

Beginning in the 1880s, jobs in the copper mines began attracting immigrants to Butte, Montana. The new arrivals came in search of a better life for themselves and their children and settled in ethnic neighborhoods, where they could speak their native languages and maintain cultural ties to their homelands. The Irish neighborhood of Dublin Gulch is shown here in about 1910.

by Janet L. Finn

Children of the Hill Situating Children in Butte's History

The story of Butte, Montana, has been told many times. It is by and large a story of the grit and danger of hard-rock mining, the power plays of the Copper Kings, and the intrigues of organized labor, with women cast in cameo roles. But if the voices and views of women have been muted in this history, the stories of Butte's children have been largely erased. Little is known about children's experiences of mining life or of the ways in which class politics, labor strife, and gender and ethnic relations insinuated themselves in the everyday lives of children. A focus on childhood also illuminates the significance of Butte and its children to the development of child-focused public policies and institutions in Montana. Butte was the state's focal point of immigration, industrialization, and urbanization and, as such, captured the attention of reformers. Tremendous economic investment, social capital, and political will were mobilized to ensure the welfare of children and keep them on the "right path" to adulthood.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Butte was home to the world's largest copper-mining operation, run by the Anaconda Copper Mining Company. In 1900, Butte's population stood at sixty-two thousand, and 88 percent of the population was under age

twenty-five. The Butte mines were soon producing one-third of the nation's copper; its mining workforce was twelve thousand strong and earned "the world's largest" payroll of \$1.5 million a month. By 1905, Butte had forty-two churches, more than two dozen public and parochial schools, as well as over forty fraternal and benevolent organizations and another forty trade and labor unions.¹

Fueling this engine of industry was an immigrant population that grew each year. Cornish and Irish immigrants dominated the first wave of migration to Butte, with the Irish comprising 25 percent of Butte's burgeoning population by 1900. The Irish were followed by Italians, Finns, Swedes, Serbians, Croatians, Slovenians, Montenegrins, Syrians, and Lebanese. New arrivals gravitated to their familiar ethnic communities, where they not only worked together underground but also created strong neighborhoods where they could speak their native language, buy and prepare familiar foods, and maintain ties to their homelands through native-language newspapers and social clubs.²

Mining was notoriously dangerous work. Injuries wrought by a "fall of ground," premature explosion of dynamite, and illnesses such as tuberculosis, pneu-



Butte Silver Bow Public Archives, Butte, Montana

It was a truism in Butte that miners were lucky to live past forty, and widows often ran boardinghouses, such as this one in a railroad section house, as a means to support their families. Residents pictured here circa 1900 include children and pets as well as the boarders and the women who ran the enterprise.

monia, and miner's consumption claimed lives every day in Butte. Miners' deaths and injuries put many families in precarious circumstances, leaving loved ones both grieving and economically desperate. For example, a 1913 accident in the Leonard Mine resulted in the deaths of five men, three of whom were fathers of young children. An account in the *Butte Miner* offered poignant details of one of the families.

Nicholas Treglown had been in Butte but a comparatively short time. He is survived by his wife and three-year-old daughter. With his family, he lived at 2101 Ash Street. When news of the accident reached the Treglown home the little girl was playing just outside the door. Realization of its import did not come to her. She played about the house all afternoon, noting her mother's tears with wonderment, and when she saw the men coming off shift from other mines she called repeatedly, "Daddy, where's my Daddy?"³

It was a truism in Butte that miners were lucky to live past forty. Michael Patrick "Packey" Buckley recalled his mother running a boardinghouse to keep the family afloat after his father was disabled.

She had to [start the boardinghouse].... My father couldn't work. He had miner's con. He died when I was in the sixth grade. You know what they called St. Mary's Parish, don't you? The parish of widows. They were all widows. Just for the hell of it, if you ever go by St. Patrick's Cemetery, go in and see the miners. Do you know what the average age is on the cross on the burial? Thirty-seven years old. And when you look back, a lot of them died from miner's con, but a lot of them died from pneumonia. They would come home on open streetcars, and [they had] no change rooms. They could get pneumonia and die, and a lot of them died from cancer, which we didn't know much about in those days.⁴

For other families, labor strife wrought desperation. In 1903, for example, all mining operations were shut down for nearly two months, affecting twenty thousand wage earners in Butte and four-fifths of the wage earners in the state, as corporate power brokers vied for control of the copper market. Mining operations were again cut back in an effort to squelch

union activism in 1906. Some families survived these challenging times with the support of neighbors, kin, and public relief. For others, charity organizations offered basic support. The Associated Charities of Butte, a volunteer organization launched in 1897 and made up primarily of women from prominent and professional-class families, sponsored a soup kitchen and solicited donations of coal.⁵

Harsh economic and environmental conditions made child rearing a daunting proposition in Butte. Overall, children were often poorly housed, clothed, and fed. At the turn of the twentieth century, 20 percent of children did not live to celebrate their fifth birthday, and 50 percent of infant mortality occurred in the first year of life.⁶ Air laced with arsenic from the copper smelters, coupled with poor sanitation and living conditions, exacerbated newborns' struggles for survival in Butte. In addition to problems of prematurity and injury at birth, respiratory illnesses and severe diarrhea—typically referred to as cholera infantum—struck newborns and infants. Parents, midwives, and doctors were often helpless to intervene. Ann Pentilla was born in Butte in 1907. Ann remembered her mother's experience: "She lost two babies. They were blue babies. They lost a lot of children [in Butte]. I remember the midwife putting the child in the oven at a certain temperature in a blanket to keep it warm, but it didn't survive."⁷

Women engaged in a vast array of informal labor and made subsistence livings as midwives, cooks, and domestic servants, but prior to 1915 poor women and children were largely dependent on the Silver Bow County poor fund. The brief entries in the notebooks of county investigators shed light on the difficult conditions of widows and children, the meager assistance available to them, and the assessments made of their worthiness to receive aid. One investigator wrote:

Mrs. P.D. 3/18/09—Age 44 years. Husband died 1 year ago. Left no money no insurance. 5 children oldest girls 19 yrs. Married cannot help them. 1-16-15-10 & 6 yrs. Boy of 16 is delicate not able to work or go to school. They own a little 3 room shack. Works herself when she can get it. She cannot go out to work as 6 year old one is sick. This seems to be a deserving case. She got relations but gets no help from them.⁸



MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, Lot 8 B1/4.02

The challenges of child rearing at the turn of the century were daunting. Overall, children were often poorly housed, clothed, and fed. The children above were pictured in the backyards of houses on the 1100 block of East Broadway for a 1908–1912 report on the working and living conditions of Silver Bow County miners and their families.

The Montana legislature approved a mother's pension program in 1915, which provided aid to widows or mothers whose husbands could not support their families. Aid was limited to children fourteen and under, and it provided a maximum allowance of ten dollars a month for the first child with decreasing amounts for additional children.⁹

Education Matters

The education of Butte children was a community priority, as evidenced by the number of schools and size of enrollments. Although Butte already had fourteen schools by 1892 and Butte High School graduated its first class in 1886, school expansion was ongoing at the turn of the century. Between 1900 and 1905, the Emerson, Sacred Heart, Sherman, Jefferson, Harrison, Holy Savior, St. Mary's, Franklin, and McKinley schools were built. Franklin School in McQueen also housed a nursery for the children of working parents that continued until the 1940s. By 1904, the Butte Public School District employed two hundred teachers to serve eight thousand students.¹⁰

Catholic education was a dominant influence in Butte. By the time Butte became an incorporated city in 1879, its first Catholic church, St. Patrick's, had

opened its doors, with an elementary school and high school soon to follow.¹¹ Joining St. Patrick Parish as a leader in Catholic education, Holy Savior Church and School opened as a Jesuit mission in the McQueen neighborhood in 1902. Central High School, which served students from all the city's parish-based elementary schools, registered 170 students on the first day of classes in 1908. Later, separate Catholic high schools for boys and girls opened.¹²

Butte enthusiastically embraced the progressive education movement. Washington Junior High School, Montana's first "fully organized" junior high school and one of the first in the nation, opened in September 1915, welcoming five hundred seventh and eighth grade boys and girls that fall.¹³ Butte High School was touted as one of the largest and most thoroughly equipped secondary schools in the Northwest in the early 1900s. Students had a choice among four courses of study: English, scientific, classical, and commercial. In addition, they could take part in a broad range of extracurricular activities ranging from sports teams to academic, athletic, and social clubs. Boys and girls alike took part in glee clubs, band and orchestra, and a host of organizations for those interested in drama, foreign languages, speech and debate,

chemistry, journalism, and puppetry. A few student organizations were segregated by gender, such as the all-male Student Senate and the all-female Etiquette Club. Opportunities in sports were broadly egalitarian in the early 1900s. While basketball and football dominated boys' sports, girls had opportunities to take part in the Athleta Club, which encouraged athletic participation for all girls, the swim club, and girls' basketball. Over the years, the possibilities for both boys and girls expanded to include golf teams, ski clubs, tumbling, tennis, and more.¹⁴

The accomplishments of Butte's schools and schoolchildren were a source of pride. Robert Young, director of the Butte Board of Education, summarized community feelings when he wrote: "There are no brighter or better behaved children to be found in

the entire country east or west than attend the Butte public and private schools. This is chiefly owing to the high character of Butte's laboring classes, of their respect for law and order, and their desire to see their children become intelligent, self-reliant, and law abiding citizens."¹⁵

Butte's schools received direction from the State of Montana, a national leader in public education. For example, the Montana legislature passed a stringent compulsory education law in 1902 that included harsh consequences for truancy and called for the establishment of industrial schools for the detention of habitual truants in cities with populations of more than twenty-five thousand residents. The Butte Industrial School, with capacity for forty students, opened in November 1903 with the mission to



Catholic high school education had its start with St. Patrick's School, above, circa 1905, the first parish-based school to expand its curriculum beyond elementary school. St. Patrick's graduated its first high school class in 1896 and was replaced by the larger Central High School in 1908.

“reform the wayward and save the lost” so that Butte children did not grow up in “idleness, ignorance, or crime.” The school was touted as the only one of its kind west of Chicago.¹⁶

The issue of truancy speaks to a point of tension between educational reformers and some Butte parents and children. Many families relied on the labors of their children as part of their economic survival. While parents valued education, they also faced hard economic realities. Montana law prohibited general employment of children under age fourteen and specifically prohibited children under age sixteen from work in the mines. Despite the law, the homes, streets, and businesses of Butte provided many children with hands-on work experience well before they had reached their fourteenth birthdays. Children sold newspapers, packed miners’ lunch buckets, cleaned boardinghouses, and worked in a variety of family-run business to make ends meet. Many a Butte boy earned his first dollars selling newspapers—purchased at two for a nickel and sold for a nickel apiece—on the city’s busy streets.

John “Skeff” Sheehy recalled his days as a newsboy:

Whatever I did make, I turned everything over to my mother. Twenty-five or thirty cents. I sold the

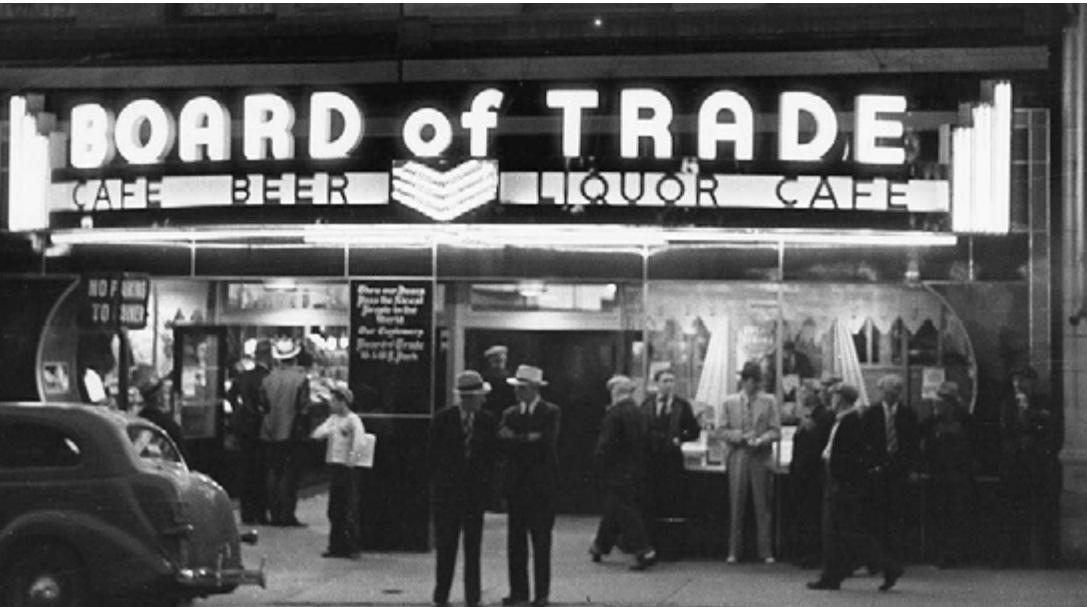
Butte Daily Post until I was about a sophomore in high school. . . . I had the Terminal Drug corner. It would be on the corner of Park Street and Dakota. . . . [I would sell the paper] in the afternoon. It was an afternoon paper. It came out at 4:00 or 4:30, something like that, right after school. [I would earn two bits or so] if I sold them all. Now, what made that possible, you’ve got to remember this—that all around the downtown area were places where the tenants were the men who worked in the mines, who were bachelors, where one room was enough for them. . . . The day shift got off at 4:30, and they’d come pouring down from the Hill, hundreds of men. Every corner, all through Park Street and Broadway, had newsboys on them. We claimed those corners as our property.¹⁷

Some children were successful at juggling the demands of work and school. Others found themselves in front of Judge Michael Donlan, the leading figure in Butte’s nascent juvenile court, facing charges of truancy. For example, in April 1911, Judge Donlan took Mrs. Berryman to task for keeping her fourteen-year-old son Eddie out of school because “the family revenues depended upon the proceeds from a dairy business and it was necessary for the boy to drive the wagon on the early morning route and attend to



“There are no brighter or better behaved children to be found in the entire country east or west than attend the Butte public and private schools,” according to Robert Young, director of the Butte Board of Education. Above, Grant School’s fourth graders pose in 1916. The Grant public school served Butte’s East Side.

Avoca Studio, photographer,
Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives, Butte, Montana, LH 021 B1 F13



Many a Butte boy earned his first dollars selling newspapers on the city's busy streets. The miners' night shift began at 6:00 and ended at 2:30 in the morning. The newsboys, like the young man pictured above circa 1939, would be there to sell to the hundreds of miners pouring off the Hill.

other work in connection with the business." Donlan was firm in his resolve: Eddie must regularly attend school or face remand to the Industrial School.¹⁸

Saving Children

Early reformers were staunch advocates on behalf of children who were orphaned or abandoned and those whose parents were unable to care for them due to illness, destitution, or dereliction. Even William A. Clark, the infamous Copper King, had a soft spot in his heart for the children of Butte. Clark had lost his son Paul at age sixteen as a result of a sudden illness. In Paul's memory, Clark funded the construction of the Paul Clark Home, which offered shelter to Butte children whose parents were unable to provide for them. The Home opened in 1900 and served 253 children in its first year of operation. Clark recruited the organizers of the Associated Charities of Butte to run the home, which they did with remarkable efficiency and a measure of moral judgment, as revealed in the 1900 annual report:

We must recognize that the most hopeful work that can be done is in saving children from beggary and vice. They must be taught to feel the responsibility that their parents never felt; taught, if possible, the skills their parent never learned; given the character

their parents never had. Proper care and environment would mean moral and social advancement to hundreds of our little products of the streets and alleys.¹⁹

Ironically, at times it was street wisdom that could be a child's saving grace. On August 15, 1902, little Eddie Bennett was among the excited group of children from the Paul Clark Home who boarded a special streetcar in Uptown Butte for an outing at Columbia Gardens. Over the course of the day, the children picnicked beneath the trees, twirled on the merry-go-round, and visited the zoo. Unbeknownst to the matrons, however, Eddie had gotten separated from the group. No one missed him as the youngsters boarded the streetcar and headed home at the end of the day. As the sun began to set, Eddie began to walk to the Paul Clark Home, located several miles from the Gardens. He descended to the outskirts of town and made his way through Uptown Butte, passing unnoticed through the throngs filling the streets, bars, and restaurants on a summer's evening. Long past dark, he was found trudging along West Park Street, mere blocks from his objective, and taken to the police station. Eddie, described as a "bright little fellow," was exhausted, but he "manfully held back tears" as he told the officers how he had gotten lost



World Museum of Mining, Butte, Montana, 306

Each week, children got free trolley rides to Columbia Gardens, the amusement park created by copper magnate William A. Clark in 1899. This photograph of the special trolley and its passengers, was taken about 1910.

and, after thinking the matter over, had come to the conclusion that there was only one way to get home and that was to walk. Eddie Bennett was five years old at the time. Little Eddie, it seems, was resourceful and streetwise, attributes worrisome in the eyes of reformers yet integral to the resilience of children growing up in the harsh urban conditions of Butte's early days.²⁰

The State Bureau of Child and Animal Protection, founded in 1903 and charged with investigation into reports of abuse and neglect of children and animals, focused considerable attention on Butte. Otto Schoenfeld, the first director, argued that it was the duty of the State to ensure that Montana's children did not grow up to be "vagabonds and criminals, idle and vicious, inmates of jails, reform schools, penitentiaries, hospitals, and insane asylums." In particular, Schoenfeld railed against "rushing the can," a common practice in Butte whereby parents sent their children to the corner saloon to purchase a bucket of cold beer and rush home with it. "The practice may not be looked upon by the public generally as a very grievous one, yet it is but the stepping stone to worse habits," Schoenfeld argued.²¹ Schoenfeld also stressed the urgent need for a humane officer specifically assigned to Butte to handle the city's high volume of child protection cases, and he was successful in securing funding for the position.²²

At times, Schoenfeld sought legal action on behalf of children, and he found a kindred spirit in

Judge Donlan, who oversaw a broad range of cases involving dependent, neglected, and delinquent children. Butte's law enforcement was also becoming preoccupied with youngsters on the city streets and their potential to go astray, as evidenced by regular court appearances of children on charges of truancy, theft, arson, and general incorrigibility. In 1907, the Montana legislature approved a bill to establish a juvenile justice system to ensure that "a delinquent child shall be treated not as a criminal but as misdirected and misguided, and needing aid, encouragement, help and assistance."²³

Juvenile court was largely a male space in Butte and elsewhere. Butte, however, was on the cutting edge of intervention with girls at risk of the perils of the street. In 1913, the city hired its first policewoman, Amanda Pfeiffer, who blended Christian ministry and law enforcement to rein in wayward girls.²⁴ On rare occasions, young girls appeared before the court. For example, in 1909 two "little girl waifs, May Lynch, 13, but small for her age, and Lillie Hawkins, reportedly 9 years old," appeared before Judge Donlan, accused of truancy and frequenting lodging houses:

Their mothers are dead and their fathers' whereabouts are unknown. Both girls are incorrigible truants and relatives could not take care of them. It was hard for the truant officer and humane officer to catch the elusive little waifs. The grandmother of May Lynch was aged and feeble and had lost

all control. The girls had secured a few dollars from their home and had rented a room in a cheap lodging house on South Main. The landlady was warned that she could be liable for prosecution for harboring the girls. It was deemed very dangerous for little girls to go to such places and other lodging house keepers were given the same warning. It was also learned that the girls had spent part of the money they had surreptitiously secured at their homes to purchase candy, ribbons, and other articles that are dear to the childish heart.

Upon hearing the case, Judge Donlan initially committed the girls to the House of the Good Shepherd, a Helena-based institution founded by the Sisters of the Convent of the Good Shepherd. The next day, however, Donlan rescinded his decision and opted instead to send them to the St. Joseph's Orphanage in Helena, contending that they were of "too tender an age" to be sent to a reformatory.²⁵

Community organizations such as women's clubs and the Women's Christian Temperance Union took an active interest in the lives of Butte children. For example, community business leaders and temper-

ance activists joined forces to establish the Butte Newsboys Club in 1903. Concerned for the boys' moral and social well-being, organizers brought them together in a self-governing club. The weekly meetings soon drew upward of a hundred participants to conduct formal business, hear guest speakers, and enjoy a variety of entertainment. The Newsboys Club was designed on the model of a miniature city, with boys elected to positions of mayor, city council members, and aldermen charged with oversight of the social and moral discipline of the members.²⁶

Child's Play

In order to survive on Butte's tough terrain, residents not only worked hard but played hard. Young and old alike found escape from the rigors of mining life in dance halls, theaters, ball fields, and skating rinks. From its early days, Butte was a die-hard sports town. Butte children grew up in a world as dominated by the rivalries of high school and Independent League football, the brash blows of boxing, and the joys of sandlot and league baseball as by mining. Professional boxing was a Butte favorite, and children as well as adults rallied around local heroes as they came up

Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives, Butte, Montana



To provide organized recreation and supervision of the newsboys who "roamed the streets" of Butte at all hours, business leaders and Women's Christian Temperance Union activists organized the Butte Newsboys Club in 1903.

Club members (above, circa 1905) wear lapel pins issued by the club. The club remained active until 1931, when it was judged to have outlived its usefulness.

against reigning champions. Inspired by the physical prowess of such local boxers as Jack Munroe, Buddy King, and Spider Kelly, Butte boys filled boxing clubs around the city.²⁷

Children invented their own competitions, from high-speed sled races down Butte's steep hillsides to fiercely competitive baseball and football games between rival neighborhood teams. While formal parks and playgrounds were scarce, gangs of children took to the streets and mine yards, creating their own play spaces. Lucille Martinesso Sheehan, the daughter of Italian immigrants, was drawn to the copper tanks containing scrap iron used to precipitate copper from mine water as her playground:

We always played in Meaderville. . . . We used to play in the copper tanks. We'd play with the copper water. [It was] just about three or four blocks from home. We'd have little milk cans, and we'd fill 'em with water, and we played in there. It was all around the copper tanks. They had these piles all over, you

know, of their debris. And we'd play around there. They were like big troughs, and we'd go around there and play in the water. I'm ninety years old and still here, so it didn't do any damage to us.²⁸

Butte children were also active participants in Butte's rich cultural life. Butte was home to numerous theaters where plays, musical performances, vaudeville shows, Italian opera, and magic shows captured the public imagination. It was not long before children were being recognized and courted as consumers of entertainment and regular customers for Saturday matinees. The Broadway Theater, with its fire escape leading to a skylight above the second balcony, was a favorite attraction for the more audacious. Young risk takers willing to clamber to the skylight, pry it open, and drop ten feet to the balcony could enjoy the show for free.²⁹

Frank Carden spent many a Saturday at the Lyric Theater on Butte's East Side:



N. A. Forsyth, photographer, MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, ST 001 108

Children in Butte created their own games and picked their own places to play. In a community devoid of grass and trees, an ore dump might serve as playground. The waste piles were excellent places for sledding and such other activities as digging a mine, the pursuit of the "young prospectors" in this circa 1909 image.

Butte theaters offered all types of entertainment, from plays, acrobats, and vaudeville to Italian opera and movies. In the photograph at left, “Caribou Bill’s Famous Dog Team” draws a mixed audience of spectators to the Orpheum circa 1902.

N. A. Forsyth, MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, ST 0001.070



On Saturdays and Sundays, you'd usually have what we later called a "cowboy opera," which consisted of Cowboy Pete Morris being shown riding his horse from east to west and then west to east to rescue the heroine. Pete never kissed or hugged the heroine but was often seen hugging and kissing his horse. He had a great following of kids at that time, and every time he kissed the horse, they would whistle and cheer him like the girls of a later period did to Frank Sinatra. However, none of them got to the point where they fainted like Sinatra's fans, but you could tell they practiced hard on the whistling bit. These movies were in black and white and were silent.³⁰

Adults recognized children as consumers of culture and took pains to protect their moral, intellectual, and social development. In March 1913, Butte schoolchildren were the captive audience for a motion picture on how to avoid the "perils of the street." The Orpheum Theater provided every school-age child in the city with a free ticket for a designated show time. The Butte Public Library launched its first "Children's Hour" in 1914. And Butte parents and teachers debated whether dance classes in the public schools

constituted a "social evil" or a legitimate part of the physical education curriculum.³¹

Butte's true centerpiece for entertainment was Columbia Gardens, which made its debut in June 1899. Columbia Gardens was an elegant park nestled in a protected fold of the rugged mountains east of town. It featured a lake, zoo, dance pavilion, arcade, and amusement park complete with roller coaster and carousel as well as vast gardens, picnic areas, and playgrounds. Funded by William A. Clark and managed by the Clark-owned Butte Street Railway Company, the Gardens offered miners and their families a magical place to escape from the rigors of daily life. From the start, Clark treated Butte children as special guests of Columbia Gardens, hosting regular events that placed them center stage.³²

Elinore Sterrett Shields Penrose was born in Butte in 1913. She recalled Columbia Gardens as

the most beautiful place for a place like Butte that for a long time had been ruined by smoke. Nobody had lawns. Nobody had flowers because of the soot from the smelters.... Once a week in the summertime, they had open streetcars, no sides on them, big red ones, and you could get in, and all the kids



would run for the streetcar, take our lunches, and go out to the Gardens. Then just about three o'clock they'd open up the pansy gardens, and they'd let us all go in and pick flowers. Of course, by the next week there were hundreds more. . . . The fellows would put them in their hats to take home to their families.³³

Butte residents made concerted efforts to encourage young people's civic participation. For example, the city's first Boy Scout troop was founded in 1910. The East Side Athletic Club, offering a needed venue for youth sports leagues, opened in 1910. By 1912, Girl Scouts had organized, and in 1915 Butte saw its first Camp Fire Girls troop. Religious and cultural organizations also focused efforts on organized activities for young people. In 1913, Butte's Jewish community organized the Junior Auxiliary of the Temple, and the Gaelic League began offering courses in Gaelic language and dances to the children of the city's Irish immigrants. Free Chautauquas—community-based cultural and educational gatherings—targeting audiences of children and youth were organized at Columbia Gardens. In 1919, the Butte YMCA opened its new six-story facility complete with indoor swimming pool, with times set aside for free recreational swimming and lessons for kids.³⁴

Fighting, Fire, and Fear

Butte's hopeful focus on children was tempered by more global concerns as well. As the nation faced the prospect of entry into war in 1917, tensions ran high in Butte, prompting Governor Samuel V. Stewart to declare martial law and call for federal troops to be dispatched to the Mining City in August 1917. While adults might have responded with resentment or

relief, children were curious. Some recalled the uniformed presence in the streets and boardinghouses transformed into barracks. Students in Sister Mary Xavier Davey's chemistry lab got front-row seats when the National Guard set up a post right outside St. Patrick's School. Sister Mary Xavier defended the rights of miners but also demanded that students respect the militia. As a gesture of goodwill, she had her students prepare coffee in the chemistry lab and serve the troops.³⁵

In the midst of this already charged context, Butte experienced its worst mining disaster—a cataclysmic fire at the Granite Mountain Mine that claimed 168 lives and injured hundreds more in June 1917. Over eighty children lost their fathers in the disaster. The fire sparked outrage among Butte's miners, and within days they were on strike. The murder of union organizer Frank Little in August 1917 brought labor tensions to the tipping point, and Butte residents found themselves under guard by federal troops sent in to quell unrest.³⁶

By the time the 1918 school year started, wartime anxieties were beginning to be overshadowed by fears of Spanish influenza. As a result of the epidemic, schools were closed from October to mid-December 1918; Washington School was converted to an emergency hospital. City health officials reported 3,500 influenza cases and 305 deaths in October 1918 alone. On Christmas Eve 1918, Butte humane officer P. J. Gilligan made a public plea for "big-hearted, generous, responsible persons to provide homes for orphaned children who lost their parents in the influenza epidemic." Herb Wendel was just a boy when the epidemic hit. He and five members of his family were taken ill. "I laid there in the front room in the big folding bed and looked out the window.



Butte's true centerpiece for entertainment was Columbia Gardens, located just east of the city. Every child's dream, it included acres of lawn, forested picnic grounds, a lake, a zoo, a playground, pavilions, a penny arcade, a roller coaster, and a ball field. This panorama of Columbia Gardens is dated 1914.

I could see in the Catholic Cemetery three or four funerals in there at one time. It was really a terrible, terrible situation.”³⁷

Despite the influenza crisis, Butte children remembered the signing of the armistice that brought an end to World War I. Jule McHugh, who was twelve years old at the time, recalled:

All the church bells rang, and the mine whistles blew at eleven o'clock on November 11. We didn't know too much about the war—we sure did later—but when all the excitement started, we were out in front sleigh riding. Helen was in the big dishpan, I was on the breadboard, and Lil was on the drawer of the sewing machine (on its side). We hollered, etc., but went right on riding. Tom and all the boys headed for the *Post* and the *Standard* to sell the extras. It was a money day. There was no radio for bulletins, so people had to buy the papers.³⁸

In the repressive climate that followed World War I, immigrants in Butte and across the country faced heightened pressure for “Americanization.” Some families pushed their children to learn only English and discouraged them from speaking their ancestral languages. Parents flocked to newly organized Americanization and citizenship classes. Butte’s first Citizen School, a night school for adults inaugurated in January 1919, offered instruction in English followed by courses in civics. Schoolchildren were encouraged to bring flyers home to their foreign-born parents. The sessions, open to both men and women,

cost one dollar per year, and 150 students registered the first night. By the end of January 1919, there were 344 students.³⁹

Aili Goldberg’s mother, a Finnish immigrant, was one of the students. Aili recalled:

I went to school with Mother all the time to get her citizen papers. . . . She did have to learn a certain amount of history. . . . I learned more history and more civics than I did when I was in school. I guess because the teacher just had to repeat and repeat and repeat. . . . I just thought it was really something. It was like the League of Nations here.⁴⁰

In contrast to this growing emphasis on Americanization, Butte’s working-class communities held to their strong political and cultural roots. Many Butte children grew up with a strong sense of ethnic identity. As Nancy Klapan described:

You grew up knowing the ethnic distinction of Butte neighborhoods. The East Side was always Austrian and Serbian, and the Irish were uptown a little ways, but they were all very distinct. And if you lived on the East Side, everybody knew, and you lived up above Park Street, you were Finnish or you wouldn’t be living there. Meaderville was off by itself, and it was very strong Italian, and the whole town was very strong Catholic from the Irish.⁴¹

Ann Pentilla grew up in the Boulevard area on South Montana Street, which was home to

many southern European immigrants, particularly Croatians such as Ann's parents. Hers was a tight-knit community "where everyone helped one another." Ann had fond memories of wedding anniversary celebrations in which neighbors would get together, go house to house collecting money, and throw a party for the couple. Children were always part of the festivities, which included dinner and dancing into the night.⁴²

Like many in her neighborhood, Ann's family had a big vegetable garden, a smokehouse, and a root cellar where they put away provisions for the winter.

In the wintertime, our dad used to get all set. We used to buy maybe twenty sacks of spuds. And then he would make his own sauerkraut—about two or three fifty-gallon barrels. Sometimes we'd raise a pig and then cure it and smoke it.... My dad used to go to the Metropolitan Market, and he'd buy a whole hog for about fifteen dollars. He would cut the meat in pieces and put it in a brine. We'd hang the meat on hooks out on the clothesline and have it dried. Then he'd smoke it. He had a certain kind of wood he used for the smoking, and he had a real huge smokehouse. That would be our food for the winter—sauerkraut and smoked meat. We had a basement that was all dirt. It was real damp down there. We used to have to stamp down the sauerkraut in the barrels with our feet. Stamp it until all the juice came out. It would have to be solid. If not, it would get mushy and spoil. It would keep all winter.⁴³

In Butte's neighborhoods, the sights, sounds, and smells of mining infiltrated the lives of Butte's working-class children. They knew the tone of bells that signaled danger and death underground. The rumble of ore trains reverberated beneath their beds. The constant fans and whistles of the mine yards were noticed more in their absence than in their presence—their eerie silence accompanying a strike or shutdown in the mines. John "Skeff" Sheehy, son of an underground miner, was born in 1918 and raised in Uptown Butte, his family home surrounded by the Original, Stewart, and Anselmo mines. The sights and sounds of mining remained a vivid part of John's childhood memories:

There was always a background of industrial noise. The several gallows frames were always at work, whirring away as they paid out or recovered the cables up over the idlers and sheave wheels and up and down the shafts, some for half a mile or more in depth. The trains rattled back and forth, and they were so heavy that they caused a rumble around them.... Each mine blew its work whistles at the beginning and end of each shift and for lunch periods, day and night, so that we always knew the approximate time without a watch....

Near where we lived on 621 North Montana Street, the Butte, Anaconda & Pacific Railroad ran right next to our house. There was a tunnel that ran right underneath Montana Street for the train to pass on to go on up the Hill.... [I remember] the first time Rita [my fiancée] came to our house.

Butte families often raised much of their food in backyard gardens and kept small animals, including chickens, pigs, turkeys, and goats, to help stock the larder. This family at 145 East La Platte owned a turkey and a goat.



MHS Photograph Archives, Helena Lot 8 box 144.09

I brought her home so the folks could see her. We were sitting in the living room, and the train passed underneath. The house was shaking, and we were talking normally, and poor Rita over there, she thought there was an earthquake or something.⁴⁴

The Roaring Twenties

The 1920s marked a dynamic time in America as consumer culture expanded, radios and movies became part of social life, and many families enjoyed greater prosperity. More youngsters were attending and graduating from high school than ever before, and literacy rates were on the rise. Children were coming to be seen as consumers in their own right—a ready market for Lincoln Logs, Erector sets, crayons, or the latest book in the Bobbsey Twins or Hardy Boys series.⁴⁵

For some of Butte's mining families, however, dreams of prosperity were elusive as the post-World War I era brought a downturn in copper production in Butte and the Anaconda Company responded with a dollar-a-day reduction in wages. When miners organized a strike in protest, they were met once again with the power of federal troops enforcing corporate will. Copper prices remained low in the 1920s as corporate interests sought to invest in rich ore deposits and cheaper labor beyond U.S. borders. Anaconda Company officials made the decision to suspend all mining operations in Butte from April 1921 to January 1922. Some families left Butte during the shutdown, and others struggled to hold body and soul of family and community together. The Joshers' Club, a charitable organization comprised of prominent local businessmen, delivered a record four thousand Christmas food baskets to needy families in 1921. The Butte Women's Council organized a relief program that provided a pint of milk a day for the city's needy children. As the *Butte Miner* reported, "Scores of little folks in the Butte schools, victims of malnutrition—some of them underfed, others lacking the food that goes to develop sturdy boys and girls—will soon be helped to find the highway to health through the free milk fund."⁴⁶

More and more women sought work outside the home to support their families. In 1921, Butte's Salvation Army opened a nursery so that mothers could have a safe place for their small children while

they were at work. The Butte Public School District was forced to lay off forty-one teachers, and the Butte Industrial School, which housed truant and otherwise "incorrigible" youth, could not afford to keep operating.⁴⁷

The opening of the East Side Neighborhood House in the fall of 1920 brought welcome diversion for many children of Butte. Modeled on the settlement houses of the nation's urban centers and organized through the National Board of the Presbyterian Church, the Neighborhood House offered recreational and educational activities. As a 1921 feature story in the *Butte Miner* described, the Neighborhood House quickly "won the hearts of the kiddies" with its pool table, library and reading room, needlepoint classes, and checkers tournaments. Kindergarteners enjoyed arts and crafts, and teens had a place for clubs, parties, and dances. It provided a meeting space for Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and Camp Fire troops. Older youth could also participate in governance as delegates to the house council. Hundreds of children took part in Neighborhood House activities.⁴⁸

Despite the adversity, 22,000 kids and adults gathered at Columbia Gardens in July 1922 to celebrate Miners' Field Day with races, competitions, and picnics. A record crowd of nearly 10,000 filled the new grandstand at Clark Park to watch the Clarks defeat the Anaconda Anodes. And when September arrived, 9,500 children headed back to Butte's public elementary schools. Butte High School enrolled 1,428 students that year, an increase over 1921, which the *Butte Miner* proudly announced as evidence that "modern children need higher education."⁴⁹

Throughout the 1920s, diverse community groups envisioned ways to engage young people in civic action and provide organized outlets for recreation. The Sunday *Butte Miner* featured a children's page, advice columns addressing the rearing of "modern" children, and regular features highlighting the activities of Butte's numerous Boy and Girl Scout troops. Boy Scouts earned high praise for their work in building "future citizens. Alma Higgins, founding president of Butte's Rocky Mountain Garden Club, sought to cultivate an interest in gardening and community forestry among Butte's schoolchildren. Beginning in 1922, Higgins initiated school-based programs in which grade-school children learned about bulb planting in the fall and competed for prizes at the



spring flower show. Higgins involved Boy and Girl Scout troops in community beautification campaigns, and she led a collaborative rose planting initiative involving the Butte public schools and members of the Garden Club.⁵⁰

Things Fall Apart

The Butte community entered 1929 on a positive note. Radio came to the Mining City when KGIR began broadcasting in February 1929, marking the start of a new era of communication and social life. Butte schools were closed on March 4, 1929, so that children could hear President Herbert Hoover take

the oath of office and deliver his inaugural address. The comedy of *Amos 'n Andy* soon became weekly family entertainment, and neighborhood children flocked to the homes of friends whose families had radios to gather around. For Christmas 1929, Butte's Kiwanis Club donated a radio to the East Side Neighborhood House, which drew an enthusiastic cadre of young listeners.⁵¹

By the early 1930s, however, the Great Depression had hit hard. Between 1929 and 1933, national unemployment soared to 25 percent. Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins reported in 1933 that one in five preschoolers and schoolchildren suffered from



Radio came to the Mining City when KGIR radio began broadcasting in February 1929. By the 1930s, all these children posing on the Silver Bow County Courthouse steps belonged to "Cousin Carl and His KGIR Happy Hour Kids" program.

malnutrition. In Butte, employment in the mines dropped by 84 percent over that time period, and families turned first to charities and then to the State of Montana for relief. By 1931, Butte and Silver Bow County had nearly six thousand residents on relief, and it was using the bulk of Montana's child welfare and mothers' pension resources. The State cut mothers' pension funds by 20 percent in 1933, exacerbating the struggles of children and families.⁵²

When President Franklin D. Roosevelt took office in 1933, his administration took swift action to bring

economic stability. The U.S. Congress authorized the Federal Emergency Relief Act (FERA) in May 1933 to provide direct aid to states for the poor and unemployed. The National Industrial Recovery Act, passed in June 1933, also provided support for public works programs to address widespread unemployment. With the passage of the Federal Social Security Act in 1935, federal, state, and county funds could be directed toward modest financial support for the children of poor families through the Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program. By 1937, 392

children from 175 families in Butte were receiving ADC support.⁵³

In 1935, the *Eye Opener*, Butte's pro-labor newspaper, described Butte as a "poor city atop the richest hill on earth." More than eight thousand people in Butte were unemployed—the second highest percentage of people on relief in the country—and, thanks to FERA, nearly half of the families in Butte were receiving aid. By the end of 1935, six thousand people were employed through Works Progress Administration (WPA) programs in Butte. Many Butte women went to work in WPA sewing rooms, cutting and sewing garments for needy men, women, and children across the state. The city received over \$1 million in FERA and WPA funds that year, and the county spent an additional one hundred thousand dollars on poor relief and widows' pensions. The WPA funded public work on construction of streets, sidewalks, and a city sewer system, and for the first time many Butte families had access to indoor plumbing.⁵⁴

New Deal public works projects provided some direct benefits for Butte youngsters. For example, the new Butte High School building opened in 1938. Butte children were delighted with the construction of the Broadway Rink, installed on top of mine tailings that had been leveled years earlier for temporary barracks when Butte was under martial law. The WPA also sponsored and staffed nursery

schools at the Blaine, Franklin, and Greeley schools, and its Division of Recreation sponsored a variety of music, dance, art, and crafts classes for children. Butte's winter sports enthusiasts were thrilled by the construction of Butte's first ski jump, a WPA project completed in 1937. Program funding also went into improving public parks and access roads in the forests surrounding Butte. The 1930s saw increased support of organized activities for children and youth by private groups such as the Catholic Youth Organization, which sponsored sports and social programs for children in Butte's Catholic schools, and the Knights of Columbus, which sponsored boys' boxing and basketball leagues.⁵⁵

Hardships of childhood during those years remained firmly fixed in people's memories. John T. Shea and his siblings benefited from WPA sewing-room products, FERA meat distribution, and his mother's resourcefulness.

We had clothes that were made down there right behind the Masonic Temple, and the girls all wore the same kinds of dresses, and the guys all wore the same blue suits and overalls. I never remember being hungry even during the Depression. My mom was a hell of a cook. . . . My mother made bread, we had rice and flour, and, I'll never forget it, Lion's Syrup. It had a picture of a lion on it. It

The Great Depression hit the people of Butte hard. In October 1931, about fifty of "Butte's prominent young women" formed the Butte Junior Service League to "foster the interests of its members in the social, economic, educational, and civic conditions of the community." Here, members dole out milk to children, who have lined up, buckets in hand.



C. Owen Smithers, photographer, C. Owen Smithers Collection

was green. That's what we had was Lion's Syrup. We'd come home from school, and my mom would give us a piece of bread with syrup on it to do you over for supper. We didn't have everything when we were growing up, but we were well fed. . . .

Centerville, that's where I lived. Walkerville is up above that. The WPA had the meat up there, and I pulled the little red wagon, and my mother and my sister and I would go up there, and we'd get the meat. But you had no refrigerators, so you had a brine barrel. That's where the meat went. And you reach in there, and if your hands were cut or had nicks in them, boy, it burnt. It'd sting the hell out of ya. And I told my dad, "Boy, that's tough on your hands." He said, "That's what the bare-knuckled boxers do. They stick their hands in that brine. It'll toughen you up. Don't let it bother you."⁵⁶

Children worked at what jobs they could find to contribute to their family's welfare. Alex Koprivica began working as a young boy during the Depression. "I remember as a kid taking my little red wagon with my brother George to the business district," he recalled. "We collected as many cardboard boxes as we could for resale at two cents a box to merchants in the fish market. It was one of the few ways to make money in those days. The wooden boxes we found were taken home to use as firewood. It was not an easy time for anyone."⁵⁷

Radio and movies brought eagerly awaited distraction to Butte children during the lean years. The Lone Ranger rode onto the scene in 1933 with his familiar charge "Hi-ho, Silver! Away!" drawing millions of listeners around the country each week. Saturday morning programming for children featuring the adventures of Tarzan and Flash Gordon captured a loyal radio following. The special treat of a Saturday matinee transported children from the realities of everyday life to new realms of adventure. They could escape into the worlds of their favorite superheroes, ride the plains of the Wild West, or celebrate the rags-to-riches story of Little Orphan Annie.⁵⁸

The height of the Great Depression was also a time of labor activism as unions demanded recognition and representation. A wave of strikes throughout the country pointed to the urgent need for labor reform legislation. Butte was again a site of labor struggle as the community endured a long, and at times violent,

strike that ran from May to September 1934. While the miners' union claimed the right to organize, the Anaconda Company-owned newspapers vilified miners' actions and dismissed their demands. Tempers were running high by June, and the miners' union and labor newspapers were posting lists of scab workers who crossed the picket lines to work. Daily front-page news reports detailed "violent acts of rowdyism" by local mobs made up not only of miners but also of women and children, who were accused of harassing the families of men who crossed the picket line, hurling rocks at mine watchmen, and "serenading" at the homes of men who were working "behind the fence" during the strike. Striking miners were accused of setting fires, tossing lit sticks of dynamite into mine yards, and throwing acid on mine watchmen.⁵⁹

John T. Shea vividly recalled the 1934 strike when the Company brought in scab laborers to work "behind the fence." He and his friends headed to the mine yards, ready to take on the men who had taken over their fathers' jobs.

We used to practice our pitchin' arms throwing rocks at those scabs behind the fence. They'd walk to work with paper bags over their heads, and we'd run alongside to get a peek at their faces, but lots of 'em you could recognize just by their shoes.⁶⁰

Miners achieved a significant victory as a result of the strike. The International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers won recognition, a closed shop, and a contract from the Anaconda Company providing for a minimum salary of \$4.75 per day and a 50-cents-per-day wage increase for all classes of workers. However, miners were called back to work on a part-time basis, and with food prices increased by 40 percent since 1933, families were still relying on public relief to get by.⁶¹

Economic recovery came slowly. By 1939, Butte's population was forty-nine thousand, significantly lower than in 1930, but, as a 1939 Butte economic survey noted, Butte had a high literacy rate and high enrollment in both public and Catholic schools. Ninety percent of Butte households had radios, and Superman, Jack Benny, Bob Hope, and The Shadow were weekly visitors in nearly every home. The city itself had experienced a makeover, with nearly four million federal dollars invested in community



During World War II, children of all ages were expected to contribute to the national defense. Butte kids helped search neighborhood yards, alleys, and empty lots, looking for scrap iron, steel, copper, and rubber. Here, a group of “scrap detectives” pose with their finds in October 1942.

development projects, including seven parks with playing fields, baseball diamonds, and tennis courts.⁶²

Coming of Age in Wartime

Life for many young people in Butte changed profoundly after December 7, 1941. World War II disrupted family life across the country as 16 million men and women joined the military. Fifty-seven thousand Montana men and women served in World War II, nearly 10 percent of the state's population. Over 2,400 Butte mine workers served in the armed forces during the course of the war; another 3,500 contributed to the war effort through their work in the mines. Given the need for copper as a strategic metal, miners were exempt from military service.⁶³

Children of all ages were expected to contribute to national defense. As the 1943 publication *Your Children in Wartime* instructed the nation's youngsters, "You are enlisted for the duration of the war as citizen

soldiers. This is a total war, nobody is left out, and that counts you in, of course."⁶⁴ Butte children joined in the nationwide war effort by both selling and buying war bonds, which provided funding for military operations in wartime. Little red wagons were put into military service as children gathered and hauled scrap metal for drives being coordinated nationwide.

Images of war permeated children's play and pre-occupations, as Shirley Trevena and Kay Antonetti recalled:

[Shirley] During the war, we were on ration coupons—sugar, coffee, nylon stockings, gas. And my dad brought some meat home, and it was very good-looking hamburger, rich and red. Anyway, he cooked it that night. And then he let out a big “neigh.” It was horsemeat. . . .

[Kay] We used to play that we were army nurses, and the bikes were our ambulances. And we had a hospital set up in our garage. And, oh, my God, we'd ring the sirens and go get the patients and just have a wonderful time.

[Shirley] I wanted to join the [Cadet Nurses Corps], the young girls who wanted to be nurses, but I was too young for that so I wrote letters. I wrote tons of letters. I thought I wrote to everybody in the country. Some of my dad's customers went into the war. I had their addresses, and I wrote to them while they were overseas.⁶⁵

Wartime created opportunities for young people to serve their country and assert their independence. John Mazzola was in high school when the United States entered World War II.

I went to Butte High School. I was supposed to graduate. In those days, the high school had two classes; they'd graduate in January and in June. I was supposed to graduate in '43, but in February of '43 I got patriotic. I thought, well, this war is going to be over. I want to help my brothers, and I want to help my country, too. So I became seventeen, and I went up and enlisted.⁶⁶

Butte families joined the nation in celebrating the end of the war on August 14, 1945. Word of Japan's surrender reached Butte about 5:00 P.M. on

August 14. As Kay Antonetti recounted, “On VJ Day everybody was out in the streets, you know, with confetti and horns honking and horns like for New Year’s Eve, and everybody happy—just like you see in the pictures, with everybody hugging each other and dancing and just a wonderful time.”⁶⁷

Postwar Promises and Problems

Promises of postwar prosperity were short-lived in Butte as men returned to the mines only to find fewer jobs and frozen wages. A brief but violent strike in April 1946 polarized the community. News accounts lambasted the impropriety of women’s involvement in the strike and the troubles caused by “young hoodlums” as they joined men in the streets to support the strike and expose scab laborers. Some youngsters reported that they had been paid by adults to perform acts of violence.⁶⁸

Many Butte youngsters experienced the conflict and confusion of the strike in more subtle ways. As one woman, whose father had a nonunion, salaried job, recalled:

My dad would go, and he would stay [behind the fence] because he was salaried. I can remember this girl who lived near us. She couldn’t play with me. It was 1946. She could not have a thing to do with me. She has since become my good friend, but at the time she wasn’t allowed to play with me. . . . In later years, people understood that management had to cross the line to keep up the maintenance on

the mines so miners could go back to work when the mines reopened. But in my dad’s time it wasn’t like that. Anybody who crossed the line was a scab. I hate that word, “scab.” I just hate it. It gives me the willies still.⁶⁹

New directions in postwar mining development resulted in profound physical and social transformations in Butte. In 1947, Con Kelley, president of the Anaconda Company, announced plans for the Greater Butte Project, which introduced a technology known as block caving to maximize output of underground mines. In a speech at the Finlen Hotel, Kelly heralded the project as the “third great period of mining in Butte.”⁷⁰ The Greater Butte Project moved forward in the early 1950s, but block caving was soon overshadowed by plans to move from underground to open-pit mining. In 1955, the Anaconda Company launched the Berkeley Pit, an open-pit mining operation, to wrest lower-grade ore from the Butte Hill.

At first, the Berkeley Pit signaled hope for Butte’s future. Not long after the start of open-pit mining, the Butte Miners’ Union and the Anaconda Company signed a three-year labor contract, which gave Butte families a sense of stability even as the character of mining and the community itself was changing around them. Buoyed by anticipated industrial expansion, the Butte Public School District called for a bond issue to repair and modernize city schools in 1956. Anaconda Company executives were reporting that upward of twenty-five hundred more miners would

Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives, Butte, Montana, PC 096 F11



A brief but violent strike in April 1946 polarized the Butte community. One woman whose father had a salaried non-union job recalled that he was called a scab and neighborhood children were not allowed to play with her. “I hate that word, ‘scab,’” she declared. “It gives me the willies still.” The house in this photograph was defaced and battered when angry mobs roamed the streets.

be needed when the open-pit operations were in full swing. School officials believed that could translate into an increase of three thousand students.⁷¹

The overoptimism of such predictions became apparent as the effects of copper production from Anaconda Company holdings in northern Chile began to exert an influence on Butte. In 1959, the miners' union was again negotiating a three-year contract and seeking substantial increases in wages and pensions. Meanwhile, the Anaconda Company began producing copper from the El Salvador Mine near Chuquicamata, Chile, in May 1959. Labor negotiations in Butte ground to a halt, and in August 1959 the Butte miners prepared to strike. Minutes before midnight on August 17, 1959, a powerful earthquake struck Yellowstone National Park, and its seismic effects shook Butte, 150 miles away. The next day, Butte miners went on strike.⁷²

For many Butte residents, memories of the 1959 strike were fused with those of the earthquake. Danette Harrington, daughter of a hoisting engineer in the mines, was sleeping on the front porch of her family home when the earthquake hit.

My brother and I never slept in the home in the summertime. I had a little front porch and a roll-away bed with a little nightstand and radio. So, the night of the earthquake, it was right after we had gone to bed. My mother had a sewing machine in the front room with a tea service on it that had been a wedding present. I could hear that tea service rattling. I thought, "What is going on?" I had a dog named Smoky, and he slept under my bed. I thought he was scratching and making my bed shake. All of a sudden my mother got up, and she was panicking, saying, "It's an earthquake." . . . My



While labor politics and strike economics forged a powerful divide among Butte residents, all could agree on the spirit and talent of the Butte High School marching band. Butte residents turned out by the thousands to see the band perform at ball games, parades, and other public venues. Here, the band marches up North Main Street in Uptown Butte in 1939.

father was underground when that happened, and they had to stay until they got the men up, and I can remember that he was totally shattered because of the fear of taking the men from the 4,000-foot level to the 2,000-foot level with the chipping engine and then from the 2,000-foot to the surface with the main engine. The fellows down at the chipping engine had to stay there to make sure they got the men out.⁷³

The 1959 strike started with a bang, lasted six months, and devastated Butte's labor community. Rumors spread that the Anaconda Company planned to close the Butte operations completely due to high operating costs. Some miners left town in search of work elsewhere. Grown-up worries preoccupied Butte's children. Bonnie Stefanic was in grade school during the 1959 strike.

The '59 strike was awful, really scary. My dad and mom, they always saved money. . . . And my dad, he'd run around and do whatever work he could do for somebody else under the table—fix cars, put on a roof, sometimes for free. . . . Some days we'd be eating beans. Christmas was sad, not so much because we didn't have money, but it was the fear.⁷⁴

On February 12, 1960, the unions and the Anaconda Company negotiated a settlement of the strike, but the long-awaited end of the strike was accompanied by sobering news—the Anaconda Company planned to close the Anselmo and Emma mines and cut back the size of its mining workforce. Seven hundred miners were out of work as a result of the closures. Over the next decade, Butte's population continued to decline. Schools, churches, and businesses closed. Franklin School, serving Meaderville and McQueen for decades, was closed due to damages caused by the 1959 Yellowstone earthquake.⁷⁵

Open-pit mining, along with modest underground operations, continued, but as the Berkeley Pit operation expanded in the 1960s and 1970s, the mine consumed several of the close-knit ethnic neighborhoods that had come to define the city. As a former resident of East Butte described:

From East Butte to Meaderville to McQueen, they are part of the Pit now. Other people get displaced



Courtesy Danette Harrington

New directions in postwar mining caused profound physical and social transformations in Butte. The opening of the Berkeley Pit operation in 1955 signaled the depopulation of Butte as fewer mining jobs existed. "At one point, when my parents were young, there were over a hundred homes in Dublin Gulch," Danette Harrington remembered. "When I grew up there were only eleven families left." Above, Harrington is pictured in her family's Dublin Gulch yard in 1950.

by renewal projects or whatever, but at least they can go back to the physical place. They can say, "This used to be my home." Even if it's a different building, they can still stand on the spot. But not Butte: it's eaten up. The ground isn't there anymore. It's hard to orient yourself to where things used to be. Those moves were hard on people.⁷⁶

While mining operations in Butte continued into the twenty-first century on ever more modest scales, children who came of age in the 1950s were the last generation for whom mining defined reality as it had powerfully done for tens of thousands of children for over a half century.

What do these many stories of childhood teach us about Butte? It is through a focus on children that we come to appreciate how and why people



Through a focus on children, we come to appreciate how and why people called Butte home and engaged in the risky business of mining generation after generation. Above, unidentified children pose in the 1950s with the Kelley Mine gallows behind them.

called Butte home and engaged in the risky business of mining generation after generation. When children are taken into account, the social history of Butte gains new meanings. Community life not only was modulated by shift work in the mines and the possibility of strikes but also moved to the pace of school days and, in summer, to the weekly rush of Children's Day at Columbia Gardens. Miners changing shifts competed with children for space on the Hill. A miner's daily connection to the world beyond Butte came through an exchange on the street with a youngster hawking newspapers. Parents, teachers, neighbors, and a host of civic groups dedicated themselves to the herculean task of child rearing. In a multitude of ways, children were a powerful force to be reckoned with, and Butte families lived with the hardships and dangers of mining life so that their children might have a life beyond mining. Children were, quite simply, Butte's

reason to be—copper was merely the means to support them.

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Notes

Children of the Hill

1. *Butte City Directory* (Helena, Mont., 1900), 19; Mary Murphy, *Mining Cultures: Men, Women, and Leisure in Butte, 1914–41* (Urbana, Ill., 1997), 4–10; Montana Writers Project, *Copper Camp: Stories of the World's Greatest Mining Town, Butte, Montana* (1943; repr., Helena, Mont., 2002), 303; Ray Calkins, comp., *Looking Back from the Hill: Recollections of Butte People* (Butte, Mont., 1982).

2. David Emmons, *The Butte Irish: Class and Ethnicity in an American Mining Town, 1875–1925* (Urbana, Ill., 1989), 13; *Butte City Directory, 1900*, 49–51, 60–70; Montana Writers Project, *Copper Camp*, 303.

3. “Five Killed at Leonard Mine,” *Butte Miner*, Apr. 24, 1913, 1. Unless otherwise noted, all newspapers cited in this article were published in Montana.

4. Patrick Michael “Packey” Buckley, interview by Joan Porter, Butte, Mont., Apr. 25, 2001, transcript, Oral History (hereafter OH) 025, Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives, Butte, Mont. (hereafter BSBPA).

5. K. Ross Toole, *Twentieth-Century Montana: A State of Extremes* (Norman, Okla., 1972), 113, 116; M. L. Cunningham, “Annual Report, Associated Charities,” Jan. 7, 1904, “Associated Charities” Vertical File (hereafter VF) 1713, BSBPA.

6. David MacLeod, *The Age of the Child: Children in America, 1890–1920* (New York, 1998), 40.

7. Ann Skoll Pentilla, interview by Ray Calkins and Caroline Smithson, Butte, Mont., Apr. 27, 1979, transcript, Oral History Collection (hereafter OHC); R. Calkins & C. Smithson: Pentilla, Ann Skoll, BSBPA.

8. “Investigation Record,” 1909–1910, Silver Bow County Poor Fund Investigation Records, 1909–1910, County Poor Farm Records, SM 109, BSBPA.

9. I. M. Brandjord, *State of Montana Department of Public Welfare Report . . . Terminating Mar. 1, 1938* (Helena, Mont., 1938), 19.

10. Robert Young, *The Public School System of Butte, Montana: Historical, Descriptive, and Illustrative* (Butte, Mont., 1904), 27.

11. Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 95.

12. By 1924, Butte had nine elementary schools and two high schools run by the Christian Brothers of Ireland, the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, and the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Boys Central High School opened under the tutelage of Irish Christian Brothers in 1924, and the old “Central” High School

was destined to become Girls Central High School. See *Montana Standard*, Apr. 22, 1951.

13. “Washington Junior High School,” VF 1927, BSBPA; Young, *The Public School System*, 27. According to Joseph Hawes, one of the first junior high schools in the country was established in 1914 in Sommerville, Massachusetts, which points to the cutting-edge nature of Butte’s school system. Joseph Hawes, *Children between the Wars: American Childhood, 1920–1940* (New York, 1997), 45.

14. This is not an exhaustive list of school-based activities. Butte High School yearbooks provide ample evidence of the variety of activities.

15. Young, *The Public School System*, 64.

16. Young, *The Public School System*, 43.

17. John “Skeff” Sheehy, interview by author, Helena, Mont., Nov. 17, 2009.

18. “School Boy Must Not Peddle Milk,” *Butte Miner*, Apr. 2, 1911, 6.

19. A. S. Christie, “First Biennial Report, Associated Charities,” Jan. 1, 1900, VF 1713, BSBPA.

20. “Children Enjoy Outing,” TS, folder 5, box 1, Paul Clark Home Collection, OC 39, BSBPA.

21. Otto Schoenfeld, *First Report of the Bureau of Child and Animal Protection* (Helena, Mont., 1904), 4–6.

22. Otto Schoenfeld, *Second Biennial Report of the Bureau of Child and Animal Protection, 1905–1906* (Helena, Mont., 1906).

23. In 1893, legislation was passed to establish the State Reform School for boys and girls ages eight to twenty-one “found guilty of any crime, vagrancy, mendicancy, or incorrigibility.” The school was to provide its inmates with training in “morality, temperance, and frugality and instruction in the different trades and callings of the two sexes.” The women’s clubs of the state joined forces with the State Bureau of Child and Animal Protection in 1917 to successfully lobby for the construction of a separate state reform school for delinquent girls. Michael P. Malone, Richard B. Roeder, and William L. Lang, *Montana, A History of Two Centuries*, rev. ed. (Seattle, 1991), 257.

24. John Astle, *Only in Butte: Stories off the Hill* (Butte, Mont., 2004), 56–57.

25. “Little Girl Waifs,” *Butte Miner*, Oct. 8, 1909, 5.

26. Activities of the newsboys were regularly reported in the *Butte Miner*. A

feature story on the newsboys, “Things That Are Being Done for the Newsboys of Butte,” appeared in the *Anaconda Standard*, May 3, 1903, 2, 7. See also Dale Martin, “School for Struggle: The Butte Newsboys Strikes of 1914 and 1919,” *Speculator*, 2 (Summer 1985), 9–11; and John Astle, “One Hundred Years of Butte Stories,” MC 350, BSBPA.

27. Montana Writers Project, *Copper Camp*, 237–39.

28. Lucille Martinesso Sheehan, interview by author, Butte, Mont., June 24, 2009.

29. Montana Writers Project, *Copper Camp*, 161.

30. Frank Carden, “A Walk from 228 Gaylord Street to Park and Main Streets and Beyond in Butte, Montana in the 1920’s and 1930’s,” ca. 1987, TS, folder 14, Butte East Side Collection, PC 096, BSBPA.

31. “Schoolchildren Will Be Shown How to Avoid Peril by Means of Motion Picture,” *Butte Miner*, Mar. 15, 1913, 5; “Open Air Story Hour at Gardens,” *Butte Miner*, July 23, 1914, 7; “School Dancing Is before Board,” *Butte Miner*, May 24, 1916, 6.

32. For the history of Columbia Gardens, see Lynne Boyer, “Butte’s Columbia Gardens,” *Montana Historian*, 8 (1978), 2–7; Judith Thompson, “Goodbye to the Gardens” (senior seminar paper, University of Montana, 1987), copy in Academic Works: AW Too4, BSBPA; and Patrick Kearney, *Butte’s Pride: The Columbia Gardens* (Butte, Mont., 1994).

33. Elinore Sterrett Shields Penrose, oral history recorded by Lynn Penrose, Butte, Mont., Sept. 3, 1984, MS, “Vertical Files—Biography: Penrose, Elinore Sterrett Shields,” VF 0674, BSBPA.

34. “National Chief Scout and Founder of Movement in Montana Meet Here,” *Anaconda Standard*, Feb. 11, 1920, in “Boys Scouts,” VF 1716, BSBPA; Astle, “One Hundred Years of Butte Stories”; “Girls Scouts,” VF 1729, BSBPA; “Camp Fire Drive Nears Objective,” *Butte Miner*, May 19, 1927, 4. Notices of language and dancing classes appear in the *Butte Miner* by 1913. On Junior Auxiliary of the Temple, see “Jewish People of Old Butte,” in “Ethnic Groups—Jewish,” VF 1096, BSBPA; “Children Free at Seton Indian Games,” *Butte Miner*, July 26, 1914, 6; and Edward Jursnich, *Butte’s East Side: Gone but Not Forgotten* (Denver, 2009), 99.

35. Toole, *Twentieth-Century Montana*, 138; Jerry Calvert, *The Gibraltar: Socialism and Labor in Butte, Montana, 1885–1920* (Helena, Mont., 1988), 113; Sheehan, S. “Nun Rethinks Our Educa-

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37. Calkins, *Looking Back from the Hill*, 13; "Father and Daughter Die of Spanish Influenza," *Butte Miner*, Nov. 5, 1918, 5; Astle, *Only in Butte*, 104; "Good Home for Every Orphan," *Butte Miner*, Dec. 24, 1918, 5.
38. Jule McHugh, "The Gulch and I," n.d., MS, "Neighborhoods: Dublin Gulch-St. Mary's," VF 1610, BSBPA.
39. "Citizens' School Opens Monday," *Butte Miner*, Jan. 20, 1919, 6.
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41. Nancy Klapan, interview by Seth Hertin, Butte, Mont., Apr. 15, 2005, transcript, OHC: Harrington Class: Klapan, Nancy, BSBPA.
42. Pentilla interview.
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44. Sheehy interview.
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