montana for the next fifty years, Burton Parker's stay was short. He was removed in the winter of 1885–86 during the administration of Democrat Grover Cleveland, and the Parkers returned to Michigan, where Burton resumed his law practice.⁴

In 1887, Frances's father became a professor at the Michigan College of Medicine and Surgery in Detroit (later a part of Wayne State University). The family settled in Detroit, and Frances attended Detroit Seminary, a girls' boarding school. The family enjoyed a prosperous life, escaping the summer heat at their Bay View home near Petoskey, on the shore of Lake Michigan. It was there that Frances's mother became ill and died on August 15, 1889. Just four months later, on December 28, Frances's father and Bella Gould

Bissell traveled across the river to Essex, Ontario, to be married. Fifteen years younger than Dr. Parker and the mother of a six-year-old daughter and seven-year-old son, the widowed Bella was not well received by the five Parker children, least of all Frances, who had always been the apple of her father's eye. By the time Frances turned sixteen and graduated in the spring of 1891, her home life was unbearable. Sherman's sister, Alma, had been petitioned to go west to "keep house" for her brother, and Frances accompanied her, most likely to teach at the mission school.⁵

Frances wrote her "Papa," on July 6, 1891, on the stationery of H. M. Cosier & Co. of Wolf Point, where Sherman worked as a clerk selling "Indian supplies" such as beads, fabrics, shoes, trade blankets, and other goods. They had attended the Fourth of July festivities in Glasgow, where the box of fireworks caught fire and the whole thing went up at once: "It was pretty for a minute but that was all," Frances reported. She and Aunt Alma were "going to visit the Indian graveyard which is over in the hills." At the time, the Assiniboiné interred their dead, and all the deceased's possessions, above ground—a few on scaffolds, most in wooden boxes, trunks, and crates—and the burials were a "must see" for travelers.

Frances's uncle, Burton Parker, served as the Indian agent at the Fort Peck Agency for a short time under President Chester A. Arthur, and Frances began hearing stories of the life among the Assiniboinés and Sioux from her Uncle Burton and Aunt Fannie at an early age. These Assiniboiné men in dance regalia were photographed circa 1885. From left to right are Black-tail, Shows His Day, Four Times, Standing Rattle, unidentified, and Cloud.



Courtesy Pat Beck



In the early 1890s, the N Bar N was an enormous operation that grazed tens of thousands of cattle on some 2.5 million acres of open range. These cowboys are pictured on the Big Dry range in the 1880s.

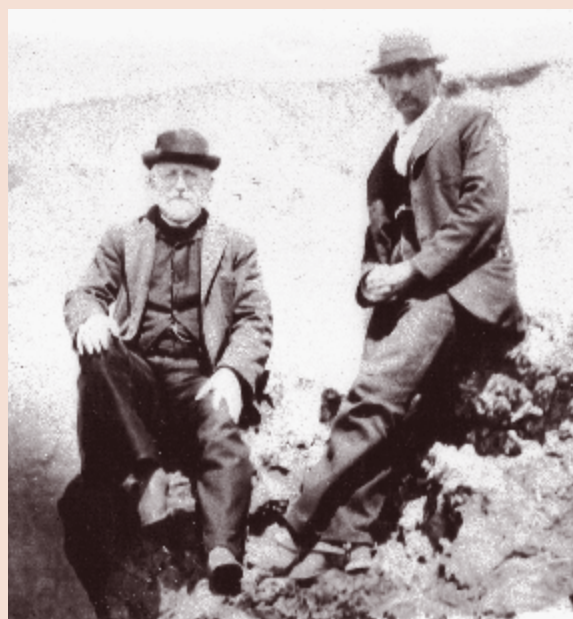
Frances also mentioned that “[l]ast night the boss of the ranch across the river was over here and we took his team and drove around. We are going over to the ranch soon.”⁶

That man was Carson Minor Jacobs, “C.M.” as he was called, the general manager of the N Bar N Ranch owned by William F. and Frederick G. Niedringhaus of St. Louis. A native of Farmington, Maine, Jacobs had graduated with a law degree from Bowdoin College in Brunswick in 1879, where he was class president, captain of the baseball team, and a member of the Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity. The first mention of Jacobs in Montana Territory comes from Miles City in 1886, where he was consulted on grasses by William Hornaday for his “The Extinction of the American Bison” report. Soon, Jacobs was working for the Niedringhauses on the N Bar N’s Big Dry range, and in 1888 he moved to the Prairie Elk headquarters two miles south of Oswego.⁷

The courtship between C.M. and Frances progressed quickly. When Frances Parker’s father and siblings came to visit her that fall, thirty-four-year-old Jacobs asked Dr. Parker for his sixteen-year-old daughter’s hand in marriage. She would later tell her niece that she never dreamed her father would say yes. C.M. and Frances were married at her old

home in Detroit on December 16, 1891, and thereafter returned to the N Bar N to live.⁸

And so began Frances Parker’s immersion into the world that supplied the characters and situations



Albert Niedringhaus, photographer, courtesy Lee Niedringhaus

Brothers William F. and Frederick G. Niedringhaus of St. Louis owned the N Bar N Ranch (see the article starting on page 3) and employed C.M. Jacobs as general manager. Jacobs is pictured here on the right with H. L. Niedringhaus, a brother of the ranch owners, at Red Rock Spring, Montana, in June 1892.

that would one day surface in her novels. In the early 1890s, the N Bar N's operation was enormous, with tens of thousands of cattle grazing some 2.5 million acres of the Big Dry and Milk River ranges.⁹ Almost all of the N Bar N's cowboys had come up the Texas-Montana Trail with the herds from the ranch's southern range in New Mexico and Texas. The N Bar N paybooks from 1893 to 1895 list 198 people on the payroll. Several Assiniboines worked at the headquarters, hauling wood and water, baking, making harnesses, and putting up hay, and several more broke horses at the Porcupine Creek horse camp. Bad Knife, Walking Bull, and Big Leggings appear in the paybooks as cowpunchers, which was rare since full-bloods rarely worked on the otherwise all-white crews.¹⁰

There was a fair share of desperados among the N Bar N cowboys. Those trail hands who did not return to Texas in the fall were often running from a checkered past, and many a good cowboy came to Montana after the Johnson County War and needed to start over with a new name. Through the years, twenty-one N Bar N cowboys would be arrested as outlaws or gunslingers.¹¹

It is likely that it was during the time that Frances was living on the N Bar N that she met Charlie Russell. Russell worked on the N Bar N and other large outfits as a wrangler and a night watchman, and in the spring of 1892 Russell sketched a letter to Milt Henderson, co-owner of the Milwaukee Beer Hall, enclosing ten dollars he owed on a tab. Rus-

sell sketched a self-portrait of himself heading out on an N-N branded horse, moving a remuda of horses. In 1893, Russell sculpted (and later painted) *Not a Chinaman's Chance* and *The Poker Game*. The rugged cowboy playing cards was "an exact photograph of Long Henry" Thompson, one of N Bar N's most notorious gunslingers.¹²

Whether the Jacobs were initially happy in matrimony is unknown. What is known is that after their first three years of marriage, Frances was rarely alone with her husband. In 1893, C.M. Jacobs left his job at the N Bar N, and he and Frances filed homestead claims about twenty-eight miles south of Chinook at the foot of the Bears Paw Mountains with the intention of raising sheep. Frances took a job teaching school in the Bears Paws for a term and boarded at the home of George Ramberg in the small settlement of Ada. The *Chinook Opinion* noted that "Miss Katie Conner of Detroit is visiting her friend, Mrs. C.M. Jacobs" in November 1894. Conner would be Frances's nearly constant companion for the next ten years.¹³

There were other frequent visitors to Clear Creek as well. No summer passed without several visits from Detroit relatives, and Sherman Cogswell, who had invested money in the Jacobs's endeavor, often stopped at Clear Creek to look after "his sheep interests." Frances also began spending more time in Detroit. In September 1895, she and Katie departed by train to spend the winter at her father's home, an enormous three-story Greek-revival mansion with a ballroom, library, salon, and billiard room overlooking the Detroit River. Photographs from this period reveal the stark contrast between life in Montana and in opulent Detroit. In one photograph taken on the Clear Creek Ranch, Frances poses with a bucket on her hip, her skirt practically in shreds, and smiles as if poking fun at her costume. Several studio

Both photographs courtesy Terri Hodges Hazelwood



C.M. Jacobs left his employment at the N Bar N in 1893, and he and Frances homesteaded on Clear Creek south of Chinook, at the foot of the Bears Paw Mountains, and took up sheep raising. Summers were filled with visits from Frances's relatives and friends, and in the winters she began spending more time in Detroit. Her spare Montana existence (far left, 1894) contrasted sharply with her more opulent Detroit life (left).



The Jacobs's son, Parker, was born on August 1, 1897, at their homestead cabin. The drafty sod-roofed log structure was no place for a new baby to spend the winter, and in November Frances, with the baby and her sister Beatrice, took the train to spend the winter at their father's Detroit home (above). Sister Beatrice, stepsister Frances Bissell, and sister Alma posed there, right, with baby Parker in 1898.

portraits taken in Detroit show her impeccably dressed and reveal her love of fine clothing.¹⁴

It was in Montana, on August 1, 1897, that Frances gave birth to a son, Parker, in the Jacobs's log cabin on Clear Creek. The baby was delivered by her father (who, with his wife and daughter Beatrice, had spent the previous month at the ranch). The *Chinook Opinion* reported that "C. M. is the happiest man on earth." When Dr. and Mrs. Parker returned to Detroit, Beatrice stayed, but the drafty log cabin with a sod roof was no place for a new baby to spend the winter. During the first week in November, Frances and Beatrice boarded the train for Detroit. When they returned to Clear Creek at the end of April 1898, Frances brought along her fifteen-year-old sister, Alma, and Katie Conner. Beatrice arrived when Alma left. The neighbors certainly took note of Frances's lifestyle. According to Norman Mosser Sr., Parker Jacobs's lifelong friend, "Some thought Frances believed she was too good for Chinook or Montana. . . . She didn't fit in. She was always dressed



beautifully and always had domestic help." The Clear Creek community rallied around C. M. Jacobs, sympathizing when he lost his housekeeper and his son for months at a time.¹⁵

There are clues that the Jacobs's marriage was deteriorating. In January 1899, Dr. Parker and Beatrice visited the Clear Creek Ranch during a snowstorm, making a twenty-eight-mile sleigh ride from Chinook in subzero weather and drifting snow. Dr. Parker reported that he was on his way to the coast, but he returned to the ranch for another week in March. This time period is apparently when "something happened. I never knew what it was, but she became terribly lonely and unhappy," according to her niece Bebe Hall. Isolated and depressed, Frances began to



By 1899, the Jacobs's marriage was deteriorating, and Frances began to create a world of stories into which she could escape. She continued to spend winters in the Detroit home, where Parker was the much-doted-upon only grandchild. In this 1902 family portrait, C.M. was seated at the far left, at the opposite end as his wife, and at some point cut out of the picture entirely.

create a world into which she could escape—at least in her stories, she could write happy endings.¹⁶

For the next few years, Frances continued to spend winters at the stately Detroit home, where baby Parker was the much-doted-upon only grandchild. During winter 1902, C.M. Jacobs traveled east to try to convince his wife to come home. A Parker family portrait made during this visit survives in a family album. In it, C.M. is not only oddly placed at the far end away from his wife but at some point he was removed from the photograph almost entirely—only his knees attest to his presence.¹⁷

In 1903, C.M. Clark Publishing Company of Boston published the first of Frances's western romances, *Marjie of the Lower Ranch*, dedicated "To My Best Friend, My Father." The novel's heroine, Marjie, bears a strong resemblance to Frances. Both were sent west to live on a Montana ranch when finished with school, and both find they are the only non-Indian girls of their age in that hardscrabble

world. Both have knowledge of Indian culture and health remedies learned from mission schools. Both were attractive women. Frances's Marjie was "the best mixture of French and Irish, that told in her make up, that gave charm to her eye, the wit to her tongue, the grace to her figure, and the weakness and strength to her nature. It gave her a physical perfection that cannot be described, embodying all the graces from a hundred generations of beautiful women."¹⁸

Marjie of the Lower Ranch is set in the Bears Paw Mountains in the area around the upper and lower Clear Creek. The Lower Ranch, on a flat beneath the mountain, belongs to Marjie's sister and her husband. The Upper Ranch belongs to the husband's brother, George. George is very similar to C.M. Jacobs: they both are large woolgrowers striving to get rich, are eighteen years older than the "girl" they love, and willing to do whatever it takes to get her. In the book, Marjie falls in love with a handsome and mysterious man, Ike, but is tricked by George into believing her

lover is a liar and is actually a murderer running from the guillotine. Devastated, she finally stops resisting George's pleas to marry her. When her sister says, "he is old enough to be your father and you don't love him," Marjie agrees but relents, "It's useless to fight it."¹⁹ In the end, though, Frances provided her

characters with happy endings. Ike is not really an outlaw but the wrongly accused son of a wealthy Chicago family whose name is cleared so he can claim his position in society.

With the publication of *Marjie of the Lower Ranch*, Frances's literary career took off, and the Clear Creek Ranch became a literary scene of sorts. The *New York Tribune* reported in that summer of 1903 that Caro Clark of Clark Publishing arrived at Chinook to visit "Miss Parker's ranch in the Bear's Paw Mountains, Montana." And in January 2, 1904, the *New York Times* published an item in its section on book and literary news: "Invitations were sent to prominent people throughout the country asking them to spend the 'Christmas holidays at Clear Creek Ranch, Bear Paw Mountains, Montana.' Some persons on the guest list are found to be characters in Miss Parker's book. It is evident, however, that some people do not read everything they get, for within a week, it's stated, over 30 letters of regret were received. The book, by the way, is in its fourth edition."²⁰



C. M. Clark Publishing Company of Boston published Frances's first western romance, *Marjie of the Lower Ranch*, in 1903. It is set in the Clear Creek area, and in it, the young heroine is being pursued by George, a character bearing a resemblance to C. M. Jacobs. C. M. and Parker are pictured here at Clear Creek in about 1903.

Courtesy Sandra Jacobs Rivas



Courtesy Terri Hodges Hazelwood

Frances's literary career took off with the publication of *Marjie of the Lower Ranch* and on June 5, 1903, Caro Clark of Clark Publishing came to visit "Miss Parker's ranch in the Bears Paw Mountains, Montana." Here are Alma (left) and Caro (right) on horseback.

Meanwhile, Frances had been working on her next book, *Hope Hathaway, A Story of Western Ranch Life*, and in May 1904 she met with Charlie Russell in Great Falls to make arrangements for its illustration. Russell finished the ten 14- x 10-inch watercolors for the book around the middle of August. Frances, along with young Parker and his new governess, Flossie Beals, then headed east by rail. *Hope Hathaway* was released November 1, with the first five thousand buyers receiving a set of eight of the Russell prints. Many years later, Frances would write a publisher questioning if she still retained copyrights to these prints: "I would cry, they are so intimately my own, made for me by my very good friend."²¹

Hope Hathaway was well received by the public. The Russell illustrations likely helped increase sales, but the novel itself is better written than *Marjie of the Lower Ranch*. It is again set in the Bears Paw Mountains and again draws on themes very close to Frances Parker's life. Hope Hathaway is the privileged daughter of a cattleman who grew up in a luxurious home tended by servants. She does not get along with her mother, a socialite who does not like Montana and who stays in New York for months at a time, an arrangement about which her father "never made any objections." Hope has accepted a teaching position in the mountains and boards there for the summer. The cowboys, sheepherders, and the men and their Indian wives and mixed-blood children were certainly based on people Frances had known through the years. In fact, Russell's illustration of *Joe Harris and His Friends* in the book was reportedly a portrait of Jack Griffin, good friend and ranching neighbor of the Jacobs; Griffin's mixed-blood children attended the Diamond Bar School in the Bears Paw with Parker Jacobs. Again, the book's central theme was finding real love—and the ending a happy one. Hope's Livingston is more than a struggling sheepman. He's actually an English lord, now ready to claim his title.²²

Frances was at the height of her success when she returned to Montana eleven months later. A *Valley County News* correspondent interviewed her in July in Glasgow while she was waiting to catch the "Flyer" back to Wolf Point ("The train does not stop at but three stations in this country," and Wolf Point wasn't one of them) and where she visited the Cogswell family and old friends from the N Bar N. When Frances arrived in Wolf Point, C. M. Jacobs



Frances Parker, *Hope Hathaway, A Story of Western Ranch Life* (Boston, 1904), frontispiece

Frances's next book, *Hope Hathaway, A Story of Western Ranch Life*, is again set in the Bears Paw Mountains and draws on themes close to Frances Parker's own life.

Frances engaged Charles M. Russell to illustrate *Hope Hathaway*, a factor that contributed, at least partly, to its success. Above is Russell's *Hope Hathaway*.

made one last attempt to convince his wife to come back to Clear Creek, but their marriage could not be saved. On August 21, 1905, Chouteau County sheriff Walter "Leather" Griffith served Frances a summons to answer a complaint of desertion and abandonment her husband made August 12 of the previous year. Frances failed to appear in court and instead returned to Clear Creek to collect her things while C. M. stayed in Wolf Point. On her way back, Frances picked up her son in Wolf Point and left Montana, never to return. The marriage was dissolved in October 1905.²³

For his part, C. M. Jacobs threw his energies into ranching and community life. In June 1905, he collected Parker in Detroit and returned to Clear Creek, where Parker began the fall term at Diamond Bar School. That August, Jacobs announced his candidacy for state representative in Chinook. He lost the primary to Orlando S. Goff, a Chinook photographer, but made another foray into politics in 1911 and was elected mayor of Chinook. By 1920, Jacobs

owned over one thousand acres of rangeland in Blaine County.²⁴ Parker lived with his father until he graduated from high school in 1915.²⁵

Frances moved to her father's farm just south of Detroit in the Brownstown area of Rockwood on the banks of the Huron River. Her home was a beautiful and quiet bungalow that had all the elements she needed to write. She was now a sought-after author—*McClure's Magazine* had asked her to write short stories. It was most likely at this time that she found that which had been missing from her life—true love. The object of her affections was Clarence Tilton, a handsome accountant two years younger than Frances. Tilton had moved to Detroit from Brooklyn, New York, in 1893 and now served as clerk for Frances's brother, Dr. Morgan Parker, the Wayne County coroner. On November 18, 1906, a year after her divorce from Jacobs, Frances and Clarence were married by an Episcopal minister in Detroit. They quietly left for a honeymoon in New York.²⁶

In 1909, C.M. Clark published Frances's next book, *Winding Waters; The Story of a Long Trail and Strong Hearts*, which chronicled the Nez Perce story from an Indian perspective. Certainly, the Nez Perce War was an event that had touched Frances's life. For years, she rode her horse across the Bears Paw Battlefield east of where she lived on Clear Creek and pondered the story of what had happened there sixteen years before she came to Montana. In *Winding Waters*, Frances fairly accurately depicts the Nez Percés' trek from Lapwai, Idaho, to the Bears Paw and their subsequent journey to Oklahoma, but she cannot resist tying a bow on her package. Her hero and heroine, Fletcher and Nanaiha Davis, devote themselves to liberating the Nez Percés and bringing them back to Indian Country. Historians might find it ridiculous to mingle the romance of a non-Indian couple with the monumental Nez Perce story, but perhaps Frances meant to find the ear of those not otherwise interested in the Nez Perce's plight. The novel is

Courtesy Sandra Jacobs Rivas



The Jacobs's marriage was dissolved in October 1905. C. M. (above, circa 1925) continued to live south of Chinook and eventually became the town's mayor. In August 1905, Parker came to live with his father and began the fall term at Diamond Bar School (right) near the family's ranch. He is the student seated on the right end of the front row.



Courtesy Mildred Munson, Blaine County Museum, Chinook, Montana

After leaving Montana, Frances, now a sought-after author, moved to her father's farm south of Detroit. Around this time, she fell in love with Clarence Tilton, who served as a clerk for her brother, Dr. Morgan Parker, the Wayne County coroner. Clarence and Frances married on November 18, 1906. The couple is pictured at right.

inscribed "Dedicated to the Public with apologies to all whom it may concern."

Winding Waters was not embraced by Frances's larger readership or by her old neighbors on Clear Creek, and Frances was disappointed by the novel's lack of success. She later said that *Winding Waters*, a "historical Indian novel, was never heard of, but it is recommended in libraries as an aid to the study of Indian history. In a foolish moment I bought the plates and copyrights of these and took them off the market."²⁷

The Tiltons were still living at Rockwood in 1910, but by 1912 they had moved to Bradentown (now Bradenton), Florida, where Clarence became county auditor in 1916. Photos from these years show Frances with her hair swept up in the Gibson-girl style, flowing white dresses, and always with flowers in her hair, her hat, or her hand. By 1920, Clarence and Frances had moved to Jerome, Arizona, where William A. Clark's United Verde Copper Company operations were booming, and Clarence found work as an accountant. Frances's sister Beatrice and her family moved to Jerome, and, surprisingly, Parker Jacobs, who had graduated from Chinook High School, also lived with them, working as a machinist at the mine.

Not long after this, Clarence became ill with bronchial asthma, and his declining health meant Frances needed to earn an income. She began writing in earnest and sought the help of Mathilde Weil of the Writer's Workshop in New York City, who predicted success "won't be too long in coming if only you will work hard in order to repeat your former successes. I believe in you with every fibre of me." Frances had been working on three manuscripts, but C. M. Clark had gone out of business, and she had no connection with another publisher. Neither her personal life nor her professional life improved. Clarence Tilton died of heart and bronchial ailments at age forty-eight in October 1925. Thereafter, Frances buckled down to



Courtesy Terri Hodges Hazelwood

finish "A Woman of the Border" and submitted it to Curtis Brown, International Publishing, in April 1926. It was rejected.²⁸

Unwilling to give up, Frances continued to work to make the manuscript "ring true" as recommended by Miss Weil of the Writer's Workshop. In correspondence, Miss Weil advised: "Your Magdalena undergoes so many metamorphoses that she does not produce so clear an impression as if she were a less versatile creature." Weil found that "the Mexican part of the greatest attraction and I liked the beginning least. I don't mean the girl and boy romance but all that part that preceded the running away of the young wife. A girl with as much spirit as your heroine could never have suffered abuse so meekly. No one could believe in the husband and his accomplice." Whether Frances was writing from her own experience is not known, but in any case she did not convince Weil. "We must live romance ourselves in the persons of the dramatis personae for it to be of any avail. And we can't quite believe in most of your characters," Weil wrote.²⁹

Other titles Weil critiqued were "Three Turtles Crawl Out of the Sea," an adventure-love story set

in the Florida Keys; “Laurie Stuart,” a conventional western love story; and “The Sheath of the Flower,” “a book based on esoteric philosophy.” Miss Weil gave constructive suggestions on the first three but did not know what to make of “The Sheath of the Flower.” “Honestly, I fear that most firms would be likely to regard it as propaganda. Hold back until you have made a name that will encourage editors to take anything you write,” Weil wrote. None of these manuscripts was ever published, and descendants have been unable to locate the drafts. One of the last photographs of Frances Parker shows her sitting in front of her writing desk with one of these manuscripts in hand.³⁰

The 1930s were difficult. “The Great Depression had set in and nobody had any cash, but we could dream,” said niece Beebe Hall. Frances “had a very hard time financially after Clarence Tilton died. But she was valiant and kept herself as well as she could and was always cheerful. She loved animals and raised hundreds of canary birds and sold them.” And even the tough times did not diminish Frances’s dreams of romance. In describing the high society wedding of her niece in 1932, Frances wrote that it was the most beautiful she had ever seen and wondered if Clarence “could view that lovely party. But no use wondering, it doesn’t get us anywhere. I, for one, mean to hunt for a live man. I wonder where I will find him!”³¹

A stroke while running after her dog around 1935 did not diminish Frances’s zest for life. Her sisters could not persuade her to stay home, and she drove her Buick from San Antonio, Texas, to Daytona Beach, Florida, and up to Long Island, New York, on an adventure. “On the Road from Daytona Beach,” meant for publication in the *San Antonio Express*, was perhaps her last piece of writing, but it apparently never appeared in print. In the piece, Frances rambles and repeats herself, telling stories about stopping at

a farmhouse and paying a woman fifty cents to rent her porch hammock for a nap and describing how she paid a police officer a dollar to “show me the way through Washington and get me on the N.Y. road.” She ends her account with the line: “What do you think of it for 90 years old in March. I now live in San Antonio where the doctors say I will live to be 100. If I do, I may live to see my 6th war, but I hope not.”³²



Courtesy/Terri Hodges Hazelwood

By the 1920s, C. M. Clark Publishing had gone out of business, leaving Frances without a publisher. Efforts to find another failed, and though she continued to write, her later books were never published. Here, Frances poses next to her desk, manuscript in hand, circa 1936.

Frances Parker died on June 17, 1937, at age sixty-two, of “exhaustion psychosis” and thyroid problems. She is buried next to Clarence in San Antonio.

Today, Frances Parker’s romantic western novels may not be remembered as much more than typical popular novels of that era and genre. If one knows the biography of their author, however, it is clear that Frances again and again wove together the characters, settings, and situations she had known into stories about the grand theme of her own life—the love story she herself wished to live. In the end, Frances Parker chose to write herself out of Montana, but not before she had documented the lives of the people she had met during her fourteen years on Prairie Elk

and Clear Creek from the eyes of an upper-middle-class eastern woman. One wonders if it is the voice of Frances Parker herself speaking when the heroine of *Winding Waters* muses, “Sometimes she thought of a little cabin in far-away mountains and her eyes grew dim.”³³

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Notes

1. C. M. Clark & Company of Boston published Frances Parker's three novels: *Marjie of the Lower Ranch* (1903), *Hope Hathaway, A Story of Western Ranch Life* (1904), and *Winding Waters, The Story of a Long Trail and Strong Hearts* (1909).
2. The name that appears on legal records is Bertha F. Jacobs or Mrs. C. M. Jacobs and later Frances P. Tilton. Since she preferred her pen name "Frances Parker" and signed nearly all of her personal correspondence in that way, I've chosen to use that name for consistency.
3. Much of the biographical information in this article comes from interviews. Special thanks to Sandra Jacobs Rivas, granddaughter of Frances Parker; Sherman Cogswell Parker Jr., Ann Arbor, Michigan, grandson of Morgan Parker; William D. McCabe Jr., Portland, Oregon, grandson of Alma Parker Smith; Terri Hodges Hazelwood and Betty Jane "Betsy" Kliever, San Antonio, Texas, great-nieces of Frances Parker; former Clear Creek residents Norman Mosser Sr., Mary Hofeldt, Warren Ross, and Lucille Oehmcke; Phillippena Long Denny, daughter of James Larpen-teur Long; and Polly Wischman of the McCone County Museum, Circle, Montana, and Jude Shepard of the Blaine County Museum, Chinook, Montana.
4. See John McClelland Bulkley, *History of Monroe County Michigan . . .*, vol. 2 (Chicago, 1913), 978-80; and William Livingstone, *Livingstone's History of the Republican Party . . .*, vol. 2 (Detroit, 1900), 308-10.
5. Sherman Cogswell Parker Jr. to author, Jan. 7, 2009; Sherman T. Cogswell obituary, *Wolf Point (Mont.) Herald*, June 17, 1932; Alma Cogswell obituary, *ibid.*, Jan. 12, 1950. Granted a license as an Indian trader in 1891, Sherman T. Cogswell (1865-1932) was a forefather and longtime resident of Wolf Point. He served as Wolf Point's first postmaster in 1886 and established the First State Bank (now Western Bank) and the Sherman Hotel, which are still in business.
6. Frances Parker to "Papa," July 6, 1891, courtesy Dayton Parker, Detroit, Michigan.
7. William T. Hornaday, "The Extirmination of the American Bison," in Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution, 1887 (Washington, D.C., 1889), pt. 2, 428.
8. Dec. 16, 1891, wedding invitation, courtesy William McCabe Jr.; Bebe Applewhite, niece of Frances Parker, to Sandra Jacobs Rivas, Mar. 22, 1990, copy in author's possession. The only white women listed in the 1880 census are Louisa Porter, the wife of Nathan S. Porter, Indian agent at Poplar, and Mary Jones, the wife of James Jones, sub-Indian agent at Wolf Point. No census exists for 1890, but in the 1891 photographs taken in Wolf Point the only white women in them are Mrs. King and Mrs. Smith, the missionary teachers, and Alma Cogswell. White agency employees had mixed-blood wives. In 1894, the *Glasgow (Mont.) Valley County Gazette* still noted only three white women living at Wolf Point; there were more in Poplar, where the larger Poplar Boarding School employed more teachers.
9. The Fort Peck Reservation was not opened for homesteading until 1914 when thousands of people converged to claim this "surplus" land after the allotment of land to enrolled tribal members.
10. N Bar N paybooks, 1893-1895, McCone County Museum, Circle, Montana. Ranch housekeeper Annie Larpen-teur, whose father Charles Larpen-teur left Fort Union the year she was born, brought her towheaded three-year-old to work every day. Her husband, N Bar N employee George Long, had become sick in 1888 and gone to St. Louis for treatment, never to be heard from again. Their son, James Larpen-teur Long, would have a long, happy life living among his mother's Assiniboiné people and in 1942 published one of the tribe's most important histories, *Land of Nakoda; The Story of the Assiniboiné Indians* (Helena, Mont., 1942).
11. A complete list of these men is on file at the Valley County Museum, Glasgow, Montana.
12. "Frind Milt" [Milt Henderson], 1892, in B. Byron Price et al., eds., *Charles M. Russell: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Norman, Okla., 2007); photograph in the James Brownlee Rankin Papers, SC 1822, Montana Historical Society Research Center, Helena; *Chinook (Mont.) Opinion*, Jan. 4, 1892; *Anaconda (Mont.) Standard*, Feb. 20, 1902.
13. *Chinook (Mont.) Opinion*, Nov. 22, 1894.
14. This palatial home still stands at 506 Parkview, Detroit.
15. Norman Mosser Jr., interview by Sandra Jacobs Rivas, summer 1990, Chinook, Montana; Norman Mosser Jr. to author, Sept. 15, 2008.
16. *Chinook (Mont.) Opinion*, Jan. 26, Feb. 2, Mar. 16, 1899; Bebe Applewhite Hall to Sandra Jacobs Rivas, Mar. 22, 1990, copy in author's possession.
17. Family album in the collection of Betty Jane "Betsy" Kliever.
18. Parker, *Marjie of the Lower Ranch*, 25.
19. *Ibid.*, 315.
20. *New York Tribune*, Mar. 25, 1903, Jan. 2, 1904.
21. *Anaconda (Mont.) Standard*, May 11, 1904. All ten of the Russell originals are in the collection of William Healey of Santa Barbara, California. See <http://www.russellraisonne.com/>.
22. Crossen, *Charlie Russell*, 16; *Chinook (Mont.) Opinion*, Nov. 8, 1894; Parker, *Hope Hathaway*, 11, 13.
23. *Glasgow (Mont.) Valley County News*, July 7, 1905; divorce decree, Oct. 28, 1905, Chouteau County Courthouse, Fort Benton, Montana. The Niedringhaus brothers sold the N Bar N Ranch in 1899, but their sons, Edgar and Lee, continued ranching in the area, building up the Pleasant Valley Farm (also referred to as the Glendale Stock Farm). *Ibid.*, June 16, June 23, July 21, Nov. 28, 1905; Aug. 28, Dec. 17, 1906.
24. Jacobs never remarried and was last recorded as living with his son, Parker, and his wife in Los Angeles in 1930 at age seventy-three.
25. Hall to Rivas, Mar. 22, 1990.
26. Marriage license no. 53250, book 5, p. 869, Wayne County Courthouse, Detroit, Michigan; 1900 and 1910 federal Census for Detroit, Michigan; 1903 Detroit city directory; Sherman Cogswell Parker to author, Feb. 17, 2008.
27. Clinton E. Achorn to C. A. Tilton, Nov. 18, 1912, courtesy William McCabe Jr.; Frances Parker to Mathilde Weil, Oct. 31, 1921, courtesy William McCabe Jr.
28. Mathilde Weil to Frances Parker, Dec. 20, 1921, courtesy Sandra Jacobs Rivas; *San Antonio Light*, Oct. 19, 1925; death certificate, Bexar County, Texas, Oct. 18, 1925.
29. Mathilde Weil to Frances Parker, July 11, 1921, courtesy Sandra Jacobs Rivas.
30. Mathilde Weil to Frances Parker, Dec. 20, 1921, courtesy Sandra Jacobs Rivas.
31. Bebe Applewhite Hall to Sandra Jacobs Rivas, Mar. 22, 1990, courtesy Sandra Jacobs Rivas; Frances Parker to "Violet," July 21, 1932, courtesy William McCabe Jr.
32. "On the Road from Daytona Beach," [1935?], Terri Hodges Hazelwood.
33. Parker, *Winding Waters*, 398.



Frances Parker, 1919