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MONTANA WOMEN  
AS COMMUNITY  
BUILDERS



# MOLDERS & SHAPERS

AN  
ORAL HISTORY  
Sampler & Guide

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MOLDERS AND SHAPERS  
MONTANA WOMEN AS COMMUNITY BUILDERS  
An Oral History Sampler and Guide



Laurie Mercier, Mary Murphy  
Linda Peavy, Diane Sands, Ursula Smith

Molders and Shapers Collective of Montana  
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# This Book is Dedicated to the Women of Montana

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Women's marching band in Bozeman Sweetpea Parade, 1907.  
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Transcripts & Production by  
Patti Borneman, Montana Historical Society,  
Oral History Office, Helena

Cover by Daphne Gillam, Bozeman

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# INTRODUCTION

Woman as civilizer has a long tradition in the history and mythology of the American West. Straight-backed, sharp-tongued, but essentially feminine, she was the schoolmarm, housewife, progressive reformer, or temperance crusader who brought to a raw, new land the culture and amenities of settled domestic life. In the last decade historians have added detail, shading, and complexity to this classic stereotype. They have recognized, as well, that this stereotype erroneously presumes an absence of civilization in the West prior to the coming of whites, thereby ignoring the richness of the Native American cultures that were already present.

But as with many myths, at the core of "woman-as-civilizer" lies a kernel of truth. Research shows that women were at the heart of many efforts that sought to improve the quality of cultural and civic life in the non-Indian frontier West. In the twentieth century, such women appear as the shadowy figures that can be glimpsed in the backgrounds of photographs that document the moment when prominent men broke ground for hospitals, schools, libraries, and churches. Yet if we sharpen our focus and look more closely, those women move into the foreground as the real molders and shapers of Montana's communities. Those women and their modern-day counterparts held bake sales to fund the volunteer fire department; clipped coupons to buy the latest medical equipment for the hospital; lobbied for the establishment of parks and playgrounds; beautified public areas with flowers and trees; staffed hotlines for farmers in crisis; established battered women's centers; provided college scholarships for women; and held union dances to benefit women workers.

However, not all community building took place in such a formal manner. Many

working women, struggling to hold together substance and soul, did not and do not have time to attend regular meetings or become engaged in elaborate projects. And working-class and minority women were not often invited to join upper- and middle-class groups. Yet these women filled the interstices of community by sharing food at funerals, community functions, and school parties; by helping needy neighbors; by sewing and quilting together for family, powwows, and raffles; by keeping an eye on each others' children; and by participating in church, ethnic, and fraternal activities. All of these women, in formal and informal ways, have provided the connective threads that have woven the lives of autonomous individuals into the rich, textured fabric of community.

The origins of the project that resulted in the "Molders and Shapers: Montana Women as Community Builders" conference and in the publication of this oral history sampler and guide stretch back about five years. A 1983 exhibit "Historic Women of the Gallatin Valley: Our Foremothers" was produced by the Bozeman Centennial Women's History Project and the Montana State University Women's Resource Center and featured biographies of women, listing organization after organization in which they were active. At the same time, an exploration of the Montana Woman's Christian Temperance Union by the Montana Women's History Project and interviews conducted for the Small Town Montana Project by the Montana Historical Society began to suggest the need to reevaluate the role women and women's organizations have played in shaping Montana communities. As historians, we began to anticipate a project for the Montana Centennial in 1989 that would involve women in every community in a celebration of their history, as

*At the time I was doing it, I never thought I was doing anything special. I just did it, as the other women did.*

Lillian Kirkemo, Missoula

*Mom used to help them out at the old St. James Hospital. . . . That was before they called that "volunteer work."*

Perdita Duncan, Butte

*It seems ironic that the women are the ones that brought all those kinds of things into the community, and yet they weren't the ones that got to take an active role in their leadership.*

Alice Finnegan, Anaconda

well as make a significant contribution to the historical record that has thus far paid scant attention to women's volunteer work.

As the project developed and early presentations were made to groups such as the Extension Homemakers and the American Association of University Women (AAUW), we realized that the topic of community building touched a chord in women that was strong but unsung. And it was the women themselves, many of whom have made community building their life's work, who suggested the questions that we, as historians, have investigated.

A conference was planned to bring together women from across the state and the historians who had already begun to research the role of women as community builders. The conference was designed to encourage the further exploration of women's volunteer work and the preservation of organizational records and to

offer workshops to improve the skills of participants wishing to work on centennial projects. Held in Helena on November 13-15, 1987, Molders and Shapers was sponsored by the Montana Division of the AAUW, supported by the Montana Historical Society, and funded by grants from the Montana Committee for the Humanities and the Educational Foundation of AAUW. It was attended by scores of representatives from Montana's various women's organizations, as well as interested individuals from across the Northwest.

The Montana Historical Society's Oral History Office created a special project on women as community builders to begin documenting women's personal histories. Funded in part by a grant from Montana's Cultural and Aesthetic Projects Fund, historians Alice Finnegan, Laurie Mercier, Mary Murphy, and Diane Sands conducted oral history interviews with



Butte Rocky Mountain Garden Club party, 1938.  
Courtesy of World Museum of Mining, Butte.

women of diverse personal and organizational backgrounds, creating a core of information for use by present and future scholars. These interviews have been processed and are available from the Montana Historical Society.

Funding for the publication of *Molders and Shapers: Montana Women as Community Builders: An Oral History Sampler and Guide* was provided by Equitable Life Assurance Society Foundation, through the auspices of their agent Jane Lopp, and the Northwest Montana Human Resources, Inc. Part I, "A Guide to Planning and Producing an Oral History Project," provides suggestions for carrying out an oral history project examining the role women have played in community work. Part II, "A Sampler of Oral History Excerpts," presents selections from completed

interviews. These quotations reveal a complex world of experience and meaning tied to women's volunteer work. We have drawn no final conclusions about the role of Montana women as community builders. We offer this presentation of our preliminary findings as a tribute to Montana's molders and shapers and as an invitation for you to join us in further study and dialogue.

Laurie Mercier  
Montana Historical Society  
225 N. Roberts  
Helena, MT 59620

Mary Murphy  
Butte-Silver Bow  
Public Archives  
Butte, MT 59703

Linda Peavy  
P.S. A Partnership  
1104 S. Fifth  
Bozeman, MT 59715

Ursula Smith  
P.S. A Partnership  
1104 S. Fifth  
Bozeman, MT 59715

Diane Sands  
Montana Women's  
History Project  
2626 Garland  
Missoula, MT 59803



Columbia Falls Business and Professional Women members painting library.  
Mel Ruder, photographer. Courtesy of Mel Ruder.

*The money just poured  
in. We made that  
\$50,000 dollars in three  
years [redeeming cou-  
pons]. . . . I got to know  
the cleaning aisle at  
Buttrey's very well.*

Frances "Scottie" Byerly,  
Lewistown

*[For] about 80 percent of  
the libraries in the United  
States, the woman's club  
either founded . . . or they  
continued to supervise or  
run.*

Marge Uhlrich, Lewistown



# PART I: A GUIDE TO PLANNING AND PRODUCING AN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Women's organizations throughout the state have contributed greatly to improving the quality of life for Montanans. Over the past century Montana women, through their clubs, societies, leagues, lodges, and associations, have raised funds and initiated projects to improve schools, hospitals, churches, and libraries; to beautify parks and highways; to conserve our wilderness areas; to care for the poor, disabled, and orphaned; to sponsor theater and art; and to lobby for a variety of civic causes. The advent of the centennial of Montana's statehood in 1989 is an appropriate time to consider a history project documenting the achievements of your organization.

In this section, we will outline the steps for planning and executing an oral history project for your club. The purpose of such a project is to record on tape the memories and experiences of a group of people whose lives might otherwise go unrecorded. And the beauty of oral history is that you can ask of your resources—living people—many questions that you cannot ask of sources already written, whose authors may be long dead.

Before you embark on your oral history interviews, you should consider what your end product will be. What you want to do with your interviews will influence how many interviews you will conduct, what your topics might be, and what kinds of questions you will ask. Your interviews may be an end product in themselves, or they may provide the material for a secondary product in a publication or presentation on the contributions of women.

There is abundant literature on "how to do" oral history. Rather than reinvent the wheel

and take up space describing how to set up an interview, select equipment, establish rapport with the narrator, and so on, we strongly suggest that you locate and study one of the manuals listed in the bibliography. Also, included in Appendix A are some helpful tips on interviewing techniques. In this section, we'll offer some ideas specific to documenting the histories of women's organizations.

To do a worthwhile project, to know what questions to ask and what sort of information to look for, you must have a well-thought-out work plan. Since women's clubs have a long and effective history of working through committees, you may want to break up the project into tasks that can be done by committees: 1) collecting records, 2) examining those records, 3) outlining topics and questions to be explored, 4) conducting the interviews, 5) processing the interviews, and 6) turning out a final product.

## 1. Collecting Records

Establish a committee to canvass your members for existing club records. These could include minute books, financial records, year-books, transcripts or texts of book reviews and lectures, copies of music and plays performed, photographs, luncheon programs, newspaper clippings, scrapbooks, even examples of artwork or needlecraft—anything that documents the activities and membership of your organization.

It might be that amassing these records is as much of a history project as your group will want to do. And many of you have already done this or have a club historian who has cared for

*And I just think that if we don't share the talents that are given—they're not ours—you know, they're given to us and if we don't share those talents, I think we are very selfish.*

Gerry Jennings, Great Falls

*WIFE's place is in the House, and in the Senate.*

Women In Farm Economics  
slogan

*Everybody's on a par  
around here, mostly.  
There's one or two kinda  
snippities, but not very  
many, they're very few  
and far between.*

Bernice Knierim, Glasgow

your records and kept them in a central place. But in other cases, as officers and meeting places have changed, records have been dispersed or lost and need to be rescued. Since your noncurrent records are such valuable resources for Montana women's history, we strongly encourage you—either at this point or after you have completed your oral history project—to donate your historical records to an archives, whether it be a local institution, university, or the State Historical Society. Donating your records to such an institution means that they will be catalogued, safely stored, and made accessible to the public as well as to your members.

## 2. Examining Records

The most crucial stage of your project—determining just what you want to learn from your oral histories—comes after you have collected your written records and before you set out to do your interviews. We suggest that you let the history and structure of your club determine the kind of project you want to do. This means doing some research in your own records. Again, a committee could be assigned to read through your minute books, yearbooks, and scrapbooks and come up with outlines that cover the range of club activities. For instance, the records might

reveal the standing committees or divisions your organization had over the years; the annual social events; the special classes you might have offered in art, needlework, and music; the kinds of civic projects your group initiated or supported; the changes that have evolved in the operating rules of the club; the books reviewed by members; the reports and presentations given; and the kinds and purposes of fundraising events. Your club records will suggest a wide array of other topics to investigate.

The following excerpts from the minute books of the 1930s and 1940s of the Marian White Arts and Crafts Club in Butte show just a few of the social and business activities that occupied that group.

### Excerpts from Minutes

Literary [division] reported a luncheon at the Casino with an exchange of gifts. . . . Needlework group it was announced would meet at the home of Mrs. Maillett for their Christmas Party. . . . Ways and Means: Mrs. McCall announced the dollar donation was making good progress. . . . Mrs. Peeks announced Mrs. Ellis was ill and Mrs. Lawn was home and improved in health and asked for a report of the illness of any member. . . . A letter from the Junior Woman's Club was read inviting us to attend their club meeting. . . . Dance pupils of Mary McTaggart Kintrea presented several numbers, and Mrs. Jas. Cummins, accompanied by Mrs. C. E. Peck, sang Irish songs. . . . Tea was served. . . . Mrs. Walter Williams gave a review of the program—Montana products luncheon, the banquet and several luncheons at the churches. . . . The first division of the literary class met at the home of Mrs. Pietsch. The short topic was a review of an opera, "Tristan and Isolde," given by Mrs. Gillis. The main topic "Foreign Women" was presented by Mrs. Frank Faulkner. . . . A wonderful report was given on the scholarship tea. . . . Total amount taken in was \$181.85 and expenses \$30 leaving \$151.85 to date.

The above minutes suggest several questions that can be asked based on the somewhat cryptic description of activities. For in-



Montana Woman's Christian Temperance Union float, Columbus, 1916.  
Courtesy of Montana Historical Society.



stance, obviously this club is organized into different divisions, as demonstrated by the reports from the "literary" and "needlework" divisions. How did these divisions function? When did the whole club meet? Did they meet in members' homes or at a clubhouse? Did different departments take responsibility for each meeting's programs? Some other questions that could be raised from the excerpt are: What was the dollar donation for? (That could lead into a general discussion of fundraising methods.) Did members care for each other when they were sick? Send cards, flowers, make visits? How often did the club participate in joint functions with other groups like the Junior Woman's Club? Did it ever invite other clubs to its meetings? What was the Montana products luncheon and what was the club's involvement? How were topics like "Tristan and Isolde" and "Foreign Women" chosen? Did the club have themes for each year's reading? How were they determined? Who received the scholarships? How was the fund established and organized? Were there other ways of raising money for it besides the scholarship teas?

Minutes often give the bare bones of club activities, tantalizing the researcher with phrases like, "a lively discussion ensued." And then they move on to the next order of business, leaving the reader wondering just what those women thought about that issue and who took what sides. In your oral history interviews you have the chance to flesh out those bare bones, to find out why some requests for money or aid were tabled while others were supported, to learn what the discussion was like when the question of supporting the ERA came up at a meeting, and so on.

### 3. Outlining Topics

After examining your written records, "holes" will appear in the story of your organization that you can fill in through oral history. In

fact, the more you research, the more questions will come to mind. At this point, make a list or outline of the topics still to be explored. The following outlines for group and individual member histories were developed by examining the historical literature on women, volunteerism, and organizations and formed the basis for the Montana Historical Society's oral history project, "Montana Women as Community Builders." (See Bibliography.) Listed are suggested topics and questions for discussion that you might find helpful in your interviews.



Absarokee Sewing Club, 1937  
Courtesy of Special Collections/Archives, MSU Libraries

### History of the Group

Besides the specific topics raised in your club records, there are some other, more general questions to ask regarding your group's history that will help illuminate our understanding of club life and women's groups. Your exploration of the history of your group might include a discussion of some of the following topics:

What were the goals and activities of the group? Why? How have they changed over time?

What factors have influenced women's participation in the group?

With what state or national organization(s) is your group affiliated?

If there has been a decline in membership, why? What about other organizations?

Describe the group's work in different periods.

What did these activities contribute to the community?

How was your group or activity regarded by the community or by different segments of the community?

Have you received acknowledgement from the community for your group's work?

What was the impact of the activities on the participants?

How was the group or project structured?

What was the purpose or goals? How were these determined?

How was leadership structured?

What were pivotal events and issues?

How were decisions made?

How was conflict handled?

What did it cost to join and to participate?

When and where did the group meet and why?

What social events or family events were part of the activities?

What did the group contribute to the community?

How did the group view its role in the community? (Activist, service, booster, etc.)

How would the group assess its impact? Is your assessment essentially the same? If not, elaborate.

Some people have claimed that women have a special sense of responsibility for the community. Do you agree? In what ways?

Who are the molders and shapers in your community? Are any of them women?

How did your group decide which projects to raise money for?

What means did you use to raise money?

Do you know how much you raised in any one year?

Are you required to report to the state or national level of your organization the amount of money you raised?

Do you make a public announcement of this effort in your community?



First Methodist Church Women's Society for Christian Service preparing for 1950 Bozeman Christmas Bazaar. Courtesy of Special Collections/Archives, MSU Libraries.



American Women's Volunteer Services members preparing Christmas gifts for World War II troop train.  
Courtesy of World Museum of Mining, Butte.

## History of Individual Members

While it is necessary to ask questions about significant aspects of your organization, it is equally important to examine the roles that individual members have played and to consider the dynamics of their personal commitment to community and club work. Recording this information will greatly expand our knowledge of the personalities of individual club women and, in a broader sense, it will help us understand the role of women in community building. Each woman's story will be different, but within the different accounts there will be similarities or familiar themes that will help historians make generalizations about club life and the meaning of volunteerism.

It is in the study of individual members that oral history is most valuable. Few minute books or newspaper clippings will tell us why a member joined a particular club, how she juggled

volunteer work with family and job responsibilities, or what experiences in her background contributed to her belief in service or activism. Posing these kinds of questions to the narrator—why, how, and what—will encourage her to think about her participation in the organization and what that activity meant to her. This intimate view of the past can provide insights into motivation, personal beliefs, and values, and it can add the human dimension to a story drawn primarily from formal written sources.

You might begin an oral interview by asking the narrator to recall something about her early life. This sets the stage for the interview, relaxes the narrator, helps her warm up for more difficult questions, and provides an opportunity to record relevant facts.

*I think there's a bonding . . . that women share that men ordinarily do not. . . I think there's a commonality of experience that women share.*

Mary Gibson, Kalispell

*Its object shall be to promote our own intellectual advancement, and to use our influence in this community for higher social, educational, and moral conditions.*

Butte Homer Club  
constitution



### **A. General Background**

Where were you born? When?

Describe your educational background.

When did you come to Montana?

Are you now or have you ever been married? What is your spouse's occupation? Number of children?

What is your ethnic background?

What is your own work history?

### **B. Family Background in Volunteer Work**

Do you come from a family of joiners?

Was your interest in community service influenced by family members or other significant persons who worked as community builders or volunteers?

In what ways, if any, was there an expressed expectation that you, too, would do community service work?

Did you grow up in a religious tradition? In what ways has that influenced community service?

### **C. Interest Areas and Community Service at Different Stages of Life**

What are your earliest memories of volunteer work?

What groups or organizations were you involved in as a young girl? Adolescent? Young adult? What special projects or achievements do you recall?

What special friendships derived from your involvement in those groups?

If and when you married, did you join different organizations or activities? How did your interests or activities change?

If and when you had children, how did your interests and activities as a community worker change? What activities in support of your children have you done? Why? How have you passed your commitment to community service on to your children?

If you are retired, what changes have occurred in your activities, groups, interests?

For all ages: Were there times when other people seemed to "expect" you to be involved in certain work because of your age or status? How did you respond to that pressure?

Do you consider yourself a feminist? How has this affected your volunteer work?

### **D. Family-Related Issues**

How does your work as a community builder fit into your other responsibilities for home and family? With your paid-work responsibilities?

What choices have your conflicting responsibilities forced you to make and why did you make the choices you did?

What impacts have the friendships and/or information gained in your community service groups had on your family?

What groups does/did your spouse belong to?

Do any of them have auxiliaries? Are you expected to join?

Do you automatically belong?

What do you do in these groups?

Compare the work and/or friendships in those groups with the work and/or friendships in other all-women groups.

Do you participate in any groups that include both sexes?

What are the goals, issues, and activities of those groups? Do women and men assume different roles in these organizations?

Compare the work and/or friendships in those groups with the work and/or friendships in all-women groups.

### **E. Community-Building Activities**

What organizations, clubs, associations, and auxiliaries were/are you involved in?

How and why do you decide which groups to join and what issues to work on?

How did you become involved with each of the groups you belong to?

What interested you about the group (other members, issues, activities)?

What was/is the process of becoming a member?

Did you have other friends or relatives who were also members?

How old were you when you joined?

How long have you been a member?

If you are no longer a member, when did you stop being active and why?

If you are the founder of a new group, describe the events leading up to the founding of the group and discuss the issues, activities, and people involved.

Why have you played the role(s) you did in the group?

What impact have you had on the issue/group?

What impact has the group had on your life?

What offices have you held at the local or higher level?



What were your responsibilities?

What gave you your greatest satisfaction as a leader?

What did you personally gain from your experience as a leader?

What kinds of relationships or friendships were formed as a result of your leadership role?

What was your role in each activity or issue?

Describe some of the activities that you were involved in.

What impact did those activities have on you?

What was the most fulfilling aspect of your work with this group?

What friendships or other relationships developed from your work in the group?

Are you a member of several organizations with overlapping memberships?

#### **F. View of the Role Played by Women in Community Service**

How do you see your "work" as a community builder?

How does that view fit into or express your life goals? What are those goals? What are their origins?

Have your goals changed or been expressed differently at different points in your life? Why?

In your view, what are the appropriate roles for women in the community? For men? Are these roles different? Have they changed over time? If so, why and how?

#### **G. Informal Community Service**

Much community-service work/volunteer work is not organized; it is one-to-one work with friends or neighbors. Tell me about the work you do that just "helps out" people.

Explore "good neighbor" work, helping the sick, the elderly, the youth of your community. Why do you do this work?

What does it do for you?

Describe your work in the last week that falls into this category of community service.

#### H. Volunteerism and Paid Work

Have the skills, contacts, or work you've done as a volunteer helped you to get paid employment? Describe.

How does volunteering versus being paid affect how you feel about the work?

Should volunteers be paid? If so, why? Why not?

How is community service recognized and rewarded in your community?

Have you ever received an award or recognition for your work as a community builder? What? Why? Describe.

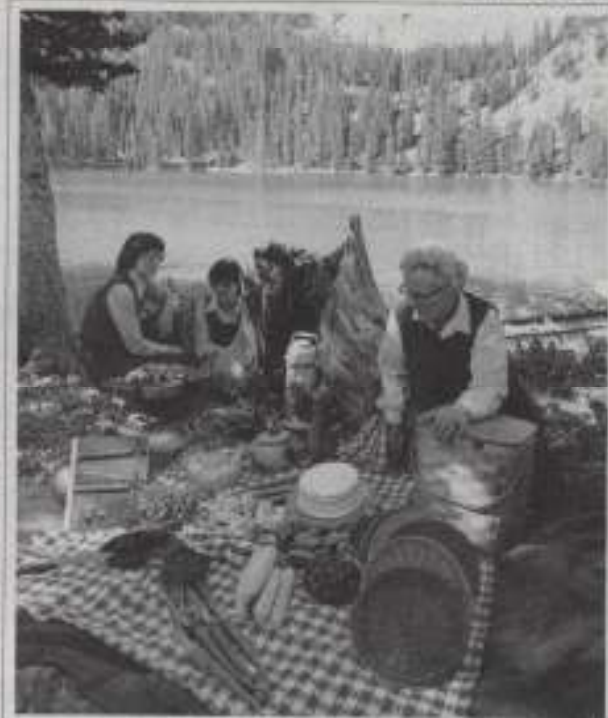
What did the recognition mean to you? To your family?

Again, the above outlines present *suggested* topics for discussion. Women ordinarily do not compartmentalize their lives into many separate categories, as the above list of questions might suggest. The lines between public work and private life often blur and overlap. Your interviews may oscillate back and forth between the topics outlined in the group history and in the member history sections. Rather than rigidly following our outlines, you should listen carefully to your narrator's response and follow up on points that she will raise. While you want to explore the issues that we have listed, trust your common sense and curiosity to direct the flow of the interview. Your own knowledge of the individual's work in the organization and the community may raise many questions that we have not anticipated. We are interested in hearing about those questions. As you discover new and important topics to explore in your interviews, please let us know.

## the Homemaker

OF THE NATIONAL EXTENSION HOMEMAKERS COUNCIL

September-October 1979



This edition of *The Homemaker*, the National Extension Homemakers Council magazine, carried a cover story on the Bridger Canyon Women's Club and their historical cookbook, *Canyon Cookery*. Courtesy of Bridger Canyon Women's Club.



#### 4. Conducting the Interview

From your research and the suggested questions, you can decide what direction you want your oral history project to take and which women you will interview. The above questions cover a wide variety of subjects; you may decide to focus more closely on one particular area of club work. For instance, one project might be to explore why your organization chose to participate in the civic projects that it did and what those projects accomplished. It is probable that projects changed over time as the needs of your community changed. You could uncover many interesting facts about how decisions were made, how funds were raised and work was accom-

plished, how your community viewed your organization, and what kinds of satisfaction members got from their activities.

If you choose to focus on the work your group has done, you will want to compile a list of members involved in various projects, from the person who has been engaged the longest to your newest participant. After all, history is the study of events through time, and you don't necessarily want to interview only the oldest members of your club, but also women who have been involved during different periods. In the same vein, you want to include women who have been involved on every level of activity, not just chairs of committees or club presidents.

*Organizations change when they're made up of men and women, and I think it's for the better.*

Harriett Meloy, Helena



*The Ladies Aid [was] organized almost as soon as they built the church.*

Gwen Mitchell, Butte

Women of the Trinity Methodist Church of Butte.  
Courtesy of World Museum of Mining, Butte.

*We can't possibly pay  
everybody to do all the  
things that need to be  
done.*

Judy Mathre, Bozeman

*Do Everything*

Woman's Christian  
Temperance Union motto

### 5. Processing the Interview

As soon as you have completed the interview, it is important to have the narrator sign a release form, granting you and future researchers permission to use the material. (See sample release form, Appendix B.) At a minimum, you should prepare a brief summary or index to the tape contents. If you have plans to use any of the material on the tape at a later date, say, for an article in the local newspaper, a club history, or a media production such as a slide-tape show, you will want to know what information is contained in the tape without listening to it. You can base your summary on any notes you have jotted down while conducting the interview. A more accurate method of identifying topics for

easy retrieval is to produce a timed summary. After the interview, listen to the tape, and note general topics discussed, listing key names, places, dates, and events. By using a stopwatch, you can note where on the tape the specific information is discussed. (See sample summary, Appendix F.)

The ideal guide to the tape-recorded interview is the verbatim transcript. Transcribing, or taking the spoken word and translating it into written form, is a time-consuming process, but it is well worth the effort if there are volunteers willing to take on the task. Your club's committee may have some people who relish research, some who like to interview, and some who prefer to take the final interview and produce a tran-



Fortieth Anniversary, Helena Current Topic Club, 1932.  
Courtesy of Montana Historical Society.



script that can be easily picked up, read, and enjoyed by other members. (See sample transcript excerpt, Appendix G.)

There are numerous manuals and books that describe in detail the process for producing such guides to tape holdings. (See Bibliography.) If you have further questions, you might contact a group in your area who has already done an oral history project. Consult the Montana Oral History Association's *A Directory to Montana's Oral History Resources*, available at your local library, to find these groups. Or contact a member of the Montana Oral History Association or the Montana Historical Society's Oral History Office. Whether your group's interviews have rough notes, brief summaries, or full transcriptions, you will want to start a card file listing the names of women interviewed, with a short list of key topics, names, and places to guide the historian(s) in your group who will use the oral histories.

## 6. Turning Out a Final Product

Once the tapes are in a more accessible form, your group can begin a variety of fun projects utilizing the interviews in public programs and publications. Some possibilities include a series of feature articles for your local newspaper during the centennial year; a small booklet on your club's history featuring excerpts from your interviews and historic photographs; a slide-tape show with clips of tape excerpts as narration; and a lesson plan on women as community builders for your public school's Montana history class. Or you might put together a readers' theater by constructing a script from interview excerpts, assigning a number of characters, and having members of the club do a dramatic reading of the different parts. This program could be designed for your birthday luncheon during 1989 or perhaps as a public program at your local library or community center during National Women's History Month in March. The range of products you can create from oral histories is

limited only by your imagination.

And what should you do with the tapes after the group has used them? Your labors were not of value just to the women of your club. The reminiscences you recorded are of interest to a much wider audience. Local, Montana, and women's historians will want to study these interviews as they begin to look at the significance of volunteer work in the history of the town, region, state, and nation. If your group has tried to produce quality oral history interviews, they should ensure that these resources are preserved and made available for future generations. The tape itself is still a fragile medium, requiring proper care and maintenance that only libraries and archives can provide. After your project is completed, deposit the tape recordings and copies of any accompanying written materials in an appropriate repository, such as a library, archives, or museum.

Your oral history interviews—which will describe the history of your organization and the history of members' involvement—are like fabric pieces of a quilt. As they are laid out and pieced together, they will begin to reveal patterns of the significant but unrecorded accomplishments of women who, together with other women, worked quietly to transform and improve Montana communities.



Helena Branch AAUW book sale, 1963.  
Courtesy of Helena Branch AAUW.

# 27th Anniversary MONTANA FEDERATION OF COLORED WOMEN'S CLUBS

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## BUTTE

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JULY 27 - 28  
1948



## PART II: A SAMPLER OF ORAL HISTORY EXCERPTS

### LEARNING THE VALUE OF COMMUNITY SERVICE

We felt that the feeling of volunteerism was not prevalent in our young married women. It was all right if they could belong to an organization for the fun and sociability, but for some reason we had failed as parents and older club members in instilling them that feeling of responsibility to their communities. And if you don't start even within your own family, and then the community, or whether it's the church or school, then how can we expect them to have that feeling toward their country or the world. That was important to me and I tried to bring that out.

*Marge Uhlrich, Lewistown*

I worked with our Boy Scout troop. You know the big thermometers that communities put out to show how much you've . . . earned at that United Way? . . . The [Boy Scouts] go out and paint up the signs. . . . I just feel so strongly that if kids are taught to give, and I don't mean money, but of themselves when they're young and if they see their parents giving, it will become a natural thing. It's like putting a nickel in the church collection plate every week. If you do that as a child, you'll do it as an adult.

*Gerry Jennings, Great Falls*

[My mother was always] preparing food for special [church] suppers or helping with children's programs. But I would say that 90 percent of any volunteer work was church affiliated, because it had such a strong influence on the neighborhood. . . . If someone died, everybody came out and helped and I think I learned a lot of skills that way. That that's just part of what you do to repay society for your space here. You know, that you help and get involved and share your talents. I don't know that I got it directly from my parents, but that was the kind of community we grew up in.

*Shetla Conners, Great Falls*

I think the responsibility I had as a child probably helped me become a responsible adult. . . . Just recently I've been looking at my role as caretaker, and I guess it was put on me . . . from the time I was real young, and I just did it. . . . To this day I'm like that, I'm always like doing something for somebody else, never even thinking about it, just doing it. But never would I dream to ask somebody to do something for me. . . . When people have done things I'm really uncomfortable.

*Alice Finnegan, Anaconda*

I brought along [to my Catholicism a] lot of feeling of obligation to . . . society at large. . . . There was a lot of stress at Carroll College within the philosophy classes and theology classes about social justice and commitments to the world.

*Vivian Brooke, Missoula*

When I grew up in Butte . . . there was a lot of discrimination. . . . But I suppose that is what makes a person decide what you're going to be in later life. It made a difference to me in what I chose to do as an activist. . . . I had to go pay light for my mother because she couldn't afford to pay the whole bill and I had to explain as an eleven year old girl going into a place and talkin' to a lady that your mother couldn't pay the whole bill and the lady saying, "Well, she has to or the light'll go off." When you gotta go home and tell your mother . . . that she's gotta sit in the dark with a whole room full of children . . . you just don't tell your mother those things. Those kind of things make you judge the attitudes of white people. And in those days, because you're young, you lump them all together.

*Lula Martinez, Butte*



28<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL CONVENTION MONTANA FEDERATION OF COLORED WOMEN'S CLUBS  
ENTERTAINED BY PLEASANT HOUR CLUB JULY 11-12, 1949 HELENA, MONTANA

Twenty-eighth annual convention of Montana Federation of Colored Women's Clubs entertained by Pleasant Hour Club of Helena, 1949. L.H. Jorud, photographer. Courtesy of Montana Historical Society.

I always was active. . . . I was interested in the U.N. and of course always the women's issue, this is my thing. Get justice for women. Justice and equality. Equal treatment. I think when I was a little girl I knew there was something wrong out there that I wasn't going to be treated quite right.

Something my mother said for years, and that is that "To whom much is given, much is expected." . . . and so if somehow you can make people feel that they make a difference, that their contribution or their body on the line, so to speak, will make a difference, that something will be different in this world.

## GETTING THINGS DONE

[We formed a Church Women United group in Columbia Falls because] we were lonely for the things that we had been in other places. We knew church women functioned throughout this nation. And we felt if Columbia Falls was going to have a church women unit ever, someone had to begin it. . . . So we got the material and went to work. And we haven't stopped. . . . It was a rich beginning and . . . we became so ecumenical in thought that we don't look at each other in a denominational way, we are friends. And we feel like we have been able to help the town in a greater way, because of this unity in God, unity in Christ, that allows us to *be* something to the people of this town.

*Ruth Renfrow, Columbia Falls*

The Catholic Church here was our center. . . . You joined the church groups and you sang in the choir and that was all there was to do because you didn't have money to go to, you know, all over like the other ones did. Money was tight. But you had enough activities in your own community that you didn't have to look for anyplace else.

*Emelia Qunell, Black Eagle*

The [Choteau] woman's club had taken charge of putting in the park. . . . The park belonged to the Great Northern Railroad and we got a lease on it and we put in tables and things and, oh, a little building that they had over there and we had our picnics over in there. It was all fenced in, we had swings and the woman's club did all that. Paid for it themselves, the woman's club.

*Emily Crary, Choteau*

When I was president . . . AAUW had done a lot of community service projects through the years, but I remember feeling that we had a lot to offer and so I appointed a committee to look at some community needs and then we decided that we would focus on some specific areas. And we did begin to become more active in community service kinds of programs in, oh, the late '60s. We worked with, well, the library moved from the old, what's now the Hockaday Art Center building, into its current headquarters and we were involved in refurbishing the children's section of the library.

*Mary Gibson, Kalispell*

I always felt that I could belong to a woman's club. They were the ones who got to the grass roots, found the needs of the community and went ahead and did it. The community realized that when there was something that needed to be done, all they had to do was ask the woman's club.

*Marge Uhrich, Lewistown*

One of our projects in AAUW, speaking of libraries . . . previously there were room libraries . . . each teacher would have her own little collection and many times the teachers would spend their own money on these collections . . . And so you might have an encyclopedia set in each room which seemed kind of ridiculous and so we started campaigning for central libraries in the elementary schools and we made a recommendation to the school board and it passed . . . and I give our AAUW organization a great deal of credit for having . . . central libraries.

*Harriett Meloy, Helena*

And our [YWCA] imperative and our purpose . . . is to empower women and children, and so we've started a drop-in daycare service and we have a young mother's group that meets here regularly and pregnancy prevention for teenagers. Recognizing that that was a need that was not being met in the community and the schools didn't really want to touch it. And this would be a good safe place to work on it.

*Sheila Conners, Great Falls*

## TOASTS

### "MOTHER CLUB"

"The fountain of Morality and good,  
The 'Mother Club,' the school of motherhood."

Mrs. S. M. Owings, Woman's Club, Deer Lodge.

### CLUB DIVISIONS

"To each division of the clubs drink deep;  
And let the factional difference sleep."

Mrs. L. T. Jones, Woman's Club, Billings.

### HOUSEKEEPERS

"The housekeeper; herself alone can know  
How much she does to make this old world go."

Mrs. E. L. Houston, Housekeepers' Club, Bozeman.



We're not working all the time cooking, baking, sewing and stuff like that. . . . every year there's at least one or two from Montana that get these scholarships. . . . [For instance], this woman has two or three little kids and her husband died and she had no way of supporting herself, she needs an education. She got married when she was quite young. Okay. She is going to college now. She's through high school anyway, and she'll be through this, she's got one more year to go. And she's being sponsored in the college and that way she can keep her kids with her. As it was, she couldn't afford to go to school and she couldn't afford to keep the kids with her. . . . [PEO does] things like that, it's mostly educational.

*Bernice Knierim, Glasgow*

The whole idea of our projects that we start is that we don't keep them forever. We start it, do it for maybe three years, and then turn it over to a group in the community so that we are developing projects. If it's not something that the community wants to take on, then our feeling is, it's probably not that important in the community, so it might just die a natural death. Oh, we've had Paris Gibson Square, Easter Seal Society, we did a lot in starting the Charlie Russell Museum, there've been a number of things in Great Falls that have been begun by the Junior League.

*Gerry Jennings, Great Falls*

So we raised \$500 by selling fifty-cent chocolate bars. Imagine how many that took. And we didn't get the whole fifty cents, we had to pay for the chocolate bars. And we were all over—another woman and I even took a ride down to Dillon and went knocking door-to-door to sell those candy bars, and we made \$500 towards the building of the Galen Chapel. That was a big project.

*Marian Canavan, Butte*

I had three small preschool children and met a group of young ladies at a bowling alley, we bowled as a matter of fact, and we got to visiting, they had young children, too, and we had a lot of the same problems and concerns, with raising the kids. And so we'd heard about Extension Homemakers and decided to contact the Extension office and find out what it was about and how we could start one. So, six of us chartered our own group. And so we kind of gave up the bowling for the time being and met as a

group of women and learned lots of things. Homemaking skills, child rearing skills, and all those kinds of things. . . . Being all young and new mothers, we just thought maybe the Extension Office could teach us some things and we'd have fun doing it as a group. So that's how we began. . . . We met in the evening so our husbands would take care of the children, we didn't take them with us.

*Alene Stoner, Helena*

I've been [Women Involved in Farm Economics] hotline coordinator since its inception . . . The idea for the hotline came about at a state steering meeting in Helena. . . . You won't talk to your neighbor about it and you can't tell your best friend and you feel like you're the only person in the whole world that's having this problem. . . . So many people were just absolutely desparate. . . . Oh, it's been tough on a lot of the women. . . . [Their husbands] can function well in their day-to-day things, as run a tractor, summer fallow, whatever they have to do, they can do that. But they can't make a major decision and they can't deal with their lenders, no way. . . . Particularly, farm women were protected from these things, you know. You weren't supposed to know what was going on in the books and stuff like that. And a lot of them have had to go out and deal with the lenders and it's been really tough on 'em and they've been so scared and frightened. Sometimes there'll be daily phone calls from these people while they're dealing with their lender. . . . Probably the most important thing we've done and been is a caring voice on the end of a telephone that doesn't say, you know, "This is something you've done to yourself, you're a bad manager," . . . we're there for people whenever they need it."

*JoAnn Forsness, Wolf Point*

When we come up with the fact that you couldn't set a toe in any of their [white] churches, that's why we [blacks] had two churches that were quite filled Sunday afternoon and Sunday evening. You didn't dare go into the Baptist, the Methodist . . . the Catholic Church, the Presbyterian, the Episcopalian Church. . . . We had our own churches, why would we try to go? But we found out the reason that we weren't accepted. . . . The mothers would take the children to two different churches [black Methodist and Baptist] . . . and they had parties at the churches. Each church had its little area where they had a stove and they had suppers and parties and the young people could gather there



Interdenominational Summer Bible School of Grain Community, Valley County, 1924.  
Courtesy of Valley County Pioneer Museum.

and have their parties because we didn't have our own [black] dance hall. And they were supervised affairs, and mothers all participated. William Fenter's mother was a great one for having parties at her house so the young people would always have a place to go. And we had some good times there at those parties. As I say, we weren't allowed in the dance halls.

*Perdita Duncan, Butte*

I've always volunteered. I've formed food banks, worked for food banks, worked for senior citizens' food banks and clothing banks. Also Senior Citizens Protective Group. [By] protective group, I mean someone who goes to these apartments like, say I took ten people that I would be responsible for, senior citizen

shut-ins. And then I'd go to their homes everyday at a certain hour. I'd knock on their doors and they'd answer me. They'd say they were alright and I'd go in and see that they were fine, that they took their medicine, their dressing and everything and see that they didn't need anything, and then I'd go to the next one. But every day that was what I did so that I would know that those ten seniors that were shut-ins, were alright, because there's not enough social workers to go around to take care of those things.

*Lula Martinez, Butte*

So the first volunteer work that I was involved in was at a Catholic orphanage, which was very interesting. And it's so strange, because there are so few orphanages these days, but that's what it was, it was actually called St. Joseph's Catholic Orphanage and we would go there and put in so many hours a week . . . where you would go to play with the children.

*Sherry Wulf, Kalispell*

I wonder if I designated myself the town's caretaker. After I was no longer the caretaker in my own family at home with my brothers and sisters, and my kids were teenagers so they didn't need me so much anymore . . . I just felt so strongly about St. Paul's Church and so strongly about our buildings in town, that why did we have to lose everything? Other towns were keeping 'em, why were we so different? Why wasn't our town important?

*Alice Finnegan, Anaconda*

## FINDING A NICHE

I actually have come to the stark realization that you cannot do everything you want to do, and that was an eye-opener for me. So, I think of it as choosing my battles. You can't fight everything, so you have to choose what you want to fight. And the people that I feel strongly about are the children and so I tend to look at children-oriented organizations.

*Shella Rice, Great Falls*

I feel like I'm a part of the community. I feel like I can go almost anywhere and there's somebody there that knows me . . . and at my age now and with Fred gone. I just was so lonely for a while there, then I started going back to these [activities] again. I walked down the street now and everybody I see put 'near says hello to me again. . . . So if I get forgotten, it's going to be my own fault, the way I look at it. Get out there and do your little bit and say no more.

*Bernice Knierim, Glasgow*

The difference that I made, that I personally made . . . would be in the area of the HELP network, and the child [abuse] prevention council, I think those were the two biggest areas. Just because I can still see the long range impact.

*Sherry Wulf, Kalispell*

I shall always be interested in the health of my Cheyenne friends. I have set aside some money toward a RN scholarship for a Northern Cheyenne girl. . . . We'll call it the Sunny Peters Nursing Scholarship, and we'll have it in connection with the Holy Rosary Hospital in Miles City, as we need Northern Cheyenne RNs. That would be my reward, would make me very happy to have it happen.

*Stella "Sunny" Peters, Birney*

I think I got into trouble with being a Democrat and being a League [of Women Voters] member, I couldn't quite separate the two. And it was hard being nonpartisan and so then I'd drop out and wouldn't be as active. You can't be on the board if you're involved in partisan politics as far as the League is concerned, so I would go off the board and then if I thought I could stay away from partisan politics, then I'd go on the board again. And sometimes I'd forget—and that wasn't so good either.

*Harriett Meloy, Helena*

Mostly I raised children until I became involved in the WIFE organization. I guess I didn't go anyplace or read anything too much more important than read a cookbook for twenty years, and now my kids are always telling me I'm never home. They're afraid they aren't going to be able to find me to put me in the rest home when I'm 80.

*JoAnn Forsness, Wolf Point*



Agnes Vanderburg, receiving the 1977 International Women's Year award for her work in the preservation of culture on the Flathead Reservation. Courtesy of Diane Sands.



When I came to work for the utility . . . I really had only had one [paid] job. . . . I think that for women especially, or anybody who happens to be just in that "older-but-less-wise" category, that volunteerism and working in volunteer agencies in a leadership position . . . like taking college courses in an accelerated format, in terms of how fast you can learn those kinds of things.

*Sheila Rice, Great Falls*

There were people . . . that were out being a part of that whole thing of reform in the church. That just became another phase of wanting to be involved, wanting in the action and just seeing what you could do, what kind of changes you could affect in society and within the areas that touched your life. . . . In Anaconda there was some women there that had done all kinds of pastoral work right along side the priest and were needed in every step of the way. I mean the parishes couldn't function without them as far as I could tell.

*Vivian Brooke, Missoula*

I guess it is my work because that's how it's turned out. . . . I have been fortunate that I have not needed to be employed for pay, in order to help support a family. I have at many times questioned whether my work really was as valuable unpaid—valued by me or by others—as it would be if I were paid for doing what I do, or even paid for doing something that wasn't as interesting or challenging. Because after all it's the standard of worth in our society, is money in a very large degree.

*Mary Gibson, Kalispell*

Father Dan said to me, "Come on, Georgia, why don't you come in the choir? I need a few strong people that I can depend on," and of course, that word 'depend' is part of what kept me in trouble all my life. If I start something people know they can depend on me to finish it.

*Georgia Mallas, Great Falls*

[My involvement with women's organizations and Junior League] made me appreciate . . . working with people who really were skillful, who really were good leaders, who were intelligent and well-organized. . . . It really did make me appreciate women. I feel very strongly that, yes, we need a lot of integration of men and women . . . but also to have our own organization. I don't

want to be the umpire of baseball, I just don't. I feel that if there are women who want to, that's great. But I do think that we need some groups where we can get together with our own sex and just be women. . . [We] need a time to sit down and just kind of relax with women. And you don't relax in the same way in a mixed group as you do in a single sex group. And I think men should be allowed that same privilege.

*Gerry Jennings, Great Falls*

## CARETAKING

It's interesting watching my mother and then watching my sister do exactly the same thing. My mother, if anybody was sick, always sent over, you know, some kind of a dinner. If anyone died, in the neighborhood you know, there [was a] dinner . . . a day before the funeral, so that the family would be able to eat together. And this was a thing that many people did. And we watch this now with our funeral luncheon which we have in the church. People still bring their cakes and casseroles and, you know, just a continuation of what was. For a while it dropped off, there was more selfishness, I would say, twenty years ago. . . . Since the smelter closed, I see that whole thing coming back again. The sharing, the openness, the whatever, to give whatever they have to those who don't have and [show] concern for each other.

*Sister Gilmary Vaughn, Anaconda*

But women, when it concerns their families, watch out. . . . They'll drown the voices of men anytime. . . . Because it's women who know how much they need when their children get sick. Without a good health clinic or without a good doctor . . . their children suffer. . . . To be a man it's great. All you have to do is just go to work for eight or ten hours and come home and you got it made. But a woman works ten hours out in the field and comes home and works another twenty-four at home. Their work is never done. A migrant woman works twenty-four hours, especially if she's got children. So they knew . . . what they needed, so they were going to fight harder.

*Lula Martinez, Butte*

# COLLECT

Keep us, Oh God, from pettiness  
let us be large in thought, in word  
in deed.

Let us be done with fault-finding  
and leave off self-seeking.

May we put away all pretense and  
meet each other face to face—without  
self-pity and without prejudice.

May we never be hasty in judgment  
and always generous.

Let us take time for all things;  
make us to grow calm, serene, gentle.

Teach us to put into action our  
better impulses, straightforward and  
unafraid.

Grant that we may realize it is the  
little things that create differences,  
that in the big things of life we are  
at one.

And may we strive to touch and  
to know the great, common human heart  
of us all, and O Lord God, let us  
forget not to be kind!

Mary Stewart

[During the depression] people they gave us lots of meat. . . . [A neighbor] says, "Everyday I want you to come. I'll give you the milk. I don't want nothing for it." And potatoes, we had garden, a big garden. And we make it just wonderful. . . . We don't have to . . . have it everything the best. They'll eat what we got. Stew, soup, all that kind of stuff, and was fine for all of us. . . . [a neighbor woman who gave us food] says, "Don't worry. We'll help you out." But after [my husband and I] went to work . . . I tried to help everyone around.

Ann Prebil, East Helena

I see that [Protestant-Catholic differences] not overshadowing the love of people and families. It never seemed to overshadow that. If your next door neighbor was Lutheran or Presbyterian or whatever that never left him out of, you know, your care . . . . But at that time we could never go into their churches.

Sister Gilmary Vaughn, Anaconda

There was a lot of love in the [Native American] home, and the children were taken care of well. There was always somebody there. You see, the family kind of stayed together. There'd be the grandparents, and maybe an aunt and uncle would stay in the same place, and all these children. So the children were never left alone. There was never such a thing as a shelter, not before 1942.

Stella "Sunny" Peters, Birney

When we christen a baby [in the Greek community], that baby is almost equivalent of our own child. I have five god children, and one of the boys is coming up from California on a little trip and he's going to be here tomorrow . . . but that brings you closer together. We have a term that we use when somebody we have either stood up with when they were married or baptized a child or those are the two primary, ones that we call the kumbata, which means . . . closer than friend, but it's not really a blood relative, you automatically become so closely interwoven.

Georgia Mallas, Great Falls

[The school] had plays and you'd have to have costumes for the plays for your kids, and they'd send you home a picture and you were supposed to make the costume like the picture. (laughs) I made a lot of them, not only for my own but for some of the other people who couldn't sew.

Marian Canavan, Butte

If I'm walking down the street, I automatically notice people. Notice if they're hungry, notice their eyes, notice if they're lost . . . . And so I notice things like that and I know how to talk to 'em. . . . I don't ever want to pass anybody by that needs me, you know and be wanting.

Lula Martinez, Butte

[I] started out doing volunteer work I guess on a serious basis at the Faith Lutheran Home and started doing hair there. That's a really important thing for the morale of the ladies. And my sister-in-law and I . . . went up and did hair all day on Friday for three years.

*JoAnn Forsness, Wolf Point*

There were no jobs around here, there was nothing here on the Reservation. . . . Right now there aren't many jobs for women on the Reservation. . . . My mother was sick then, after 25 or 30 years away . . . I come back here, my mother was sick and she didn't get better, and I wouldn't leave until she got better and she never got better. Then my dad was left alone, and I stayed here, I never left to live in California after that.

*Florence MacDonald Smith, Ronan*

Black Eagle, I'll tell ya, it was really, those days it was really nice because everybody was so sociable and we all knew each other and you could leave the doors wide open, never had no problem. Just like all one family. Yeah, it was really nice. At night we used to go play cards together or get together and it was different than now. Now you have to watch your neighbors, I'll tell ya.

*Olanda Vangelisti, Black Eagle*

[Rural women] might have a quilting bee and bring their children and their husbands. The husbands, who were almost always farmers being in the rural area, would get together and they'd visit over all their farms. The children, gave them a chance to get together and play. The farms being many miles apart, they usually didn't have this social get-together. So it really played an important part, and the ladies then would get together to can or



Saint Anne's Lodge, forerunner of SNPJ Lodge, East Helena, 1913.  
Courtesy of Montana Historical Society.



to quilt or to learn a lot of new methods and quite often they would teach each other. Somebody would be appointed the designated leader for the day, and instruct the whole group. . . . I think the rural areas really took advantage more so of [what] the cooperative extension service had to offer than the city ladies who were busy working from eight to five and caring for their families in the evening.

*Alene Stoner, Helena*

## CHANGING TIMES

I think the feminist was somebody to kind of avoid in those early days. And I felt that there were a great many AAUW members who were very uncomfortable with this idea of the new feminism and the Equal Rights Amendment. . . . Because they were homemakers and mothers and they'd always played that role, even though they had college educations, they came back into the home and did their thing.

*Harriett Meloy, Helena*

[Working club members] can no longer go in the afternoon and have some tea and cookies and have a woman's club meeting. Their time is valuable. They must have a purpose. They don't care about all the sociability, basically. . . . Usually it is better if there is a definite need. . . . Every person has to feel needed in the group. . . . That is one of the key reasons . . . for having a club and holding one, is to have a purpose, have good programs, and have meeting times will coincide with the convenience of members.

*Marge Uhlrich, Lewistown*

I always go back to the politics, I think we do need, and I've always said this, "[We need] 50/50 [men and women in the legislature]." . . . Men and women are fundamentally different and we stand for fundamentally different things. Men are more interested in the business and the banking and the insurance and the big making money, profit, and women are more caring for the human needs of this world. . . . There's such a need for these things to be done which money and men will never provide. [Things such as] child care, maternity benefits, taking care of crime, and seeing that children have the proper nutrition and things.

*Katherine MacDonell, Somers*

Traditionally, there's been a women's garden club and usually . . . they did work in the parks and help do some of the plantings. . . . What I recall is they've gotten older and older and older and I don't know if they've attracted younger women to participate. But they've been interested in putting on flower shows and doing flower arranging, and improvements in the parks. And the men's garden club, they don't talk about flowers, they talk about garden plans, vegetables, and things like that.

*Judy Mathre, Bozeman*

There are certain things in our [Greek Orthodox] church that a woman cannot do. But being on the church board is not one of them. The thing that got women started on the board was necessity, they just didn't have enough bodies among the men who were willing or able to do it.

*Georgia Mallas, Great Falls*

[Gnomes at Home Alone] is training kids to be home alone after school. I can't remember a day when I came home from school my mother wasn't there. . . . And so I think Camp Fire is a good example of where they used to have the traditional groups that you'd go to someone's house after school and their mother was the Camp Fire Leader and now—not that they don't have those—they do, but they're also saying, wait a minute, there's a whole group of kids out there that are home everyday, and we need to give them skills and assurances and etcetra on how to stay alone.

*Sheila Rice, Great Falls*

Now Rebekkas were in here too. And their membership went down, declined, so that . . . our meetings, now are at homes. . . . All of this declined during the war years. . . . Of course, a lot of our older members have gone. And because of the economy a lot of our younger people had to move. So, that took on both ends. So, now the Royal Neighbors, we're meeting in homes and the same way with the Grange. . . . And there's so much more other recreation now. Cause they got bowling, they have golf and that they didn't have before, and TV. Don't forget TV! (laughs) So, that, the need isn't there really for that recreation [provided by clubs].

*Helen Schagel, Eureka*

I used to go down and wrap Christmas presents for the patients with the Gray Ladies down at Warm Springs and then I had to ring the bell for the Salvation Army, I helped on drives and stuff like that. But see now those Gray Ladies don't even come to Warm Springs no more. That's all taken over by social workers. But I remember years ago, years that every Christmas I would go down there all day long, we'd wrap, the Gray Ladies would wrap all these presents.

*Alice Shepka, Anaconda*

I think we got ten thousand dollars, but I don't know whether we got first or second, I can't remember, in the nation, for community service one year. We had about three hundred members [in the Grangel] at that time, but now they're fizzled out till there's only about twenty-five. Only eleven of them are active. But we still plug away. They meet here in my house. . . . It's supposed to be a farm organization, but they do take town people into it. But they don't approve of the smoking in their meetings, or drinking or any of that, and that eliminates a lot of people in this day and age. . . . And they've done lots of things around, even now, with just our little group. The other day we gave a thousand dollars for the ambulance fund and things like that. . . . But everybody's getting too old to do any work. We sold our hall and that's where we get the money, interest and stuff, to do these things.

*Julia Vanleishout, Eureka*

We tend to be not paid as well in the paid work force. We tend not to recognize ourselves, or be recognized by society for the value of the contributions as homemakers and as volunteers. . . . As more women have gone into the workforce there has been less time to give to volunteer-community activities, or at least there's been more of a priority on time and energy. For a while, I think, as women began to reenter into the paid work force, there was an expectation that women had of themselves, maybe others had of them also, that they should do it all. They could be homemakers and mothers and have careers and do all the volunteer activities as well. And, a lot of people got exhausted and burned out. . . . There is a value to all of the things that we do. But we can't do it all. And we need to recognize that nobody can do it all.

*Mary Gibson, Kalispell*

# Marion White Arts & Crafts

1951-1952

FINE ARTS  
NEEDLE CRAFT  
BOOK REVIEW  
KENSINGTON  
EDUCATION  
DRAMA  
MUSIC  
LITERATURE



## WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

[I volunteer] because I think there are some ways in which I can make a difference. . . . I think there are some ways in which I have been able to reach out to needs that I see and, either individually or in developing a program, respond to those. I feel that we have done some constructive things in developing the Youth Guidance Home and what happened on the school board while I was a member and some of the things that are going on in AAUW, some legislation that we've all worked together on, that make a difference in the lives of people. So personally that's very satisfying and fulfilling.

*Mary Gibson, Kalispell*

Women have a tremendous amount to offer in making this world a better place. I think we have to recognize the power that we have there and use it. And that means organizing, and coalescing and sharing. I think the beauty of woman . . . sort of generally speaking, is our style of cooperatively moving things forward. That style doesn't always mean that it goes very quickly—'cause it's a messy kind of style because it stops and lets everybody make a contribution and talk about it and play with it and try this way and if that doesn't work then you try another way. It's not bulldozing through.

*Sheila Connors, Great Falls*

As the years progressed I think [Extension Homemakers] also felt it necessary to let the community and the public know that the women were as important as the men in a family situation and so I think we've tried to upgrade our status and be educated, be able to communicate and . . . be knowledgeable about what's going on in the big wide world and feel important.

*Alene Stoner, Helena*

We ought not to get so wrapped up in our own lives that we forget there's other people out there that need us for things, and that we can be helpful and we can make a difference in individual lives and we can make a difference in a whole community's life. . . . So never underestimate your own power to make a lasting impression on yourself and your neighborhood and your community and the world, for that matter.

*Sheila Rice, Great Falls*

Working women I know are so community-minded and so want to fit in wherever they can, that it just isn't the non-working ones. It's an attitude. Just wanting to give . . . and wanting to see this community be all it can be.

*Frances "Scottie" Byerly, Lewistown*

I think that we owe it to ourselves to be a part of the community because it makes us so aware of our heritage and how proud we ought to be of it.

*Georgia Mallas, Great Falls*

I don't think I've left anything [as a legacy] except maybe, with a few, an awareness that women are important and we should carry on the fight. Lift the banner high and light the torch and march on. You go two steps forward and one step back for the next how many centuries, but you'll make it eventually, I think.

*Katherine MacDonell, Somers*

Oh good heavens, I've had more recognition than I ever deserved. I've always had the philosophy that you don't do something just to be recognized or have appreciation. If that's all you do it for, you better not even start. Because it's going to be a thankless day when you get recognized for everything you think you should be recognized for.

*Harriett Meloy, Helena*

When I was going to college . . . I went to a Sunday School class . . . and at that time if a girl was caught drinking she was sent home. . . . We got to asking about this in the Sunday School class, "Why? The boys are allowed to drink, the boys are allowed to smoke, why not the girls?" And this professor said, "You know, down through history, women have been looked up to for keeping the moral standard high." And I've always felt that way. And I think sometimes that women have lowered themselves in the estimation of the men. . . . And I can't see why . . . women have to do everything that men do. Why can't we be a little different?

*Gwen Mitchell, Butte*

I would say, bring out the best in yourself by giving of yourself to others. . . . I would say, as a parent, that parents need to show their children the importance of volunteer work and the importance of giving to a community, because without volunteers . . .



the community doesn't exist, it truly doesn't. It might run, but it doesn't exist.

*Gerry Jennings, Great Falls*

I think part of being progressive . . . means being focused more on human issues rather than industrial issues or money issues, that the state of human beings, in particular of women, is a primary focus—searching for nontraditional ways of doing politics and doing life. . . . First of all it's a fundamental issue of equity. And that it was quite clear then and now that women did not have an equitable place in society, and even more obviously in politics. . . . I would say that definitely [the Women's Lobbyist Fund] was not going to be a sewing circle, this was not going to be a study group, that this organization would play hardball. If

that's what it took that we would get in there and mix it up with the best of them and it would win.

*Kathy Van Hook, Helena and Paula Petrik, Bozeman*

Everywhere you go people need someone . . . and there's not very many people that can give of themselves. People will share what they have. . . . People will give money but they'll give money just to get rid of ya. . . . They'll say, "Well here, here's five dollars, take off. I did my share." You know I feel that way that the church does that a lot. . . . Here's our Christmas donations, and that's it for the year. . . . It's easy to give like that. It's easy to give a coat or a jacket or a pair of shoes, but it's not easy to give of yourself and that's what we're lacking. . . . People need to give of themselves. People need people.

*Lula Martinez, Butte*



Missoula St. Patrick's Hospital Guild members rolling bandages, c. 1950.  
John Forssen, photographer. Courtesy of Lillian Kirkemo.

## Appendix A

### INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES

You will invest several hours in preparation for the actual oral history interview. First you must contact the narrator and obtain background information, then you will check and research resource materials on the main topics to be discussed, formulate an outline, and prepare your equipment. When you contact the narrator, ask about photographs, records and correspondence she might be willing to loan or donate. Once the interview is underway, the following guidelines should be remembered:

1. An interview is not a dialogue. Let the narrator tell her own story, and limit your own remarks to brief acknowledgements, followed by questions to keep the interview moving.
2. Ask open-ended questions that will elicit the most descriptive responses, such as "explain how", "illustrate", "tell me why", "discuss".
3. Use body language to respond to the narrator's comments. A nod of the head or smile or raised eyebrow can communicate as much as an "uh-huh" or "yes" that will be distracting on the tape recording.
4. Relax and speak conversationally. Do not worry if your questions are not as neatly phrased as you might like.
5. Ask one question at a time, and keep questions as brief as possible.
6. Don't let periods of silence fluster you. Give the narrator a chance to think about what she wants to say before you interrupt with the next question.
7. Listen carefully, and rely on curiosity and common sense to ask follow-up questions.
8. When the narrator strays from the topic, politely pull her back to the subject at the first opportunity.
9. Try to establish dates, locations, and participants at each significant point in the narrative.
10. Resist the temptation to show off your knowledge. It's the narrator's information, not the interviewer's, that's important.
11. Limit the interview to a reasonable time (2 hours maximum) and avoid tiring the narrator.
12. At the close of the interview, obtain a signed legal release from the narrator, granting you permission to handle and disseminate the interview material.

## Appendix B

### SAMPLE RELEASE FORM

I hereby give and grant to the (name of institution) as a donation for such scholarly and educational purposes as the (institution) shall determine, according to the regulations of the (institution), all rights, including copyrights, to my tape-recorded memoirs, except for such restrictions specified below.

#### Restrictions:

Date of Agreement

Narrator

Address

City, State, Zip

Interviewer

Name of Institution

Address

City, State, Zip



**Appendix C**  
(Page 1)

\_\_\_\_\_ Name of Project

\_\_\_\_\_ Project date

**BIOGRAPHICAL DATA**

Full name (including maiden): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Place of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Education/years of school: \_\_\_\_\_

Church affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

If married, date of marriage: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of children \_\_\_\_\_

**Family History**

Name	Birthdate	Birthplace	Occupation	Organizations
------	-----------	------------	------------	---------------

Mother: \_\_\_\_\_

Father: \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse: \_\_\_\_\_

Children: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

COMPLETE OTHER SIDE OF THIS SHEET FOR COMMUNITY/VOLUNTEER WORK HISTORY

Appendix C  
(Page 2)

COMMUNITY/VOLUNTEER WORK HISTORY

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Please list organizations (including clubs, civic-oriented groups, informal groups, youth or educational groups, etc.) that you have joined. Include years you belonged and any positions or committees you served on. Add any other additional information you think we should know.

1. Organization: \_\_\_\_\_  
Years involved: From \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_. Total years \_\_\_\_\_  
Positions/committees served \_\_\_\_\_
2. Organization: \_\_\_\_\_  
Years involved: From \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_. Total years \_\_\_\_\_  
Positions/committees served \_\_\_\_\_
3. Organization: \_\_\_\_\_  
Years involved: From \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_. Total years \_\_\_\_\_  
Positions/committees served \_\_\_\_\_
4. Organization: \_\_\_\_\_  
Years involved: From \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_. Total years \_\_\_\_\_  
Positions/committees served \_\_\_\_\_
5. Organization: \_\_\_\_\_  
Years involved: From \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_. Total years \_\_\_\_\_  
Positions/committees served \_\_\_\_\_
6. Other areas of involvement in your community: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(If you need more room, please include on additional sheet of paper.)

## Appendix D

### INTERVIEW FILE NOTES

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ BIRTHDATE \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

M \_\_\_\_\_ F \_\_\_\_\_ REFERRED BY \_\_\_\_\_ CONTACTED BY \_\_\_\_\_

INTERVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_ INTERVIEW DATE \_\_\_\_\_

INTERVIEW LOCATION \_\_\_\_\_

MAIN TOPIC OF INTERVIEW \_\_\_\_\_

RELEASE OBTAINED \_\_\_\_\_ RESTRICTIONS, IF ANY \_\_\_\_\_

NUMBER OF TAPES IN INTERVIEW \_\_\_\_\_ MATERIALS PROMISED OR LENT FOR COPYING: \_\_\_\_\_

OTHER PERSONS PRESENT DURING INTERVIEW (NAMES AND RELATIONSHIP TO NARRATOR): \_\_\_\_\_

POSSIBLE COOPERATIVE WORK: \_\_\_\_\_

INTERVIEW LOCATION (SPECIFIC ROOM, HOW AFFECTED INTERVIEW): \_\_\_\_\_

PRIOR EXPOSURE (HAD THE PERSON BEEN INTERVIEWED, PHOTOGRAPHED, RECORDED BEFORE? IF SO, WHEN, BY WHOM, AND HOW DO YOU THINK IT AFFECTED THIS INTERVIEW?) \_\_\_\_\_

HOW DID INTERVIEW PROGRESS? (BE SPECIFIC ABOUT WHETHER THE PERSON WAS RELAXED, RELUCTANT TO TALK, ETC.) \_\_\_\_\_

SUMMARIZE AND EXPLAIN ANY RELEVANT INFORMATION OBTAINED WHILE THE RECORDER WAS OFF. \_\_\_\_\_

DETAIL YOUR PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS AND REACTIONS ABOUT THE PERSON, THE INTERVIEW AND ANY PROBLEMS OR SUGGESTIONS. \_\_\_\_\_



**Appendix E**

**INTERVIEW TAPE LOG**

\_\_\_\_\_ Transcript

\_\_\_\_\_ Summary

\_\_\_\_\_ Tape Number

NAME (include maiden) \_\_\_\_\_ BIRTHDATE \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

SPECIAL INTEREST \_\_\_\_\_

OTHERS PRESENT AT INTERVIEW (Note name and relationship) \_\_\_\_\_

INTERVIEWED BY \_\_\_\_\_ INTERVIEW DATE \_\_\_\_\_

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW \_\_\_\_\_

LENGTH OF INTERVIEW \_\_\_\_\_ hours(s), \_\_\_\_\_ minutes NUMBER OF TAPES \_\_\_\_\_

TAPE RECORDER USED \_\_\_\_\_ TAPE BRAND \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ CASSETTE \_\_\_\_\_ REEL/REEL QUALITY OF RECORDING \_\_\_\_\_

DESCRIBE ANY INTERFERENCE \_\_\_\_\_

RELEASE FORM OBTAINED \_\_\_\_\_ RESTRICTIONS FOR USE, IF ANY \_\_\_\_\_

TRANSCRIBED OR SUMMARIZED BY \_\_\_\_\_

SPECIAL CONDITIONS FOR USE OF TAPE \_\_\_\_\_

BRIEF SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW CONTEXT AND TAPE CONTENTS (catalog card)

INDEX SUBJECT HEADINGS \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F

### SAMPLE INTERVIEW TAPE SUMMARY (Begins at end of Tape I - Side B)

#### INTERVIEW WITH MARY GIBSON

##### TAPE I - SIDE B (continued)

25-30 Training sessions coordinated to develop plan. Workshops held in regions to present plan, assist with promotion and development of similar programs in their regions. Two areas: community organization and small support groups. "My responsibility as a regional coordinator was to be involved in presentations of these models and to organize some workshops and present the models. And that project wound up two years ago. About the time that that terminated, the woman who was then the community interest rep on the national level was elected to another position in AAUW and so she resigned and because we had worked together in Families and Work, she recommended me to the board for appointment." Is now on three committees on association level. Legislative program committee, association program development committee, and "Women's Work, Women's Worth" task force.

30-32 Describes legislative program worked on. Washington D.C. lobbying. Educated and distributed information to AAUW members. Federal legislation major concern, usually affects state legislation as well. Describes legislative issues worked on. Describes Women's Work Women's Worth project.

##### TAPE II - SIDE A

0-5 Describes Women's Work, Women's Worth project. "The focus that has evolved as we're now going into the second year of this topic is primarily on volunteerism, dependent care, and the third, re-entry women. Women re-entering pay employment, resuming careers." (tape interruption) "The way we proceed is to provide information and program ideas to divisions and branches." (tape interruption, problems with recording apparent) Resumes discussion about branch programs and division assistance to branches.

5-10 Tells how Kalispell branch of AAUW is implementing such programs. Several on Women's Work, Women's Worth, AAUW Week during Women's History Month. "One of the projects that we had was to ask members to estimate their number of volunteer hours that they gave to the

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