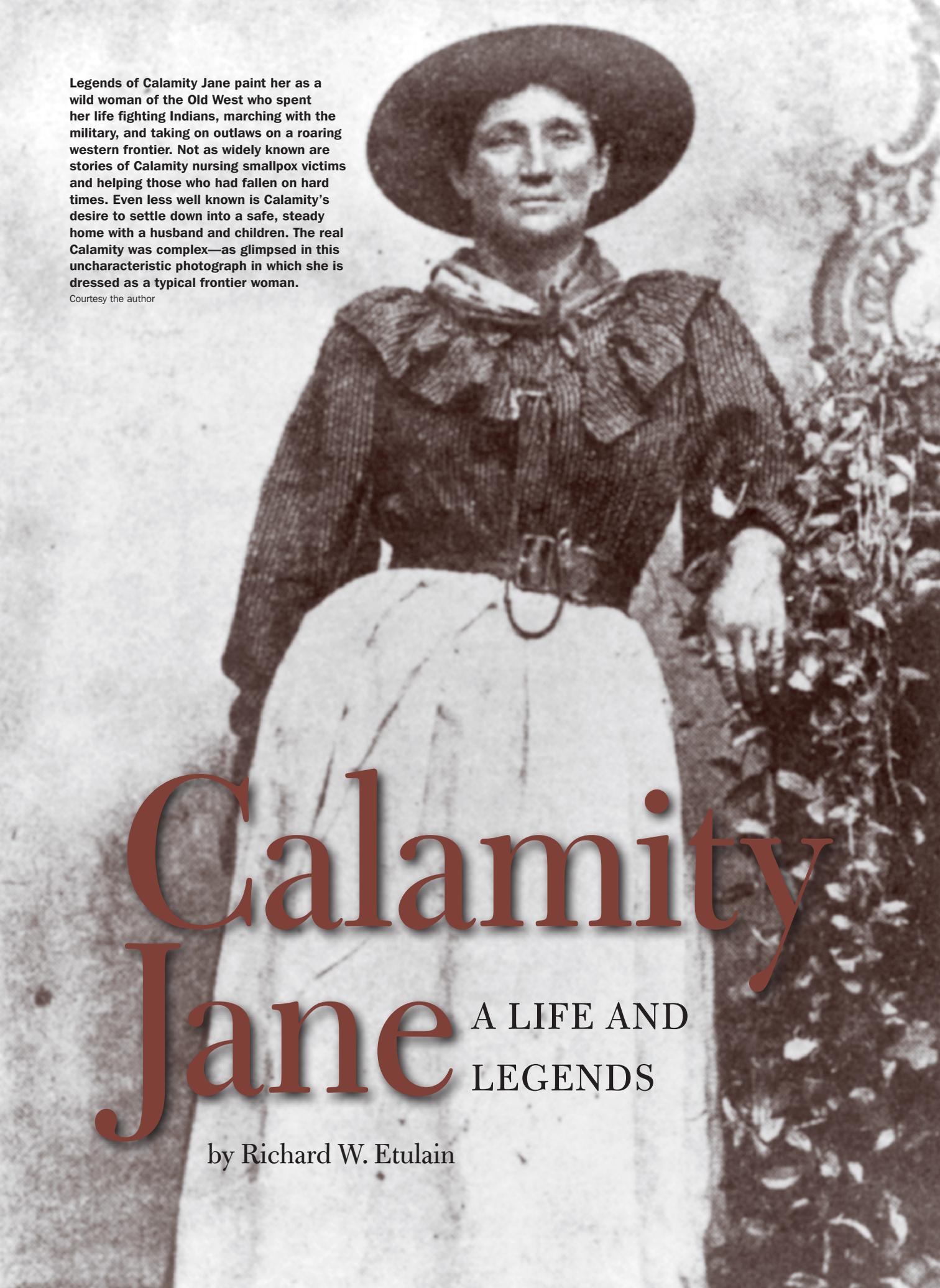


Legends of Calamity Jane paint her as a wild woman of the Old West who spent her life fighting Indians, marching with the military, and taking on outlaws on a roaring western frontier. Not as widely known are stories of Calamity nursing smallpox victims and helping those who had fallen on hard times. Even less well known is Calamity's desire to settle down into a safe, steady home with a husband and children. The real Calamity was complex—as glimpsed in this uncharacteristic photograph in which she is dressed as a typical frontier woman.

Courtesy the author



Calamity Jane

A LIFE AND
LEGENDS

by Richard W. Etulain

The *New York Times* reporter was puzzled. How was he to write the obituary of that mysterious wild woman of the West, Calamity Jane, when he knew so little about her? Even though Calamity may have been the most-written-about woman of the pioneer West, the facts of her life seemed but a molehill beside the mountainous legends already stacked around her. Facing this dilemma, the journalist chose to play on the legends rather than investigate the facts. Like so many stories about Calamity, his narrative was as far from the truth as he was from faraway Montana, South Dakota, and Wyoming.¹

Appearing one day after her death on August 1, 1903, in Terry, South Dakota, the New York journalist's brief story of Calamity relied heavily on hearsay and the suspect, undependable 1896 autobiography of Calamity. The subhead of the obituary foreshadowed its errors. The writer declared that Calamity was a "Woman Who Became Famous as an Indian Fighter" and that "thousands of tourists went miles out of their way to see her." Generally, the obituary repeated Calamity's falsehoods about scouting, serving with General George A. Custer, and capturing Jack McCall (Wild Bill Hickok's assassin) with a threatening cleaver. The reporter also repeated exaggerations from frontier magazines and newspapers, labeling Calamity "The Beautiful White Devil of the Yellowstone" and as a young woman who laid "around with a lot of road agents on the prairies."² The *Times* obituary, a harbinger of the future, exuded stretchers and dealt little with Calamity's actual life. At its center, the New York story traveled the most popular legend about Calamity: she was a wild woman of the Old West who spent her life on the frontier fighting Indians, marching with the military, taking on the bad guys, and helping a roaring frontier pass through its final stages.

But the New York newspaper overlooked two other legends that congealed around Calamity in the last twenty-five years of her life, roughly from 1876 to 1903. The better known of these two stories was Calamity as a veritable angel of mercy, courageously helping smallpox victims no one else would aid and giving freely to those down and out. Less widely touted but nonetheless apparent by the end of Calamity's life was her desire to be a pioneer woman, to marry, to have children, and to have a steady, safe home.

In the days and weeks immediately after Calamity's demise, numerous newspapers across the country cobbled together obituaries and retrospective stories about her that were no more dependable than the *New York Times* obituary. Building on wild journalistic stories and sensational dime novels, the writers continued the legends that had grown up about her since the 1870s. It would take several decades before diligent biographers and historians dug out the obscure details of Martha Canary and her deification as Calamity. Indeed, a full century transpired after her death before the definitive biography of Calamity appeared.

Two especially useful approaches to Calamity's life and legends lie before a writer. One can illuminate her story through gender analysis, clarifying how her roles as an usual woman in the West illuminate and expand meanings of frontier history. Or, one may deal with Calamity's biography and career in light of shifting climates of opinion during her lifetime and in the following century. The following pages primarily use the second approach, without overlooking insights gained from gender analysis.

Martha Canary's rather traditional early life carried no hints of what she would become after her teenage years. She was born in 1856, perhaps on May 1, near the town of Princeton, in north-central Missouri.³ Her parents, Robert and Charlotte, were a farm family, as Robert's parents had been. As the U.S. census revealed, Martha's paternal grandparents, James and Sarah Wilson (or Willson) Canary, began life in Virginia, moved to Ohio early in their marriage, parenting a large family of five boys and four girls, and continued to farm in eastern Ohio until 1852.⁴ (Robert was the youngest of the children, born in 1825.) On their way west, the Canary family stopped briefly in Iowa before arriving in Mercer County, Missouri, in the mid- to late 1850s. Perhaps James and Sarah were looking for more-available, less-expensive land for each of their sons and sons-in-law, about half of whom followed the parents west. On June 14, 1855, in Polk County, Iowa, son Robert married Charlotte Burge, age fifteen. Robert and Charlotte arrived in Mercer County within the next year with much of Robert's family; all congregated not far from one another in northern Missouri.⁵



Calamity Jane was born Martha Canary in 1856 in Princeton, Missouri, to Robert and Charlotte Canary. Her parents traveled west, landing briefly in Virginia City and then in Blackfoot City, Montana Territory, shown at left circa 1865. Charlotte died in Blackfoot City in 1866, and Robert died within a year, leaving Martha an orphan at age twelve.

The census of 1860, too often overlooked, provides the most revealing evidence about the Canarys before dramatic changes invaded the family. Robert and Charlotte were now the parents of three children, all born in Missouri: Martha (the future Calamity Jane), in 1856; Cilas (Silas?), in 1857; and Lana (or Lena), one year old. Robert was literate, Charlotte not, their land worth \$1,500, and their personal estate \$400.⁶

More than sixty years later, biographer/journalist Duncan Aikman traveled to Princeton, hoping to mine the memories of Mercer County residents who recalled the Canary family.⁷ Robert, they remembered, was at best a phlegmatic, unenthusiastic farmer; preschool Martha, a lively tomboyish girl. But it was mother Charlotte who remained fresh and controversial in the neighbors' minds. Repeatedly, Charlotte bruised the social expectations of neighborhood wives. Her brightly colored and eye-catching clothing, her cigar smoking, her public flirtatiousness and swearing, and her drinking (sometimes to drunkenness) branded her when upstanding mothers were to be innocent of all these untoward actions.

The Canary family fell apart and soon left Mercer County after Grandpa James died in 1862. When an estate administrator attempted to regain the money, livestock, and farm implements from Robert and Charlotte that belonged in James's estate, they refused to deliver the goods. Vague rumors of Charlotte's pro-Southern sympathies (she was called a "Secesh") and Robert's antipathy for farming may have been rea-

sons for the Canarys exiting Missouri, but the most likely explanation lies buried in the Mercer County court records. When Robert and Charlotte refused to return the requested goods, other members of the family sued them. The probate and county courts hailed Robert into court several times between 1862 and 1864, but the proceedings indicated that Robert "comes not." In late 1862, Robert and Charlotte sold their farm and hustled off to a less threatening place. Whether they headed directly west or stopped off for a few months to the north in Iowa before striking out for Montana is not clear.⁸

The next decade of Martha Canary's life is a virtual tabula rasa of dependable documentation. In her ghostwritten autobiography, Calamity Jane plays up the adventure and dangers of the long trip west. She also claimed she became "a remarkable good shot and fearless rider for a girl of my age."⁹

The Canary family disappears from the scene in these years save for one important newspaper document in Montana Territory. The Canarys were evidently drawn to the new strike in Alder Gulch in the early 1860s. Robert, Charlotte, and their children most likely arrived in 1864, and by the end of the year, they were in deep trouble. Jammed in among the five thousand or more who crowded into the Virginia City area, the Canarys lost their way in the chaos and costs of the boomtown. A brief story in the December 31, 1864, issue of the *Montana Post*, headlined "Provision for the Destitute Poor," highlighted the difficulties of "three little girls, who state their names to be Canary."

Then the angry reporter turned on the parents: “The father, it seems, is a gambler in Nevada [City]. The mother is a woman of the lowest grade.” The writer concluded that this was “a most flagrant and wanton instance of unnatural conduct on the part of parents to their children.”¹⁰

Things got worse. Charlotte died in Blackfoot City, Montana, probably in 1866. Robert, hoping to get help in raising his brood, headed south to be among the Mormons. A year later, he too had died. Now, Martha, not yet a teenager, was an orphan and responsible for her siblings. What could she do? She had no family in the far-off West and no community of support. She would make do. Rumors suggest that Martha’s younger sister Lena and brother Elijah (Lige) were farmed out to Mormon families in Utah. Martha was on her own, so young, but a survivor.

The period from 1868 to early 1875 is a challenge for biographers because scarcely more than a handful of sources disclose Martha Canary’s whereabouts and activities. Much later, Calamity said that after the death of her parents, she “went to Fort Bridger during 1868, then to Piedmont, Wyoming, with the U. P. Railroad.”¹¹ In 1869, the census taker caught up with Martha in Piedmont, where she claimed to be fifteen (but was actually thirteen) and evidently helping in a boardinghouse and babysitting. Martha’s misbehavior got her in trouble. The woman with whom she was staying, Emma Andrews Alton, “blew up and fired” Martha.¹² In the next few years, strong rumors place her in the Wyoming mining boomtowns of Miner’s Delight and South Pass City, where again her antisocial activities impelled her out the door and back to the “hell-on-wheels” railroad towns

stretching across Wyoming. Martha was reported in Cheyenne in the early 1870s and about this time reconnected with her sister Lena, who had relocated to western Wyoming. Lena married German immigrant John Borner, and gave birth to a large family before her early death in 1888, at age twenty-nine. Martha’s brother Lige also came to western Wyoming, but his footloose, roughneck activities kept him running from place to place.¹³ Later, Calamity claimed to have been with General Custer and other military commands during the early 1870s, but there is no proof of such activities, save with General George Crook in 1876.

The best evidence places Martha in Cheyenne and places to the north, such as Fort Laramie, in 1874–1875. One trader along the Cheyenne to Deadwood stagecoach route claimed Martha was in a “hog ranch” (house of prostitution) selling sex by the mid-1870s.¹⁴ In 1875, she sneaked into the Newton-Jenney Expedition sent north by the U.S. government to check out the rumors of gold in the Black Hills.¹⁵ It was Martha’s first trip to the Hills, perhaps as a surreptitious teamster after she was tossed out trying to march with the command dressed up as a soldier. During this trip north, Martha became Calamity Jane. “Mac,” a reporter for the Chicago *Inter-Ocean*, Dr. Valentine McGillycuddy, the expedition’s topographer and engineer, and Harry “Sam” Young, a teamster and later Deadwood bartender, all spoke of her traveling

In 1875, Calamity sneaked along with the Newton-Jenney Expedition, sent by the federal government to investigate rumors of gold in the Black Hills. After being tossed out for dressing as a soldier and marching with the command, Calamity may have surreptitiously stayed on as a teamster. This, the first known photograph of her, was taken at French Creek, Dakota Territory, during the expedition by photographer A. Guerin.



J. Leonard Jennewein Collection, Dakota Wesleyan University Archives, Mitchell, South Dakota

with the expedition. Dr. McGillicuddy described her as “crazy for adventure,” and Mac reported her a more “unctuous coiner of English, and not the Queen’s pure either, than any (other) man in the command.”¹⁶ In other words, Martha, now being called Calamity Jane, was already a prolific, unrepentant swearer of world-class caliber.

The year 1876 proved the turning point in Calamity’s career. It began with two quick trips to the Black Hills with General George Crook and his army in the winter and spring of the year. Calamity may have served informally as a scout (so a good source claims), but primarily she was a camp follower, hitching rides with soldiers and sneaking in among the teamsters and bullwhackers before she was discovered, chased out, and sent back south. Several travelers on these trips and other observers reported her with Crook. And not always traditionally dressed or sober. One teamster described her as “dressed in buckskin suit with two Colts six shooters on a belt.” To him, she was one of the roughest persons he had ever seen. In the town of Custer, Calamity headed for the nearest saloon and “was soon made blind as a bat from looking through the bottom of a glass.”¹⁷ In the 1880s and 1890s, when Calamity began to make a name for herself as a Wild West performer, she made much of these experiences, claiming that she was an active scout for General Crook.

Calamity’s travel itinerary in late spring and early summer of 1876 was chockablock. In March, she was with Crook to the north; in May, back in Cheyenne, where she was arrested for stealing clothes but was declared “Not. Guilty.”¹⁸ In early June, she zipped back north for a second jaunt with Crook.¹⁹ Heading out of Cheyenne, “greatly” rejoicing “over her release from durance vile [jail],” she “borrowed” a horse and buggy. After overindulging in “frequent and liberal potations” of “bug juice,” she headed for Fort Laramie, ninety miles up from Cheyenne.²⁰ By mid-June, Calamity was celebrating with soldiers from Fort Laramie. The rhythm of her life, already

in uncertain high gear, whirled into overdrive in the coming months.

At the end of June, an encounter took place that would forever change Calamity’s story. In spring 1875, Wild Bill Hickok, newly married to circus owner Agnes Lake, and his partner Charlie Utter were in Cheyenne making plans to ride north. Hickok would try his hand at mining, he promised his new wife, who stayed in Cincinnati. Charlie hoped to establish a stage line into the Black Hills.²¹ Soon after mid-June, they were on their way. When the Hickok-Utter train stopped just north of Fort Laramie, the officer of the day asked them to take along several prostitutes to keep them away from the soldiers. Calamity may have been among the prostitutes. One creditable source

J. Leonard Jennewein Collection, Dakota Wesleyan University Archives, Mitchell, South Dakota



Calamity never had an affair with Wild Bill Hickok, yet rumors of such a romance have become a major, if shaky, legend. In reality, Calamity met Hickok in spring 1875 during a trip from Fort Laramie to Deadwood. They rarely saw each other in the following weeks, and Hickok was murdered less than two months later on August 2 by a drifter named Jack McCall.

describes her as drunk and “near naked.” Here, in late June, in northeast Wyoming, Calamity met Wild Bill for the first time. They would know one another as acquaintances, and no more, for about the next five weeks. Members of the train gave Calamity a suit of buckskins for the trip into the Hills.²²

Contemporaries made much of the dramatic entrance of Wild Bill, Calamity, and other members of the train into Deadwood in early July, picturing them as prancing along the entire main street, greeting friends. But in the weeks to come, Wild Bill and Calamity were rarely together. And then tragedy struck on August 2, when Jack McCall, a drifting



When Calamity arrived in Deadwood in 1876, the town was booming, as seen in this circa 1876–1877 view. She exchanged her buckskin suit for a dress and quickly became an in-demand hostess and dancer in the lively saloons and theaters. She was later remembered as a “great friend in a time of trouble. If anyone got sick or hurt, she nursed them until they got well.” One memoirist remembered her as “the heroine of the Deadwood smallpox epidemic.”

ne'er-do-well, sneaked up behind Hickok and shot him in the back of the head when he was in a poker game. Those who have tried to conjure up a love affair between Hickok and Calamity in Deadwood, or in previous years, have no facts on which to base those stories. But the rumors have become a major, shaky legend surrounding Calamity.²³

From 1876 to 1881, Calamity was in and out of Deadwood. In man-deluged, female-starved Deadwood, Calamity became an in-demand worker, hostess, and dancer in the boomtown saloons and lively theaters. But a transformation was necessary. “Boys,” she told those camped with Wild Bill and Charlie Utter, “I wish you would loan me twenty dollars. . . . I can’t do business in these old buckskins.” The men dished out the money, and the re-dressing worked. A few days later, Calamity returned to the men’s camp

dressed attractively as a woman. “She pulled up her dress,” one eye witness recalled, “rolled down her stocking and took out a roll of greenbacks and gave us the twenty she had borrowed.”²⁴ Saloons, all-night dance halls, theaters, and the ubiquitous, undefinable “hurdy gurdies” offered positions to the very small group of women as hostesses, entertainers, and “dance hall girls.” Calamity worked in several of these establishments but mostly in the Gem, ruled over by the unsavory manager Al Swearingen, who turned the theater into a “notorious den of iniquity.”²⁵

One observer claims that it was “generally well-established . . . that Jane was a prostitute.”²⁶ Perhaps, but unproven. No irrefutable evidence exists that Calamity sold sex in Deadwood. That she worked in houses of prostitution and hog ranches and that she had several “husbands” without benefit of clergy is

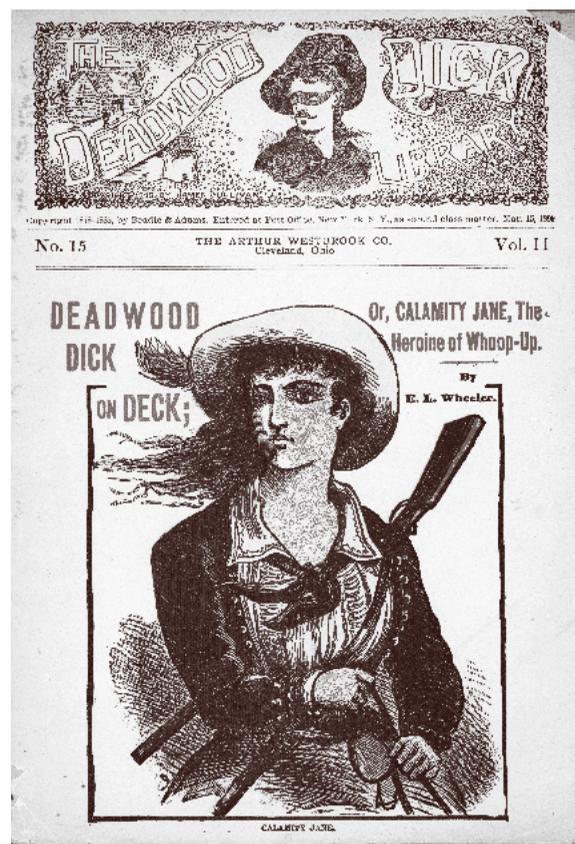
established. Still, no patron of the “joy palaces” or any madam or worker therein ever testified to Calamity’s being an out-and-out prostitute. Despite this lack of substantiating evidence, one part of the Wild Woman legend that began to gather around Calamity in Deadwood indicated that she was a prostitute.

But stronger evidence during the Deadwood years suggests that Calamity often served as a nursemaid for the sick and a helper for the needy. Granted, sometimes these stories of Calamity as a ministering angel seemed attempts to balance harsh criticism of her unwomanly and socially aberrant acts. Illustrating this ambivalence are the stories of Jesse Brown and A. M. Willard, two early arrivals in Deadwood. At first, they labeled Calamity as “nothing more than a common prostitute, drunken, [and] disorderly.” But they quickly countered that negativity by praising her efforts as a nurse, particularly during a devastating invasion of smallpox.²⁷ Other sources were more certain of Calamity’s positive actions. One memoirist remembered her as “the heroine of the Deadwood smallpox epidemic”; another recalled her as “a perfect angel sent from heaven when any of the boys was sick.” Several others agreed, with another acquaintance stating that “Calamity was a great friend in a time of trouble. If anyone got sick or hurt, she nursed them until they got well.”²⁸

A mishmash of rumors and solid information about Calamity exploded onto the national scene from 1876 to 1878. In 1875–1876, she had first appeared in regional newspapers; then, her notoriety spread in 1876–1877 through much of the northern West but particularly in the Northern Rockies and the upper Great Plains. In 1877–1878, her name and stories about her fanned out from the West and into the national media. Journalist Horatio N. Maguire profiled Calamity in two books, *The Black Hills and American Wonderland* (1877) and *The Coming Empire: A Complete and Reliable Treatise on the Black Hills, Yellowstone and Big Horn Regions* (1878). The second of the two books also featured a lively illustration entitled “Miss Martha Canary (‘Calamity Jane’), The Female Scout,” which pictured Calamity as a young, electric heroine galloping through a Wild West landscape. Information from the books was picked up and printed in New York newspapers.²⁹ Journalist T. M. Newson furnished even more extensive treatment of Calamity in his play *Drama of Life*

in the Black Hills (1878). Newson’s drama also carried rather amateurish illustrations of Calamity as both a masculine and a feminine frontier woman, as well as a revealing photo of her, now lost.

But the most important of Calamity’s sudden appearances, the most significant venue for turning her into a nationwide heroine, was in dozens of dime novels, beginning with *Deadwood Dick, the Prince of the Road; or, The Black Rider of the Black Hills* (1877). The first of thirty-three novels in the Deadwood Dick series by veteran dime novelist Edward L. Wheeler, it presented Calamity as a rambunctious, devil-may-care heroine who could outride and outshoot many of her male companions. Calamity appeared in nearly all these dime novels, sometimes as Deadwood Dick’s companion in thwarting evildoers, less frequently as his wife, but nearly always as a frenetic female helping to tame an uncivilized frontier. She appeared in the titles of two of the series—*Deadwood Dick on Deck; or, Calamity Jane, The Heroine of Whoop-Up*



Calamity’s fame grew rapidly after she was portrayed as a heroine in dime novels such as *Deadwood Dick on Deck* (1878) by Edward L. Wheeler, the eighth in a series of thirty-three. Nearly all of the content of these novels was imagined nonsense, but they became one of the most popular dime novel series of all time.

(1878) and *Deadwood Dick's Doom; or, Calamity Jane's Last Adventure* (1881)—and on the cover of two novels—*Deadwood Dick on Deck* and *Deadwood Dick in Leadville; or, A Strange Stroke for Liberty* (1879). Nearly all of the content about Calamity in these novels was imagined nonsense, and even some pretending to be authentic biography was wide of the mark. Wheeler knew very little about Calamity; as one cynic commented about dime novelists: they wrote without fear—or research. But the series caught on and became one of the most—if not the most—popular dime novel series of all time. The Deadwood Dick series made Calamity an overnight sensation. In less than three years, Martha Canary had been transformed into a national heroine.³⁰ Her life would never again be the same.

In the next two decades, Calamity was increasingly identified as a lively female protagonist of the

“yellowback” novels. These continuing moments of recognition were not always pleasant for her. When journalists or other writers quoted lurid lines about her from dime novels, Calamity usually blew up in anger, labeling the stories and descriptions as packs of lies.

But underneath the layers of sensation was a needy woman who seemed, occasionally, to find a stable and happy existence. That searching heroine took to the road in the early 1880s, hoping to find a husband, family, and home and to discover how to make a living. Calamity incessantly wandered for most of the last twenty years of her life, first in Montana and then in Wyoming in the 1880s and also returning to South Dakota for brief stops after the mid-1890s. In the first half of these years, she seemed to never stop; but in the latter part of the second decade, she lost her vitality, leading to a sharp decline and death.



MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, 981-573



MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, 941-417

While her fame as a wild woman of the West grew throughout the 1880s, Calamity herself appears to have wished to have a stable domestic life. However, earning a living as an entertainer offered the best economic opportunity. Contrast the portrait at left, likely taken circa 1882 by photographer L. A. Huffman, in which Calamity appears dressed with all the propriety that society expected from a woman of her time, with the image at right of her in buckskins and holding a rifle. The latter was taken circa 1896 just before Calamity began a tour with the Kohl and Middleton dime museum group. She sold copies of the buckskin-clad photograph during her travels.



After the Northern Pacific Railroad laid track across Montana in the early 1880s, Calamity rode west as far as Spokane, Washington, where she dealt faro and other card games. Throughout the 1890s, she drifted from town to town, riding the rails. She worked in hotels and saloons and hauled wood. She was photographed (above) in Billings in 1894 with soldiers from the Twenty-Second Infantry called out to protect the Northern Pacific train during the nationwide Pullman strike.

Through these years, Calamity often displayed her desire to be like other pioneer women. As early as 1877, she told an inquiring reporter in the Black Hills, “I want you to understand my name ain’t Calamity Jane, it’s Maggie Cosgrove.” Two years later, she elaborated, “Boys, . . . I am married to George [Cosgrove] now and am living straight and don’t do any business on the outside.” But like most of Calamity’s “husbands,” no record exists that she and Cosgrove were ever legally married.³¹ In fact, in 1881 in Montana, Calamity was said to be living with another man, possibly ranch worker Frank King. Late in 1882, Calamity became the mother of a baby boy, whom she called “Little Calamity.” Sadly, the baby died soon after birth.³²

In between husbands throughout the 1880s, Calamity tried several ways to make a living in a society that expected women to be stay-at-home wives and mothers. She worked as a domestic in hotels, did men’s work hauling wood to nearby towns, and

served variously in saloons. In addition, when the Northern Pacific Railroad (NP) laid new rails across Montana in the early 1880s, she rode west as far as Spokane, Washington, where she dealt faro and other card games.³³ Then, attracted by the new mineral strike in the Coeur d’Alenes in northern Idaho, she tried something new. In February 1884, Calamity and a small corps of female dancers hiked over snow-covered mountains from the NP railroad junction to the boomtown of Eagle City, where they entertained miners crowded into a tent saloon. Calamity, telling exaggerated yarns about her life, became the “star of the evening,” and after her monologue, the women danced with the female-hungry miners until morning. One month later, Calamity returned to “mine the miners” with further entertainment, but a pretty Irish lass, Molly b’Damn, outsparked Calamity, pushing her out of the Coeur d’Alenes.³⁴ Later in 1884, trying to capitalize on her brief experience as an entertainer, Calamity joined Tom Hardwick’s Great Rocky

Mountain Show, but it collapsed financially before she could become one of its feature attractions.³⁵

By the mid-1880s, Calamity, now living in south-central Wyoming, in Rawlins, had a new “husband,” William S. (Bill) Steers. She would try to be a new mother—and wife—in that order. That relationship proved to be her stormiest. In regional newspapers, she and Steers were often reported as fighting. In 1885, Steers would have been twenty, nine years younger than Calamity. One Rawlins journalist harpooned Steers as “one of the most worthless curs unhung.” Another reporter indicted Steers for beating up Calamity and stealing her “watch and chain.”³⁶ But in October 1887, Calamity gave birth to a second child, a baby girl she named Jessie Elizabeth. To gain respectability, Calamity and Steers traveled to Pocatello, Idaho, where they were legally married on May 30, 1888.³⁷ Calamity now had a husband, but more importantly, a father for her seven-month-old daughter. Inexplicably, Steers disappeared, and Calamity never mentioned him again.

Instead, Calamity asserted later that Clinton Burke, her next “husband,” whom she claimed to have married in Texas, was Jessie’s father.³⁸ There is no evidence for the claim. Indeed, Calamity and Burke probably did not meet until the early 1890s, perhaps in eastern Montana. They were together off and on until about 1896, with Jessie sometimes accompanying them. In the early 1890s, Burke, the son of a Missouri minister, worked at odd jobs on

Calamity had several husbands—though not always with the benefit of clergy. Clinton Burke, the son of a Missouri minister and Calamity’s partner during the early 1890s, worked at odd jobs on ranches and farms. Calamity claimed that he was the father of her daughter, Jessie, born in 1887. There is no evidence for that claim, and, in fact, Calamity and Burke probably did not meet until the early 1890s.



J. Leonard Jernheim Collection, Dakota Wesleyan University Archives, Mitchell, South Dakota

Even when her domestic life was more settled, Calamity was pinched financially. Part of the problem was her excessive drinking, rambling, and unwise use of money. Here, she exchanges hats and shares a reunion drink with cowboy Teddy Blue Abbot in Utica or Gilt Edge, Montana.

ranches and farms. He, Calamity, and Jessie traveled through Montana, parts of Wyoming and South Dakota, and then Calamity and Burke began a trip with the Kohl and Middleton dime museum group in 1896 before the relationship ended.

After the breakup with Burke, Calamity tried again to establish a home with a new companion. She and Robert Dorsett, a laborer in eastern Montana, were together by 1898, if not sooner. They were spotted in Billings, and then in Lewistown, and next in the small towns of Utica and Gilt Edge. But the “marriage” did not last long, with the couple separating as early as summer 1899. Perhaps a rumor explains the breakup. One source states—and daughter Jessie said much the same many years later in the 1930s—that Dorsett stole the child away and took her to live with his mother in Livingston. On occasion, Calamity half-humorously referred to her abilities to entice a new companion, but in doing so she covered up a more significant point. When observers teased her about the young, handsome men she attracted (Steers, Burke, and Dorsett were all about ten years younger), she retorted, “I never had a fellow with a h— of a lot of money; [but] I always did pick a good-looker.”³⁹ The problem and achievements



Courtesy, the author

went much deeper. Calamity could not find work that would pay sufficiently to support Jessie and herself. Even when with a “husband,” Calamity was pinched for financial resources. Part of the problem, of course, was her excessive drinking, rambling, and unwise use of money.

For several years, Calamity kept in mind the possibilities for earning a living through entertainment, and a decade later, she had her largest success when, after tiring of ranch work, she returned to Deadwood in 1895, with Burke and Jessie in tow. Early the next year, she signed on with Kohl and Middleton, the dime museum entertainers, and barnstormed across the northern United States from Minneapolis to the East Coast. Calamity was sold as the “Famous Woman Scout of the Wild West,” the “Heroine of a Thousand Thrilling Adventures,” the “Terror of Evildoers in the Black Hills!” and the “Comrade of Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill!”⁴⁰ All of this was hype, but it worked. One newspaper revealed that Calamity was earning fifty dollars a week for presentations, and an acquaintance who heard one of her performances said that the Wild West heroine was drawing crowds with her interesting, sensational monologue. Just before the tour left, Calamity, with the aid of a ghostwriter, turned out a nine-page autobiography, *Life and Adventures of Calamity Jane: By Herself* (1896), that, with a few



With the aid of a ghostwriter, Calamity turned out a nine-page autobiography, *Life and Adventures of Calamity Jane, By Herself*, in late 1895 or early 1896. The pamphlet was filled with embellishments, tall tales, and outright lies.

nods toward authenticity, overflowed with stretchers and inaccuracies. Over the years, too many unsuspecting biographers and historians uncritically embraced what Calamity said in the little pamphlet. Although the tour went smoothly, when Jessie, whom Calamity and Burke left with a friendly family in South Dakota, was reported sick, Calamity came home to help her daughter.⁴¹

After Calamity returned west, probably in May or June 1896, she was unable to capitalize on her recent experiences, and her nomadic life resumed. Picking

up Jessie in Sturgis, Calamity began traipsing from town to town in Wyoming and then in Montana. After her brief time with Dorsett, she began a downward tumble during the next three or four years. Trying to eke out a living selling her autobiography for fifteen cents and her photographs for a dime or more, Calamity rarely found other work that lasted more than a few days or weeks. She wandered into and around the Yellowstone Park area, where she lived off generous acquaintances and resided in a “pest house” set aside for those suffering from communicable diseases.⁴²

J. Leonard Jennewein Collection, Dakota Wesleyan University Archives, Mitchell, South Dakota



Throughout the 1890s, Calamity continued wandering from town to town in Montana, Wyoming, and the Dakotas. Trying to eke out a living selling her autobiography for fifteen cents and her photograph for a dime or more, Calamity rarely found work that lasted more than a few weeks. Here, she poses with a horse borrowed from a cowboy on a street in Utica, Montana, in 1897 or 1898.

After Calamity landed in a poorhouse in Bozeman, her story caught the attention of New York journalist Josephine Winifred Brake. Brake attempted to rescue Calamity by bringing her to the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York. But Calamity quickly tired of working for Brake and signed on with Colonel Fred Cummins and his Indian Congress at the exposition. The photograph at right was taken that summer.



D. C. Arnold, photographer, Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ds-05299

A new challenge with new employment possibilities occurred in early 1901. Calamity herself became sick, and because she was unable to pay for her care, she was taken to a poorhouse in Bozeman. She soon bounced back and went on her way.⁴³ But the story of Calamity Jane being in a poorhouse burst into national newspapers and caught the attention of a New York journalist and author named Josephine Winifred Brake. After reading the story about the down-and-nearly-out Calamity, Brake dreamed up an idea. She would rescue Calamity, take her east, introduce her to the public in the Pan-American Exposition then in Buffalo, New York, and provide a home and stability for the western heroine. When Brake arrived, she located Calamity in the “hut of [a] negress” near Livingston. Critics of Brake—especially the most cynical of the commentators—accused her of ulterior motives, of planning to use Calamity and her Wild West reputation to reap some unnamed reward. Recently discovered documents suggest that Brake was working with the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo to bring Calamity east as an attention-attracting feature, but she also exhibited genuine concern for Calamity then and later.⁴⁴

Not surprisingly, Brake’s enterprise did not go well. On the trip east, it was difficult to keep Calamity on the wagon, and once in Buffalo, she was not easy to handle. In a few days, Calamity tired of working for Brake and signed on with Colonel Fred Cummins and his Indian Congress. Less than a month later, Calamity wanted to return home. Binge drinking got

her into trouble, and in despair she went to Buffalo Bill Cody, recently arrived in Buffalo with his Wild West arena show, and begged for money to pay her fare back west. Cody anted up, and after a few delays, Calamity was back west in late fall 1901.⁴⁵

The next two years saw steady decline. Calamity’s drink-fueled wandering recommenced. For nearly a month in early 1903, Calamity (Jessie was with her) worked for madam Dora Du Fran’s “house of joy” in South Dakota cooking and doing the laundry. Then she fell off the wagon. “For five days she whooped it up,” Du Fran wrote later. In her noisy celebrating,



Lewis R. Freeman, *Down the Yellowstone* (New York, 1922), opp. p. 80

Wanting to return home to the West, Calamity begged Buffalo Bill Cody for the money to pay her fare and was back by late fall of 1901. This 1901 photograph shows her preparing breakfast in Livingston, Montana.



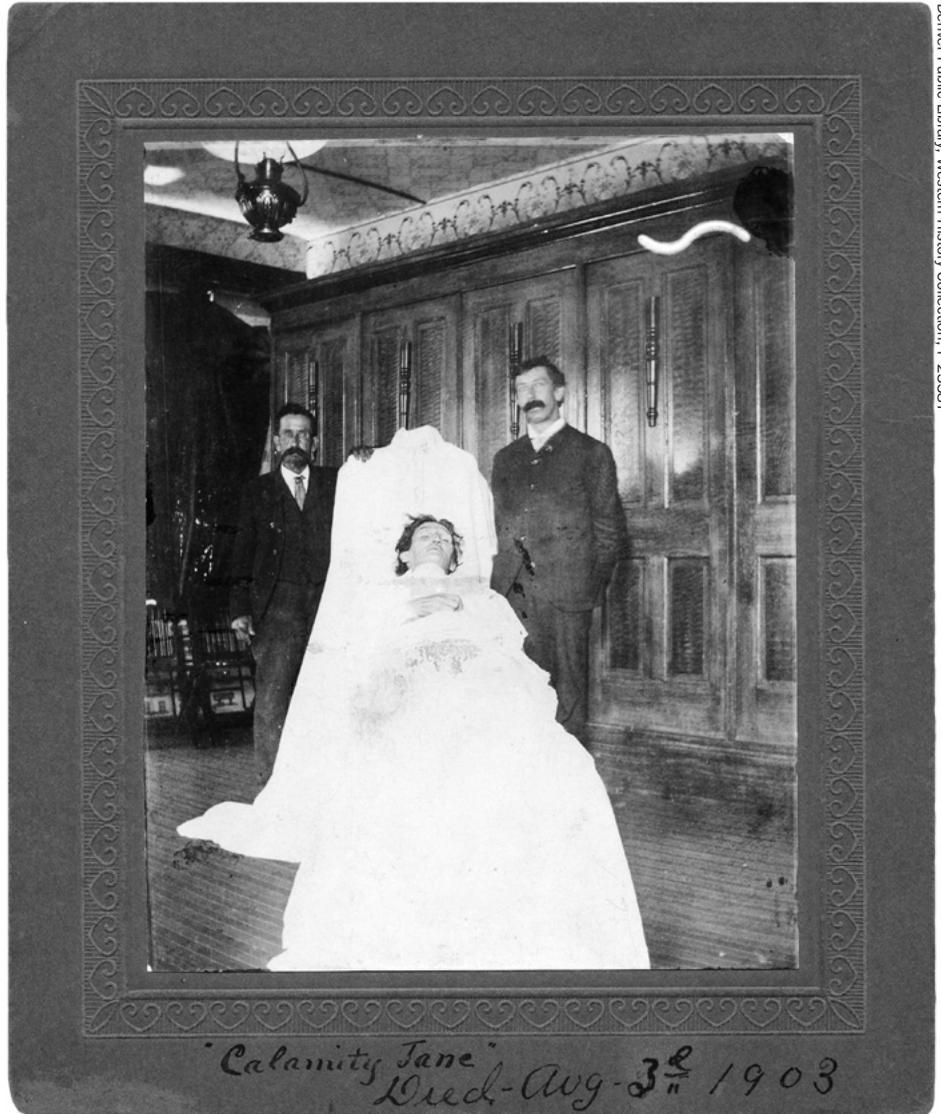
On the afternoon of August 1, 1903, Calamity succumbed to an illness in the town of Terry, a few miles outside of Deadwood. She was forty-seven. In her final hours, she may have told listeners that she wanted to be buried near Wild Bill Hickok in Deadwood. Here, she poses in July 1903 in front of Hickok's grave in the Mount Moriah Cemetery.

Calamity went howling up the street, competing with the coyotes who were sounding their own barbaric yawp across the Black Hills.⁴⁶

The next months were depressingly similar—and worse. A few weeks in Sundance, Wyoming, more trips around to Black Hills towns, and back to Deadwood in midsummer. Photos taken in July show Calamity a wrinkled wreck. In late July, she boarded an ore train for the mining town of Terry, a few miles out of Deadwood. Soon after her arrival in Terry, an incapacitating illness overtook her. Doctors said there was nothing they could do, and Calamity seemed to accept that she was dying. In her final hours, she may have told acquaintances that she was already a grandmother, with Jessie having given birth, but she would not give information about the whereabouts of her daughter. Calamity may also have told these listeners she wanted to be buried near Wild Bill Hickok in Deadwood.⁴⁷

Death came on the afternoon of August 1, 1903. Probably the main cause of Calamity's demise at age forty-seven was chronic alcoholism. The funeral service at Deadwood's Methodist Church drew a huge crowd of friends, acquaintances, and curious bystanders. Charles B. Clark, the father of later well-known writer Badger Clark, officiated at the service. Drawing from Psalm 90, Dr. Clark emphasized Calamity's humanitarian actions, praising her "deeds of kindness and charity . . . [; she was a] heroine."⁴⁸ After the service, a hearse took Calamity's remains to the Mount Moriah Cemetery, where she was buried near Wild Bill's grave. The companionship Calamity may have wished for in life seemed possible only in death. Ironically, the stone prepared for Calamity's grave misspelled her name and gave a wrong age and birth date (as age fifty-three, and thus born in 1850). This combination of facts and erroneous information had marked her life and legends while she was living.

A huge crowd of friends, acquaintances, and curious bystanders attended the funeral service, where Charles B. Clark officiated, praising Calamity's "deeds of kindness and charity." Here, Calamity lies in repose on August 4. Undertakers Henry and Charles H. Robinson stand beside the casket. The handwritten note on the photograph is in error; Calamity died on August 1.



Now it went on. The marriage of truth, distortion, and legend has continued to define Calamity Jane in the more than a century since her death.

Journalists, biographers, and historians were not sure what to say about Calamity Jane at the end of her life. Their indecision continued what had been true in the twenty-five years or so before her death when images of her had been neither monolithic nor static. During her lifetime, journalists often tried to balance the less palatable facets of her controversial character—the cross-dressing, drinking, and promiscuity—with counterbalancing images of an angel of mercy. These positive treatments included her care for smallpox victims, her aid for the poor, her attentions to mothers and children, and her bail-

ing out the penniless. Missing in nearly all accounts of Calamity during her lifetime, however, was her desire to be a rather traditional pioneer woman with a family. A handful of hints reveals this desire. As we have seen, Calamity wanted to be married, to be with a “husband,” to be near children. In 1895–1896, in an extraordinary interview, she told a female interviewer that her daughter, Jessie, was her reason for living and that she wanted to make sure Jessie got the education she herself had missed. Almost a decade earlier, novelist William Loring Spencer (Mrs. George E. Spencer) had portrayed Calamity as an energetic, go-ahead frontier figure, on the one hand, but also a warm, supportive friend for the novel’s heroine. In the novel, Calamity bonds with Meg Stevens even though other snooty Deadwood females dismiss her as below their social station.⁴⁹ A few writers and moviemakers

would pick up on a feminist interpretation of Calamity in the next century.

Although interest in the pioneer West boomed in the period from roughly 1905 to 1930, less than a handful of important works were written about Calamity. Several barriers faced those who wanted to write about her. Information about Calamity remained nearly nonexistent, with many of the reliable facts buried in newspapers, census reports, and other legal records not of easy access to researchers. In addition, many of the stories about Calamity, including her own, were unreliable, often more fanciful and downright false than truthful. Myths about Calamity—that she had served as a scout, that she was an Indian killer, and that she had been romantically attached to Wild Bill Hickok—were already hardening into assertions. Moreover, novelists and moviemakers were telling masculine stories; women were the companions of these heroes, not the central characters in novels and films made during the period. Biographers who wished to provide veracious and soundly researched accounts of Calamity had to find their ways through or around these barriers that seemed almost impassable or insurmountable. The patterns that emerged revealed that moviemakers and biographers were frequently more interested in embracing the legendary stories than in turning up newer or more truthful accounts.

The first two films featuring cinematic Calamities illustrated the degree to which myths about her had already solidified in the teens and early twenties and how much she would be the supporting female character, not the star. The silent film *In the Days of '75 and '76* (1915) issued not out of Hollywood but from northwestern Nebraska. Like such later movies as *The Plainsman* (1936) and *Calamity Jane* (1953), this film portrays the romance of Calamity and Wild Bill. Played by Freeda Hartzell Romine, Calamity is a perky, pretty tomboy who learns to shoot well and carries a side gun along with her rifle. But she is also portrayed as domestic and in a very positive light, before she marries Wild Bill halfway through the film and later helps him with scouting and mining. The plot carries through Wild Bill's violent death. At times, Calamity seems like one of the guys, but not the slightest bit of immorality or alcoholism is suggested. As in most of the early Calamity movies, the gray side of the historical Calamity—the possible

prostitution, aberrant behavior, and alcoholism—is entirely elided.⁵⁰

The second silent film with a role for Calamity, William S. Hart's *Wild Bill Hickok* (1923), is somewhat shrouded in mystery because all copies of the movie have disappeared. And, because of Hart's reputation as the leading Western star of the time, neither he nor Paramount could allow Calamity's character, starring Ethel Grey Terry, to steal the limelight in her supporting role. Hart flatly declared the movie to be historically accurate (he himself had written the screenplay for the film), but it repeated a false story that Calamity and Hickok had been acquaintances in Dodge before they reconnected in Deadwood. At the end of the movie, Hickok, the famous pistoleer, suggests he and Calamity might forge a life together, but before that can happen, Jack McCall dashes on camera and guns down Wild Bill. Here again, the romantic attraction of Wild Bill and Calamity dominates the plot.⁵¹ These sentimental stories, not



Journalists tasked with writing Calamity's obituary were not sure what to say about her. Many tried to balance the less palatable aspects of her life with stories of Calamity caring for smallpox victims and bailing out the penniless. Many painted Calamity as an adventurous western woman, as seen in this illustration for W. G. Patterson's "Calamity Jane" published in *Wild World Magazine* in August 1903.

substantiated in history and biography (but not yet clear in the 1920s), were the much-needed plot line to fuse the story of an Old West hero and heroine. In addition, with few exceptions, it would be several years before Calamity could stand alone as the main character in cinematic works and novels.

The first nonfiction book on Calamity, Duncan Aikman's *Calamity Jane and the Lady Wildcats* (1927), excessively focused on the legendary Wild West image of Calamity. Aikman, a journalist inflicted with the sardonic wit of his friend and cultural critic H. L. Mencken, devoted a bit more than a third of his 350-page book to Calamity, along with other provocative sections on Cattle Kate Watson, Belle Starr, Lola Montez, Madame Moustache, and other Wild West women. Supposedly a work of nonfiction, most of its pages about Calamity reeked of imagined scenes and what-ifs—even though Aikman interviewed a few persons who knew Calamity, read dozens of newspaper clippings, and perused other published information about her. If the author had utilized only the hard facts of his research—and avoided artistic verbiage—his account of Calamity could have been condensed into a twenty-five-page essay.

Addicted to a frenetic Old West, Aikman distorted the lives of Calamity and the other “Lady Wildcats.” When he wrote to Wyoming historian Grace Raymond Hebard, he asked for stories about their gambling and shooting; never did he request information about them as wives, sisters, daughters, or mothers. Aikman's Calamity is rarely a pioneer woman and almost entirely a frontier hellcat. He spilled no ink about her giving birth to two children or on the lives of her children, and he debunks almost entirely her rumored actions as an angel of mercy. Given his intentions, Aikman found what he wanted: Martha Canary, the



Courtesy Paul Andrew Hutton

The first silent film about Calamity appeared in 1915. Produced by a small film company in Chadron, Nebraska, *In the Days of '75* and '76 portrayed Calamity, played by Freeda Hartzell Tomine, as a perky, pretty tomboy. Halfway through the film, she marries Wild Bill. Not the slightest bit of immorality or alcoholism is suggested in the film.



Courtesy Paul Andrew Hutton

A second silent film with a role for Calamity, *Wild Bill Hickok*, appeared in 1923. William S. Hart, the leading Western star at the time, wrote the screenplay and starred as Wild Bill alongside Ethel Grey Terry as Calamity. Hart declared the movie to be historically accurate, but it portrayed a romantic attraction between Wild Bill and Calamity that was never substantiated in history.

wild “lynx's kitten” who becomes the wild woman of the West. Unfortunately, his unreliable account remained the most widely circulated historical source on Calamity for more than two decades, with subsequent biographers capitalizing on his disclosures

but also victimized by his slanted evidence, misstatements, and blatant fabrications.⁵²

In the next three decades, from 1930 to 1960, biographers, novelists, and filmmakers followed the legend of Calamity as a wild woman of the Old West, but they also traveled other avenues of explanation. These interpretations sprang up during a time of growing interest in the Old West, one that spiraled upward and hit a high peak in the 1930s. And, most remarkable of all, two women came forward to claim they were either a granddaughter or a daughter of Calamity.

The accounts of Jessie Elizabeth (Oakes) Murray and Jean Hickok McCormick appeared suddenly on scene in the 1930s and 1940s. In the late 1920s but especially in the early 1930s, Murray emerged to claim



Courtesy the author

Calamity's daughter, Jessie Oakes Murray, disappeared from the historical record after her mother's death. She reappeared suddenly in the 1930s and claimed to be Calamity's granddaughter. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Jessie queried librarians, archivists, and historians for information about her "grandmother" and sometimes about the man she considered to be her father, William Hickok, a relative of Wild Bill. Her biological father was most likely Bill Steers.

she was Calamity's granddaughter or niece. Calamity's daughter, Jessie, was written about a few times from her birth on October 28, 1887, until her mother's death.

She then disappeared for more than three decades, only to reappear suddenly, telling many to whom she wrote that she was Calamity's granddaughter. Throughout the 1930s and sporadically in the next few years, Jessie queried librarians, archivists, and

historians for information about her grandmother or her aunt and sometimes about the man she considered to be her father, William Hickok, a relative of Wild Bill. When her informants failed to turn up the information she requested, she upbraided them for their not getting "the scum off your brain."⁵³ Along the way, Jessie frequently changed her story, especially after another woman's claim to be Calamity's daughter surfaced.

Jean Hickok McCormick dashed on scene on Mother's Day, May 6, 1941, announcing to a nationwide radio audience on "We the People" that she was the genuine daughter of Calamity Jane and Wild Bill Hickok. She claimed Calamity and Bill had fallen in love in Kansas, married, and Calamity gave birth to a daughter named Jane (or Janey). Bill abandoned Calamity and Janey. Thinking she would be unable to raise her daughter, Calamity gave her up for adoption to James O'Neil and his wife to raise in



The Center for Western Studies, Augustana College, Sioux Falls, South Dakota

As the myth of a romance between Calamity and Wild Bill Hickok became more entrenched, Jean Hickok McCormick (above) sensationally announced herself to be their daughter during a national radio broadcast in 1941. According to McCormick's story, Calamity and Wild Bill had fallen in love in Kansas and married, and Calamity had given birth to a daughter. Unable to raise her, Calamity gave her up for adoption to James O'Neil and his wife to raise in England. To bolster her claim, McCormick produced a diary she attributed to Calamity as well as unsent letters.



Courtesy, Paul Andrew Hutton

As aficionados and even historians embraced Jane Hickok McCormick's claim that Wild Bill Hickok and Calamity had married, films entrenched this myth in the public mind. *The Plainsman* (1936) starred Gary Cooper as Hickok alongside Jean Arthur as a Calamity who drives a stagecoach and swings a bullwhip but who wears form-fitting buckskins and wants to be a wife and a mother.

England.⁵⁴ To answer skeptics, Hickok McCormick produced an unpublished diary that Calamity reportedly kept and also letters unsent to Janey. More than a few aficionados of the Old West and others who wanted so much to see a mother-daughter strain in Calamity's life embraced Hickok McCormick's story and sources without asking the needed questions. Unfortunately, many writers and moviemakers used her story for nearly a half century before biographer James McLaird showed it to be a shabby fraud.⁵⁵

The Hickok McCormick followers included historians and biographers in the 1940s. Clarence S. Paine, a librarian who amassed an unusually large collection of Calamity documents for his planned biography of Calamity, never could free himself from the Hickok McCormick story even though he was a thoughtful, diligent researcher. Another local historian and

a medical doctor by occupation, Noley Mumey, was so smitten by the Hickok McCormick story that he published, for the first time, the complete diary and letters, without questioning their authenticity. More annalist than analyst, Mumey provided a valuable summary of key newspaper articles about Calamity but failed to use much of the Hickok McCormick story in his own narrative.⁵⁶

The Hickok McCormick virus also infected another biographer, Glenn Clairmonte, in her *Calamity Was the Name for Jane* (1959). Touted as "The Only Complete Life of Calamity Jane" and a "distinguished biography," the book fell far short of these salutes. Instead, the author, taken in by the Hickok McCormick tale and adding false facts to demonstrate Calamity's warmheartedness toward her putative daughter Jean, produced a deeply flawed book. Clairmonte also refused to deal with Calamity's "husbands," and Calamity's profanity and early drinking are muted. And nearly everything about the Wild Bill-Calamity relationship is imagined, sometimes even more far-fetched than the Hickok McCormick story. Clairmonte's biography demonstrated how difficult it had become to produce a defensible biography of Calamity if one relied heavily on the Hickok McCormick materials and tried to make the Calamity-Wild Bill relationship the center pivot of the story.⁵⁷

But two films did exactly that, dramatizing Calamity's story as a love affair with Hickok. These two movies, *The Plainsman* (1936) and *Calamity Jane* (1953), probably did more to shape the dominant romantic image of Calamity from 1930 to 1960 than any other venues.

When famed movie director Cecil B. DeMille announced his plans in early 1936 for a film on Wild Bill Hickok with a major role for Calamity Jane, he set tongues to wagging. Would he place an emotional romance at the center of the film, how would he treat the darker side of Calamity, and would he remain true to history and end the film tragically? Even though Hickok family members tried to warn DeMille away from the falsity of a Calamity-Wild Bill romance, DeMille stayed on that track, with appealing roles for Gary Cooper as Hickok and Jean Arthur as a hybrid Calamity trying to sort out her competing masculine and feminine impulses.⁵⁸ In *The Plainsman*, Calamity drives a wild stagecoach and swings a wicked

bullwhip, but she is also appealingly feminine in her form-fitting buckskins, her hair nicely arranged. She acts like a man but also wants to be an attractive woman, wife, and mother. One memorable scene reverberates with symbolic meaning and encapsulates DeMille's interpretation. Preparing to secure help for soldiers pinned down by Indians, Calamity steps out of the nearly ruined skirt of a stylish dress she had donned earlier in hopes of proving her femininity and rides for reinforcements in the buckskins worn beneath her dress. Moving back and forth from dress to leather pants, Jean Arthur's Calamity personifies the oxymoronic Calamity that had come on scene by

the 1930s. Spunky, perky, and pretty but also assertive and courageous (but not boozy or loose), Calamity plays a romantic, vernacular woman of the frontier who wishes to marry.⁵⁹

The second film, the musical *Calamity Jane* (1953), starring Doris Day, revealed how far moviemakers were willing to go in featuring a romantic Calamity in full flower. Like most musicals, this film, with huge doses of glitz, uplift, and nonstop action, shoved history aside in the dash toward entertainment. Day was ideally suited for her role in this musical Western. Her singing talents and her physical attractiveness, her agility, and her vivaciousness matched the need for

a romantic, less gritty Wild West Calamity. There would be no alcohol, only “sasparillah”; her swearing is limited to no worse than her denunciation of recalcitrant miners as a “mangy pack of dirt-scratching beetles” or “slab-sided coyotes.” The plot line of *Calamity Jane* follows the heroine's transition from a careless and seemingly carefree tomboy to a woman aching for a man's love and marriage. When Calamity discovers her love for Wild Bill (who is definitely not a lead character in the film), she transitions toward love and marriage, emotional transformations that come front and center in Sammy

In its romantic depiction of Calamity, *Calamity Jane* (1953) sacrificed nearly all historical veracity. This glitzy musical starred Doris Day as a vivacious Calamity who transforms from a tomboy into a woman discovering her love for Wild Bill Hickok. The film portrays none of the darker aspects of Calamity's life—she drinks only “sasparillah,” and she never swears.



Courtesy Paul Andrew Hutton

Fain's Oscar-winning "Secret Love," whose lines reveal that Calamity's "heart is now an open door" and "her love is secret no more." Nothing of Calamity's alcoholism and sexual explicitness is evident here nor the historical fact that Wild Bill died in Deadwood a bit less than a month after he arrived in mid-summer 1876. In its excessively romantic depiction of Calamity, Doris Day's role sacrificed nearly all historical veracity on the altar of cinematic popularity.⁶⁰

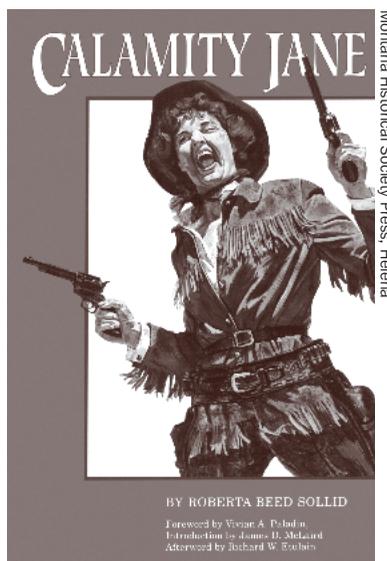
At the same time that the false story of Jean Hickok McCormick and the romantic roles for Calamity in *The Plainsman* and *Calamity Jane* greatly distorted history, two biographers were trying to keep historically accurate portraits of Calamity in front of readers. J. Leonard Jennewein, journalist and professor, set out to write a full-scale biography but concluded he "had neither the time, money, nor talent" to complete the project and reduced his fifty-thousand-word manuscript to a pamphlet-length book. Jennewein was a truth teller, combing hard-to-get newspaper sources and interviewing oldsters who knew Calamity before issuing his *Calamity Jane of the Western Trails* in 1953. In his brief work, Jennewein addressed most of the controversial topics: Calamity's birthplace, her death, her drinking and her prostitution, her scouting, her physical appearance, and the Hickok McCormick story. Consider his one-line summary of Calamity's drinking: "Alcohol pushed and pulled and pounded on Calamity Jane." Or his comment on the Hickok McCormick and Wild Bill narrative: "We buy no stock in the Calamity Jane-Wild Bill corporation."⁶¹ Word for word, Jennewein's abbreviated work remains eminently valuable.

The same hardheaded realism exudes from Roberta Beed Sollid's *Calamity Jane: A Study in Historical Criticism*, published by the Montana Historical Society in 1958. At its appearance, the work was the best-researched biographical study

of Calamity. Via Greyhound buses, Sollid visited nearly all the major collections of Calamity material and interviewed aged men who had known her personally. Sollid was no romantic sycophant; she may even have disliked Calamity. As she said bluntly at the beginning of her book: "No career is so elusive to the historian as that of a loose woman."⁶² Her diligent research turned up new information on such topics as Calamity's nickname, her so-called husbands, and her nursing, jailings, gun handling, and death. Her work was not so much a biography as a critical study of the stories told about Calamity and the validity of those narratives. Nor was it a thesis-driven book; rather, it debunked misconceptions, lies, and folklore. Sollid achieved much of her corrective goal, and her book became the most reliable study of Calamity for most of the next half century.

By the end of the 1950s, no coherent, ongoing single image of Calamity Jane had come into focus. Instead, divergent and changing images dominated the scene. Historians and biographers wrestled with the chaotic, differing stories of Calamity's life. Movie-makers, though accepting some of Calamity's rough, uncouth side, were more interested in peddling romantic stories about her. And for nearly twenty years, the variant story of Jean Hickok McCormick as the daughter of Calamity and Wild Bill had troubled and diverted many Calamity tellers. If

these diverse, shifting images dominated the period from 1930 to 1960, an even sharper shift transformed Calamity images after 1960. A New Gray Calamity bounded onto the scene, influencing—indeed, transforming—much of what was written and filmed about her up to 1990. The new images of Calamity Jane were apiece with the tipping points of change occurring in American culture and consonant with the interpretive shifts of the American West. The sociocultural upset following the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963 and his brother Robert in 1968 and



Montana Historical Society Press, Helena

In 1958, the publication of Roberta Beed Sollid's *Calamity Jane: A Study in Historical Criticism* at last provided a realistic view of Calamity. Sollid turned up facts about Calamity's husbands, nursing, jailings, gun handling, and death. However, it still did not provide a definitive biography; rather, it debunked misconceptions, lies, and folklore.

of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., as well as the Vietnam War and the antiwar dissent that boiled up vis-à-vis the war, transformed the tone of many novels, histories, and movies during the sixties. These dramatic incidents and events also reshaped interpretations of the American West. Western novels such as Thomas Berger's *Little Big Man* (1964), Robert Flynn's *North to Yesterday* (1967), and John Seelye's *The Kid* (1972) illustrated the expanding emphases on violence, ethnic and racial topics, and new roles for women. Similar topics received major attention in such Western films as *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), *The Wild Bunch* (1969), and *Little Big Man* (1970). Western historians likewise participated in the transformation, gradually transitioning away from earlier narrative and romantic storytelling to more analytical/evaluative studies of Native Americans, Chicanos, women and family, and environmental history. By the end of the 1980s, a historical work like Patricia Nelson Limerick's *Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (1987) illustrated the marked changes going on in western historical writing.⁶³

These sociocultural shifts clearly molded images of Calamity Jane that surfaced between 1960 and 1990. None circulated more widely than the nearly twenty novels of English author J. T. Edson featuring a nonromantic—if not an antiromantic—Calamity as a central or supporting character. In his Calamity novels, Edson introduced a bit of biography, but he had it wrong in stating that her mother, Charlotte, now widowed, took her daughter “Mary Jane Canary” [*sic*] to a convent. But, at sixteen, “Mary Jane” escapes and quickly begins her new life as a cook and then a skilled rider, a wielder of a long whip, and a fearsome gun-woman. His Calamity heroine is an attractive (but not beautiful) woman, sexually voracious, a moderate drinker and smoker, a stout but well-built female, and romantically intertwined with more than two or three equally handsome and virile heroes. No drunkenness or prostitution here; instead youth, robustness, competitiveness, and success.

The imagined Calamities in Edson's novels juxtapose her wild woman legend and the New Gray Calamity coming on scene. In the first Calamity novel, *Trouble Trail* (1965), Calamity and three other women get into a vicious brawl, tearing off one another's clothes and ending in a sweaty heap. In another novel, *The Cow Thieves* (1965), Calamity rides nonstop,

gallops through a series of threatening violent scenes, and beds down with the hero Danny Fog two or three times. In one of the last of the series, *Calamity, Mark and Belle* (1980), Edson exhausts his list of adjectives in describing Calamity: she is pretty, red-haired, sexy, well-endowed, raunchy, promiscuous, foul-mouthed, adventuresome, courageous, and forever young. Again, the conflicts are with equally alluring and daring—and physically strong—women. Even though Edson's fictions were mostly innocent of factual history, they kept Calamity's name continuously before a huge reading public.⁶⁴

Edson's emphases on sexuality and violence became steady fare in the so-called adult Westerns that several publishing houses printed in multi-volume series. Most of the novels, although carrying one author's name, were written by a stable of house-hired writers. The most voluminous of these was the Jake Logan series, launched in the mid-1970s and containing more than four hundred volumes by 2010. In one of the Logan series novels, *Dead Man's Hand* (1979), Calamity beds down with superhero John Slocum. Calamity comes on scene as a sexual toy of the macho men, eventually simultaneously taking on Slocum as a lover and also Wild Bill Hickok, on the same night, in the same blankets. *Longarm in Deadwood* (1982), in another sex-and-violence series, features Calamity as a drunken nymphomaniac, trying to seduce the hero Longarm and other men who come to her attention. The novel presents an excessively negative and distorted picture of Calamity as a filthy, ugly, clap-ridden, and hopeless liar.⁶⁵

Pete Dexter's novel *Deadwood* (1986) also featured a New Gray Calamity.⁶⁶ In his novel, Calamity smells like the ripe mules and horses she rides. Nor is she much cleaner than the filthy tents and lean-tos where she flops. Calamity is so rancid that a fresh crop of mold grows unnoticed on her neck. No man pays much attention to her even though fornication and sexual violence are rife in Dexter's *Deadwood*. Unwashed, unloved, and underappreciated, she seems less a woman in Dexter's novel than a two-legged screaming eagle bent on shooting off toes, bragging of her “husband” Wild Bill, and out-drinking all others, men and vile drunkards included. Dexter's Calamity is not believable; she is a flat, one-sided figure of parody instead of a full-bodied, round character of memorable fiction.

Larry McMurtry's novel *Buffalo Girls* (1990), also featuring a New Gray Calamity, contains redeeming qualities.⁶⁷ McMurtry's Calamity symbolizes a closing frontier, a once-heroic past disappearing into nostalgic haze. The author also depicts Calamity as a failure in nearly all of her endeavors. She falls off the stagecoach in Buffalo Bill's Wild West, she cannot use a gun, and she fails to *do* anything except live off others. Although McMurtry's novel and heroine suffer from excessive grayness, the work raises significant cultural questions about the effect of a closing frontier.

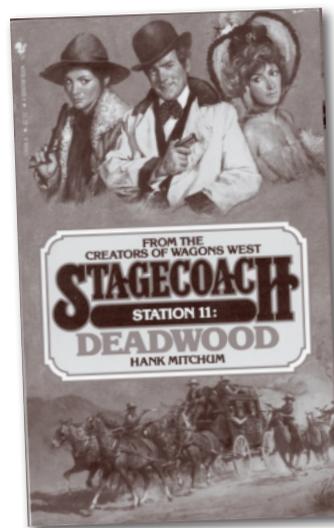
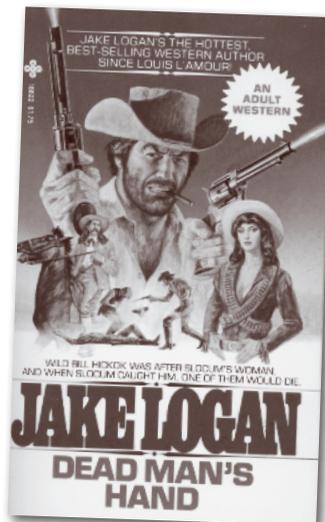
The most important film released in this period was the TV movie *Calamity Jane* (1984), starring a feminist Jane Alexander.⁶⁸ The movie used the Hickok McCormick story as its plot line and also illustrated the increasing tendency of Calamitists to create an ambivalent character, rambunctiously masculine and less assertively feminine. Here, the thematic emphasis, less successfully, is Calamity as Hickok's wife and the mother of his daughter, but her role as a strong, independent woman is on much stronger ground. Her desire for independence clashes with her lust for a partner. Alexander superbly portrays these clashes of desire and actuality. And she revealingly tells her daughter Janey (who does not know that Calamity is her biological mother), "What I know about wifing you could stuff in a saddlebag." Or, even more sensationally, "Well, I guess it's the same for us ladies here and there. You either get paid for

washing a man's drawers or for pulling them down." In her unvarnished, gritty actions, Alexander's Calamity, foreshadowing even more realistic images in coming movies, illustrates the large distances between her and Doris Day's Calamity of the 1950s.

Revealingly, between 1960 and 1990, historians and biographers seemed uninterested in Calamity. A few local historians wrote essays or pamphlet-length studies of Calamity, but no full-length biography of her appeared in these decades. Historian Watson Parker produced two important studies of Deadwood and the Black Hills boomtowns, although he did not care much for Calamity. Calling her "the notorious harlot" and that "notorious bawd" and describing her as "built like a busted bale of hay," Parker even suggested "that if indeed she cured any smallpox victims, she probably gave them the great pox in return."⁶⁹ Biographers of Wild Bill Hickok were kinder. Englishman Joseph Rosa, who turned out the most important life story of Hickok, *They Called Him Wild Bill* (1964), denied any Wild Bill-Calamity romance and denounced the Jean Hickok McCormick story as a fraud.⁷⁰

The most important essays on Calamity were by historian-biographer James D. McLaird. Beginning his long, fruitful career as the leading authority on Calamity, McLaird published a path-breaking essay on the developing legends surrounding her. He also filled in information on Calamity's role in the Black Hills Expedition of 1875 and furnished background for William Loring Spencer's novel about Calamity Jane.⁷¹

By the end of the 1980s, the mushrooming images of a New



As the country experienced a sociocultural change during the 1960s, a new image of Calamity began to emerge. This New Gray Calamity was promiscuous, foul-mouthed, typically drunk, and sometimes violent. This emphasis on sexuality and violence became steady fare in adult Western novels.

Gray Calamity in some ways gained more headway than the declared truth tellers in the race to reveal Calamity's story. But many segments of Calamity's life remained to be uncovered. Much of this missing information would be discovered and pieced together in the next quarter century.

A variety of Calamity Janes marched across the stages of U.S. and global cultures following 1990. Some image makers advanced new feminist interpretations, others preferred the New Gray Calamity, still others followed the Jean Hickok McCormick outdated story, and more than a few wanted Calamity as a bona fide wild woman of the Old West. Most important of all, James McLaird provided a full, historically sound life story of a complex woman of the pioneer frontier.⁷²

In 1995, two major motion pictures furnished even more pronounced feminist interpretations of Calamity. The *Buffalo Girls* film, based on McMurtry's novel of the same name, followed the discredited Jean Hickok McCormick story. Despite its source, *Buffalo Girls* furnishes intriguing depictions of gender relations, sexuality, maternal desire, and a disappearing Old West. Calamity is a very intimate girl friend with Madame Dora Du Fran, who is equally intimate with cowboy/rancher Teddy Blue. Calamity, played by Anjelica Huston, emotionally wants to stay connected with her daughter Janey, now in Europe. This mother-daughter relationship played well with American audiences. But viewers seemed less interested in an equally important theme: Calamity as a symbol of a vanishing Old West. When Buffalo Bill Cody invites her to be a part of his Wild West arena show, which will make her "famous," she retorts, "I *am* famous."⁷³

Similar gender themes appear in *Wild Bill*, with Jeff Bridges as Hickok and Ellen Barkin as Calamity. The movie accepts much of the Jean Hickok McCormick plot yet promotes a strongly feminist rendition of Calamity. Barkin's Calamity has much to say about men-women relationships, about sexuality, and about the significance of these relationships. She wants Wild Bill to love her, but she is willing to have much less than that. By and large, Calamity is depicted as a female nurturer in a heathenish guy world. Serving as something of a saloon housewife, she cleans up and serves up necessities. Although based in part on Pete Dexter's novel *Deadwood*, this cinematic Calamity is not the dirty and foul heroine

of Dexter's fiction who seems to have bundled with a skunk. In all, Barkin epitomizes a New Gray Calamity reflecting on love, sex, class, and gender.⁷⁴

The HBO made-for-TV *Deadwood* (2004–2006) probably attracted more viewers than any other venue portraying Calamity in the years following 1960. Lasting three seasons with thirty-six episodes, the series proved unusually fascinating for television audiences. *Deadwood* illustrated how much a New Gray Calamity Jane had come on scene, and it showcased the talents of gifted writer and producer David Milch, bringing to life a new kind of Western for movie and television viewers.⁷⁵ Even though Milch and several of his actors claimed the series episodes were "historically accurate," they rarely were. Milch skewed the lives of lead characters to fit his dramatic purposes, imagined many characters and events that never happened, and greatly overplayed the theme of violence. For example, he depicts the Gem Theater/Saloon as a den of death, with about a dozen murders occurring at the site alone over the series' three years. In one interview, Milch also asserts, rather arrogantly, "that's not the way they talked in the West" (in criticizing the critics of his characters' profane language), when almost no western scholar would make that claim because evidence is lacking on how frontier men and women spoke.⁷⁶

Robin Weigert performs superbly as Calamity but within a narrow focus. Described ambivalently as a profane drunkard but also as a nurse of the sick and a lover of children, Weigert's Calamity appears in major or minor roles in about three-fourths of the thirty-six episodes. But Calamity is so often inebriated and isolated from the community that she cannot function as a dancer and entertainer. Producer Milch occasionally exhibits outright silliness. Contemporary sources did not refer to Calamity as "Hickok's woman," as do several scenes in *Deadwood*. Milch rushes further into a morass of unbelievableness when he ventures: "I don't think he ever banged her . . . [but] she told everyone he did."⁷⁷ No writer at the time, or since, has Calamity saying she and Hickok were bedmates. The inadequate depiction of Calamity in *Deadwood* is all the more disappointing because the program had such an amazing following.

In 1995, Montana museum owner Stella Foote published her biography, *A History of Calamity Jane*, which proved to be the last hurrah for full-length

books adhering to the Jean Hickok McCormick line.⁷⁸ Foote and her husband, Don, had known Hickok McCormick, hired her at their museum, and supported her in her declining years before her death in February 1951. The Footes bought the so-called Calamity diary and letters and published portions of them in small pamphlets. In her biography, Foote's reach far exceeded her grasp when she tried to force contradictory information into the Hickok McCormick mold. Overall, the large limitations of Foote's vanity-published biography further undermined the already weakened McCormick story.

Finally, in the 1990s and beyond, the solid, exhaustively researched essays and books of James D. McLaird provided the dependable historical accounts that Calamity Jane aficionados had lacked for nearly a century. The most important of McLaird's several essays was "Calamity's Jane's Diary and Letters: Story of a Fraud."⁷⁹ Published in *Montana The Magazine of Western History* in 1995, the invaluable essay, point by point, dismantled the Jean Hickok McCormick story, showing where the documents were wrong, falsified, and hedged about with misleading assertions. McLaird proved that no one should place any reliance on the diary and letters for further research on Calamity. He also speculated that Hickok McCormick had trotted out the fraudulent documents because she hungered and thirsted after notoriety. Replacing her own nondescript background with a life linked to two western legends would give her the desired headlines. Hickok McCormick did get newspaper and radio attention, but the notice quickly melted away. Even if the documents were undoubtedly forgeries, Hickok McCormick gained, in some measure, what she may have wanted to achieve in claiming to be the daughter of Calamity and Wild Bill.

Thorough, measured, and thoughtful, McLaird's biography *Calamity Jane: The Woman and the Legend* (2005) is, by far, the most important publication on Calamity.⁸⁰ The author's exhaustive research jumps out from every page, including his near-definitive coverage of frontier newspapers, manuscript collections, and published books and essays. McLaird chops out the cluttered underbrush of misconceptions: Hickok McCormick's fable, the exaggerations of Calamity herself, and the misleading conclusions of the Calamity–Wild Bill relationship. If subsequent readers examined closely McLaird's

text and notes, they could avoid the noxious weeds of unsubstantiated rumors, falsehood, and downright lies that clutter the Calamity landscape.

The major contributions of McLaird's turning-point biography are two. For the first time, we have a full-scale, veracious account of Martha Canary/Calamity Jane's life. We are also given a valuable overview of the legends that grew up around her during her lifetime and in the following decades. Three years later, McLaird dealt with the most widely trafficked legend surrounding Calamity in *Wild Bill and Calamity Jane: Deadwood Legends* (2008).⁸¹ Showing how exaggerated tales in sensational magazine and newspaper accounts and in dime novels helped spawn the legends flooding over Hickok and Calamity, he moves on to show the wrongheadedness of those views that turned them into a much-touted couple. McLaird presents a complex Calamity, noting the jostling images of her as a young woman dressed as a dancer, waitress, and entertainer in Deadwood saloons and the conflicting depictions of her as a buckskin-clad rider and teamster among workers and soldiers, usually dressed as man. Equally rewarding is McLaird's tracing of the evolving notoriety of Calamity from a young waif, to a local celebrity, to a nationally recognized dime novel heroine, and on to a notorious wanderer and distressed, aging woman. Unfortunately, in the decade since the publication of McLaird's biography in 2005, other authors have not moved notably beyond his contributions. Nor have they made good use of his prodigious research in their own essays and books.

By the end of the twentieth century, readers, viewers, and a variety of other participants in popular culture had a veritable smorgasbord of Calamity Jane representations spread before them. These representations commonly reflected the increasing interest of most Americans in feminist themes. TV shows, dramas, and one-person impersonators presented some of these womanly images of Calamity. Several communities were also celebrating Calamity. Princeton, Missouri, finally stopped overlooking that Martha Canary/Calamity Jane was born there and began and continued its Calamity Days. Livingston, Montana, commenced sponsoring a Calamity Jane Rodeo. And, probably most widely known, Deadwood launched its Days of '76 in the 1920s, a celebration that continues to draw large groups of spectators

and tourists into the twenty-first century.⁸²

In two other areas—clothing stores and restaurants—entrepreneurs also played on diversifying Calamity Jane themes. One clothing line carries a shout-out line: “I figure if a girl hankers to be a legend, she ought to go ahead and be one.” Calamity Jane clothing stores, opening across the country, also appeared in Calgary, Canada, where offerings included canvas trench coats, dresses, boots, lingerie, and wedding dresses, all sold under the slogan “Be What You Want to Be.”

Calamity Jane restaurants also spread from the West to the East Coast. A Calamity Jane restaurant in Seattle urged customers to “celebrate the spirit of our namesake.” The café promised to serve up “great grub,” with no dishes proving to be calamities. Another Calamity Jane restaurant in northern New Mexico provided a spicy menu of green chile stew, burritos, and enchiladas. The most unusual of these food servers was the Calamity Jane Saloon in the Basque area of southern France. This establishment, its publicity indicated, would “cultivate the meaning of the heroes of the American West.”⁸³

Racehorses, show dogs, household pets, artworks, and footwear also carried the Calamity Jane nomenclature. Athletes adopted her name too, with famed golfer Bobby Jones naming his putter Calamity Jane. The web page for Indiana University’s Ultimate Frisbee team is exceptionally direct, catching the varied implications of Calamity’s divergent identities: “Give ’em Hell, Give ’em Fear!”

By the early twenty-first century, Calamity Jane’s name had taken on a hodgepodge of meanings, well beyond merely the identification of a nineteenth-century woman of the frontier West. Journalists, biographers, historians, and some filmmakers and



Courtesy Paul Andrew Hutton

Fables about Calamity continue to proliferate, most recently in HBO’s made-for-television series *Deadwood* (2004–2006). Robin Weigert (above) played Calamity as a profane drunkard who nevertheless nurses the sick and loves children. However, Weigert’s Calamity was often so inebriated and isolated from the community that she could not function as a dancer and entertainer. A hodgepodge of meanings continues to surround Calamity as twenty-first-century purveyors of popular culture discover—much as Calamity herself did—that the Calamity of legend grabs the public’s attention.

novelists may have made her the most written about woman of the American West; they focused primarily on the well-known and notorious western female. But other entrepreneurs, cultists, and purveyors of popular culture found a catchy brand that captured buyers, attendees, and hangers-on. Much as dime novelist Edward L. Wheeler did in the nineteenth century, others of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries discovered, or rediscovered, that the name of Calamity Jane snaps up attention. Like the names of leading sports figures, political leaders, others of the past, and the newest sensation on the morning television or evening news shows, Calamity’s name grabs buyers, curiosity seekers, and tourists. She has become a powerful magnet of popular culture. That is not likely to change soon.

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Calamity Jane

1. This essay draws extensively from Richard W. Etulain, *The Life and Legends of Calamity Jane* (Norman, OK, 2014). The two best sources on Calamity Jane, to which I am much indebted here, are James D. McLaird, *Calamity Jane: The Woman and the Legend* (Norman, OK, 2005), and James D. McLaird, *Wild Bill Hickok and Calamity Jane: Deadwood Legends* (Pierre, SD, 2008).

2. *NYT*, Aug. 2, 1903; [Martha Canary], *Life and Adventures of Calamity Jane, By Herself* (n.p., 1896); Lewis R. Freeman, "Calamity Jane and Yankee Jim, Historic Characters of the Old Yellowstone," *Sunset* 49 (July 1922): 22–25, 52, 54; *Yankton (SD) Daily Press and Dakotatian*, Aug. 8, 1877, quoting the *Deadwood (SD) Daily Champion*.

3. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Mercer County, Missouri, 1860.

4. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1820, 1830, 1840, 1850, Malaga Township, Monroe County, OH.

5. William Whiteside, "Chronology: Canary Families in Iowa," Aug. 1998, typescript in author's collection. Whiteside, an indefatigable researcher, has prepared several such research chronologies. Robert's family in Mercer County included his father, James, perhaps his mother, Sarah, his brother, James Thornton Canary, and two of his sisters, Lana (and husband James Kilgore) and Mary (and husband Robert Southers).

6. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Mercer County, Missouri, 1860.

7. Duncan Aikman, *Calamity Jane and the Lady Wildcats* (New York, 1927); Doris Thompson, "Princeton Claims Fame as Calamity Jane Birthplace," *Princeton (MO) Post-Telegraph*, July 25, 1957.

8. Land Records, Mercer County Courthouse, and Probate Records, 1862–1865, Circuit Court of Mercer County, Princeton, MO.

9. *Life and Adventures of Calamity Jane, By Herself*, 1.

10. *Virginia City Montana Post*, Dec. 31, 1864.

11. *Ibid.*

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13. Jean Mathisen, "Calamity's Sister," *True West* 43 (Dec. 1996): 23–30; [Tom Bell], "Pioneer Profiles: John and Lena Borner," *Wind River (WY) Mountaineer* 5 (Oct.–Dec. 1989): 2, 32–34.

14. L. G. (Pat) Flannery, *John Hunton's Diary 1876–77*, vol. 2 (Lingle, WY, 1958).

15. Julia B. McGillicuddy, *McGilly-*

cuddy Agent: A Biography of Dr. Valentine T. McGillicuddy (Stanford, CA, 1941), 25–27; Candy Moulton, *Valentine T. McGillicuddy: Army Surgeon, Agent to the Sioux* (Norman, OK, 2011); Lesta V. Turchen and James D. McLaird, *The Black Hills Expedition of 1875* (Mitchell, SD, 1975).

16. *Yankton (SD) Daily Press and Dakotatian*, July 6, 1875; Harry (Sam) Young, *Hard Knocks: A Life Story of the Vanishing West* (Portland, OR, 1915).

17. Jesse Brown and A. M. Willard, *The Black Hills Trails . . .*, ed. John T. Milek (Rapid City, SD, 1924), 76.

18. *Territory of Wyoming vs. Maggie Smith . . . No. 269*, May 24, 1876, Wyoming State Archives, Cheyenne; *Verdict No. 269; Cheyenne (WY) Daily Leader*, June 9, 1876.

19. Charles M. Robinson III, *General Crook and the Western Frontier* (Norman, OK, 2001).

20. "Jane's Jamboree," *Cheyenne (WY) Daily Leader*, June 20, 1876.

21. Joseph G. Rosa, *They Called Him Wild Bill: The Life and Adventures of James Butler Hickok*, 2nd ed. (Norman, OK, 1974), 238–39.

22. I am much indebted to the only full eyewitness account of Hickok's trip to Deadwood in early summer 1876, his meeting with Calamity, and their simultaneous weeks in Deadwood: William B. Secrest, ed., *I Buried Hickok: The Memoirs of White Eye Anderson* (College Station, TX, 1980).

23. John S. McClintock, an early resident of Deadwood and a trustworthy source, says Calamity and Wild Bill were companions in Deadwood, but most other contemporary sources disagree. McClintock, *Pioneer Days in the Black Hills . . .*, ed. Edward L. Senn (Deadwood, SD, 1939). James McLaird deals extensively with the Wild Bill–Calamity rumors in his excellent brief volume, *Wild Bill and Calamity Jane: Deadwood Legends*.

24. Secrest, *I Buried Hickok*, 102; Raymond W. Thorp, "White-Eye, Last of the Old-Time Plainsmen," *True West* 12 (Mar.–Apr. 1965): 46.

25. McClintock, *Pioneer Days*, 69.

26. Secrest, *I Buried Hickok*, 117.

27. Brown and Willard, *The Black Hills Trails*, 414–15.

28. Will Frackelton, *Sagebrush Dentist*, ed. Herman Gastrell Seely (Chicago, 1941), 127; Secrest, *I Buried Hickok*, 103.

29. <http://www.mtpioneer.com/2011-june-pioneer-editor.html>.

30. Richard W. Etulain, *Telling Western Stories: From Buffalo Bill to Larry McMurtry* (Albuquerque, 1999); Daryl Jones, *The Dime Novel Western* (Bowling Green, OH, 1978).

31. *Deadwood Black Hills Times*, Dec. 17, 1877; McLaird, *Calamity Jane*, 102.

32. [M. L. Fox], "Calamity Jane," *Illustrated American*, Mar. 7, 1896, 312; McLaird, *Calamity Jane*, 119–20; *Deadwood (SD) Black Hills Daily Times*, Feb. 10, 1881.

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34. Wendell Brainard, *North Idaho Sunday*, July 17, 1986; Jerry Dolph and Arthur Randall, *Wyatt Earp and Coeur d'Alene Gold! Stampede to Idaho*, 2nd ed. (Post Falls, ID, 2000), 113–14.

35. *Billings Post*, June 26, 1884; *Livingston Daily Enterprise*, Aug. 16, 1884.

36. *Rawlins (WY) Carbon County Journal*, Sept. 18, Oct. 30, 1886; *Sundance (WY) Gazette*, Sept. 2, 1887.

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38. *Life and Adventures of Calamity Jane*, 6; Death Records, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Houston Health and Human Services, City of Houston Texas.

39. *Ismay Journal*, June 28, 1934.

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43. *Anaconda Standard*, Feb. 23, 1901, Apr. 12, 1953; *Denver Rocky Mountain Herald*, Apr. 13, 1901.

44. *Denver Times*, July 12, 1901; *Buffalo (NY) Evening Times*, July 31, 1901; *Buffalo (NY) News*, July 12, 1901; <http://panam1901.bfn.org/documents/panamwomen/calamityjane.htm>.

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46. D. Dee [Dora Du Fran], *Low Down on Calamity Jane* (Rapid City, SD, 1932), 33, 10.

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48. *Deadwood (SD) Weekly Pioneer Times*, Aug. 6, 1903.

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braska's Contribution to Early American Cinema," *Journal of the West* 33 (Apr. 1994): 13-19.

51. *Wild Bill Hickok*, Paramount Pictures, 1923. The script Hart wrote for this film is in the William S. Hart Collection, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, Los Angeles, CA; Diane Kaiser Koszarski, *The Complete Films of William S. Hart: A Pictorial Record* (New York, 1980), 143.

52. Aikman, *Calamity Jane and the Lady Wildcats*; Duncan Aikman to Grace Raymond Hebard, Aug. 17, Sept. 7, 1927, and Grace Raymond Hebard to Charles W. Bocker, Aug. 23, 1927, Hebard Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie.

53. *Deadwood (SD) Black Hills Weekly*, July 28, 1933; Jessie E. Oakes (Murray) to Earland Nelson, Dec. 5, 1933, Clarence S. Paine Collection, The Center for Western Studies, Augustana College, Sioux Falls, SD; Jessie (Oakes) Murray to Marie Lawler, Oct. 21, 1957, Meade County Records, South Dakota State Historical Society, Pierre. Jessie Elizabeth's life can be briefly told. After her birth in Oct. 1887, she traveled off and on with her mother, Calamity Jane, until probably the late 1890s. She then disappeared save for a brief stay with her mother in early 1903. If scattered, unconfirmed reports are correct, Calamity may have become a grandmother shortly before her death, meaning that Jessie had become a mother. Jessie reappeared in Montana records as marrying twice, in 1904 and 1908. She was off scene until the 1930s through the 1950s, when, sporadically, she wrote to libraries and archives trying to gather information on Calamity, whom she called her grandmother or aunt. How she decided Calamity was her grandmother or aunt rather than her mother is not clear. Most of her later years were spent in varied California locations. That state's records reveal she died in spring 1980, age ninety-two. She may have been institutionalized in her final years. For the best discussion of Jessie Elizabeth Oakes Murray, see McLaird, *Calamity Jane*, 248-50.

54. "Billings Woman Announces That She Is Daughter of Famed Calamity Jane," *Billings Gazette*, June 14, 1941. For a brief biography of Hickok McCormick, see Stella Foote, *A History of Calamity Jane: America's First Liberated Woman* (New York, 1995), 214-17. Jean Hickok McCormick's life is not easy to trace because the records are scarce, contradictory, and often change. Jean claimed, of course, that she was born on Sept. 25, 1873, in Benson's Landing, near present-day Livingston, Montana. As noted above, she alleged she was the daughter

of Calamity Jane and Wild Bill Hickok, but she frequently rearranged the details of her later life. Jean stated that she returned to the United States as an adult and married Robert Burkhart, a Virginia politician who divorced her in 1916 after eighteen years of marriage when he discovered her controversial heritage. She may have become a mother during this first marriage, but if she had children, their histories have mysteriously disappeared. After working as a volunteer nurse in World War I, she married Ed McCormick, an injured American flyer who died shortly after their marriage. In the early 1920s and the following decade, Jean traveled about in the northern West, working as a cook and part-time nurse at dude ranches. She dashed on scene with her sensational account in 1941. The final decade of her life, up to her death in 1951, was increasingly difficult. She had to rely on the aid of others to subsist.

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56. The most important essays by Paine are listed in McLaird, *Calamity Jane*, 357; Mumej, *Calamity Jane*.

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58. *The Plainsman*, Paramount, 1936. Howard L. Hickok to Cecil B. DeMille, Oct. 8, 1936; Agnes Robinson Reed to Cecil B. DeMille, Nov. 13, 1936; DeMille to A. R. Reed, Nov. 18, 1936, all in Cecil B. DeMille Papers, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University Library, Provo, UT.

59. Richard W. Etulain, "Calamity Jane: The Making of a Frontier Legend," in *Wild Women of the Old West*, ed. Glenda Riley and Richard W. Etulain (Golden, CO, 2003), 177-95, 209-11.

60. *Calamity Jane*, Warner Brothers, 1963.

61. J. Leonard Jennewein, *Calamity Jane of the Western Trails* (Huron, SD, 1953), 7, 22.

62. Roberta Beed Sollid, *Calamity Jane: A Study in Historical Criticism*

(Helena, MT, 1958), xi. Sollid's book was reprinted with a foreword by James D. McLaird and an afterword by Richard W. Etulain (Helena, MT, 1995).

63. Richard W. Etulain, *Re-imagining the Modern American West: A Century of Fiction, History, and Art* (Tucson, 1996).

64. J. T. Edson, *Trouble Trail* (London, 1965); J. T. Edson, *The Cow Thieves* (London, 1965); J. T. Edson, *Calamity, Mark, and Belle* (London, 1980).

65. Jake Logan, *Dead Man's Hand* (New York, 1979); Tabor Evans, *Longarm in Deadwood* (New York, 1982).

66. Pete Dexter, *Deadwood* (New York, 1986); Etulain, "Afterword," in Sollid, *Calamity Jane*.

67. Larry McMurtry, *Buffalo Girls* (New York, 1990).

68. *Buffalo Girls*, CBS-TV, 1984.

69. Watson Parker, *Gold in the Black Hills* (Norman, OK, 1966), 64, 167, 168; Watson Parker, *Deadwood: The Golden Years* (Lincoln, NE, 1981), 153.

70. Rosa, *They Called Him Wild Bill*, 1964, 1974.

71. In addition to the McLaird essay "Calamity Jane's Diary and Letters," see also James D. McLaird, "Calamity Jane: The Life and the Legend," *South Dakota History* 24 (Spring 1994); James D. McLaird, "Calamity Jane and Wild Bill: Myth and Reality," *Journal of the West* 37 (Apr. 1998): 23-32; Turchen and McLaird, *The Black Hills Expedition of 1875*; and McLaird and Turchen, "Introduction," Spencer, *Calamity Jane*, 1887, 1978, iii-xi.

72. McLaird, *Calamity Jane* (2005).

73. *Buffalo Girls*, CBS-TV, 1995.

74. *Wild Bill*, MGM/UA, 1995.

75. *Deadwood*, HBO, 2004-2006.

76. *Deadwood* (2004), season 1, feature.

77. *Ibid.*, commentary.

78. Foote, *A History of Calamity Jane*.

79. McLaird, "Calamity Jane's Diary and Letters."

80. McLaird, *Calamity Jane* (2005).

81. McLaird, *Wild Bill and Calamity Jane* (2008).

82. Kevin Britz, "Deadwood Days of '76: The Wild West Shows as Community Celebration," *South Dakota History* 40 (Spring 2010): 52-84.

83. An Internet search for "Calamity Jane" turns up hundreds of references to a plethora of places, people, events, ideas, businesses, and a riot of other items. The name Calamity Jane is now, virtually, known around the world.