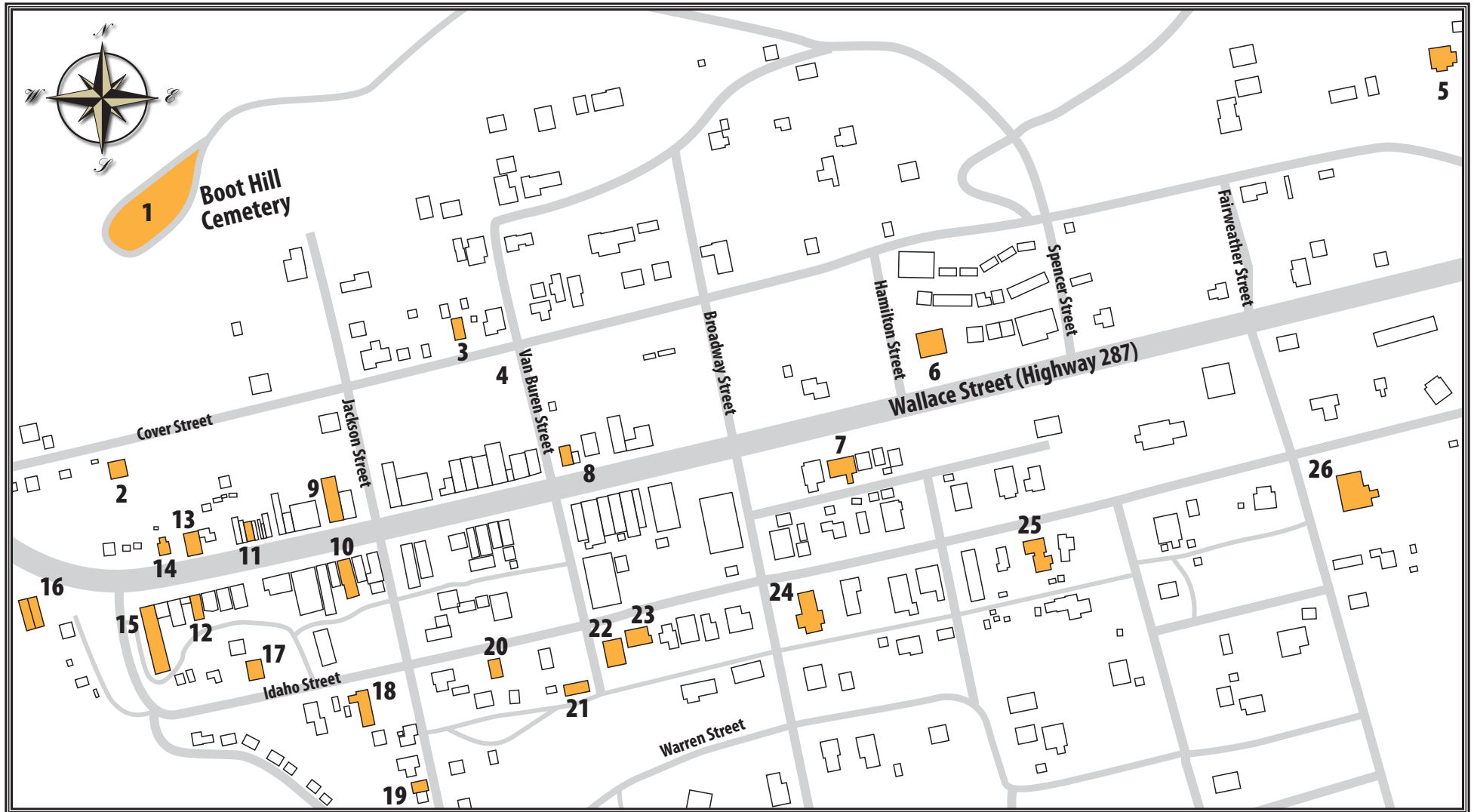


WELCOME TO VIRGINIA CITY, MONTANA

The Women of Virginia City Tour, by Ellen Baumler



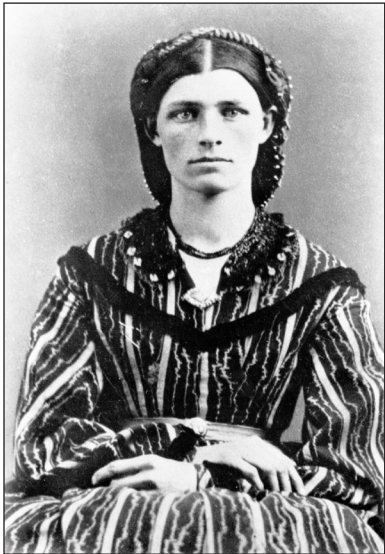
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|---------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1 Boot Hill | 7 McKay-McNulty House | 13 Dance and Stuart Store | 19 Cogswell/Taylor Cabins | 25 Sanders House |
| 2 The Brick | 8 Hangman's Building | 14 Aunt Julia's | 20 Thomas Francis Meagher House | 26 Henry Elling Home |
| 3 Martin Lyon House | 9 Fairweather Inn | 15 Smith and Boyd Livery | 21 Mrs. Slade's House | |
| 4 Elephant Corral | 10 Gypsy Arcade | 16 Green Front Boarding House | 22 Methodist Church Site | |
| 5 Rockfellow House | 11 McGovern Store | 17 First Madison County Jail | 23 Daems House | |
| 6 Gilbert House | 12 Sauerbier Blacksmith Shop | 18 St. Mary's Hospital/Bonanza Inn | 24 Episcopal Church | |

The Women of Virginia City

Alder Gulch boomed with the discovery of gold in 1863. Nicknamed the Fourteen-Mile City, of the nine communities that sprang up along the gulch, Virginia City emerged as the largest. It quickly became Montana Territory's first social, financial, and transportation hub. Throughout its history, much of what has been written about Virginia City has been written by men about men. The literature is heavily laced with the activities of the vigilantes and their controversial work. Much less has been written about the women. Although they were a minority in the male-dominated mining camp, women were integral to the community and a few played key roles. Here are some of the memorable women of Virginia City and the places that help tell their stories.

1. Boot Hill

Clara and Mathilda Dalton



Mathilda Dalton's parents died of typhoid, leaving her to care for three younger siblings. MHS Photo Archives 941-874

Typhoid, spread through contaminated water, was common in mining camps where miners were careless with the water source. The Dalton family learned this firsthand. Clara, her husband, William, and their four children came to Bannack in 1862. Mathilda, at twenty, was the oldest. Granville Stuart (see #13) nicknamed Mathilda "Desdemona" after the character in Shakespeare's *Othello* because "she was beautiful and so good." Edwin Ruthven Purple, in his gold rush narrative *Perilous Passage*, describes "Dez" as tall and magnificently formed and one of the belles of Bannack. One smitten lad supposedly blew out his brains for her. Another spurned lover, however, said that everything she ate went to her feet, which were unusually large. The family moved to Virginia City in 1863 and Mathilda soon fell victim to typhoid. Clara nursed her daughter through the illness, but then both she and

her husband became ill. Mathilda was still recovering in January 1864 when both parents died. Mathilda, left to care for her three much younger siblings, had few options, so she married Zebulon Thibadeau and eventually settled at Wallace, Idaho. Mathilda's parents are buried here on Boot Hill, Virginia City's first cemetery. Their graves are the only marked burials, except for the five

road agents. Because of the stigma attached to the five, most families moved their loved ones' graves to Hillside Cemetery across the ridge, but there was no one to move the Daltons. It was not until the 1920s that Mathilda's children returned to Virginia City to mark their grandparents' graves.

2. The Brick

Jennie Ashley and Maggie Colman

Dredging crews began working out of Virginia City in the 1890s, bringing much needed patronage to local boarding houses and restaurants. These, however, were not the only businesses to benefit from gold dredging. Madam Jennie Ashley filled a lucrative niche after establishing her bordello here along Cover Street. According to the 1900 census, Jennie employed three "sporting ladies" who worked in this small house known locally as "The Brick." Local old-timers recall that the American four-square residence was an upscale parlor house with partitions dividing the living room into tiny offices, or "cribs." Maggie Coleman, formerly of Butte, was a prostitute and mother of three who came to Cover Street to work as an independent contractor. She did well, working her way up the red light hierarchy to a madam with two employees. In 1910, Maggie's rented brothel, which no longer stands, was next door to Jennie's. After 1918, during Prohibition, prostitution—like alcohol—went under cover. By 1920, Jennie had retired, but at sixty-one, she still lived at The Brick. Maggie, however, and all the other women had moved on. Jennie Ashley spent thirty years in Virginia City, but sadly no one seems to remember her at all.

3. Martin Lyon House

Anna Lyon

This small unassuming cottage first belonged to Martin Lyon, an early-day tailor who came to Virginia City with his family in 1864. He and his wife, Anna, immigrated to Chicago—he was from England, and she from Ireland—and they later followed the gold rush west. Joining other settlers bound for the Montana gold fields, the Lyons came to Alder Gulch with their two sons where Martin set up a successful tailor shop. One Saturday night in mid-January 1865, Martin did not come home. Anna was in a frenzy, but a blinding three-day blizzard made searching impossible. When the snow finally ceased, searchers found Martin not far down the street where his attackers had left him, his skull crushed and his pockets empty. Anna's grief intensified because, according to family legend, Martin was interred in "Boot Hill," the town's first cemetery, where five suspected road agents had been buried the previous year. There was disagreement over the location of

Martin Lyon's grave because of heavy snowfall and because one of the five outlaws, Haze Lyons, had a similar last name. Anna Lyon could not even mark her husband's final resting place. Her sons married and left Montana. Anna took in boarders and did domestic work to eke out a living, remaining in the house her husband had built until her death in 1896.

Amanda McKeen

In 1905 newlyweds Amanda and Frank McKeen moved into the house. Frank was proprietor of the Anaconda Hotel and Saloon (the present Fairweather Inn; see #9). Frank was a colorful character, but so was his wife. Amanda was tall and stunning, and her past was a little shady. The marriage shocked the community because neither seemed to be the marrying kind. Amanda had no children but she was devoted to Frank. Frank died in 1919 and Amanda spiraled into depression. Unlike Anna Lyon, Amanda could not survive alone. The *Madisonian*, March 30, 1923, describes Amanda's end:

Neighbors were shocked Wednesday morning upon discovering that Mrs. Amanda McKeen had committed suicide by shooting. It was evident that she had been in unsound mental condition for some time. On Tuesday she went to Butte, supposedly for the sole purpose of purchasing a revolver. Returning Wednesday morning she went immediately to her home, entered the bathroom, placed the muzzle of the gun in her mouth and forced a shot upward in the brain. Undertaker Olson of Sheridan had charge of the funeral, which was conducted this afternoon, interment being in the Hillside Cemetery by the side of her late husband, Frank McKeen.

The substantial granite marker noting the grave of Frank McKeen can be easily found along the road that runs through Hillside Cemetery. Although there is a place for her name next to his and a slight depression in the earth denoting her burial place, Amanda's name was never added to the headstone. Her grave, like Martin Lyon's across the way at Boot Hill, is unmarked.

4. The Elephant Corral

Virginia Slade

Virginia Slade was the wife of Jack Slade, the last man the vigilantes hanged in Virginia City. The women of Virginia City were in awe of her. She was a tall, full-figured, striking woman who carried a revolver under the beautiful gowns she made herself. She was a crack shot, could cuss like a miner, and was a loyal and devoted wife to her badly behaved husband. On her Kentucky-bred stallion, once owned by American Fur Company trader Malcolm Clarke, she shockingly rode astride like a man. The couple lived on a ranch seven miles

north of town. Jack Slade was a danger to the public when drunk, shooting wildly in the streets, scaring children, and damaging property. In March 1864 his wild antics finally led the vigilance committee to hold a swift meeting and a brief trial. Jack was sentenced to hang for little more than disturbing the peace. They led him to the corral gate behind Rank's drug store here on Cover Street and strung him up. The men feared Virginia's arrival and her powers of persuasion, so they acted swiftly. The executioner kicked the dry goods box from beneath Jack Slade's feet, and as he swung, someone shouted, "Mrs. Slade is coming!" All heads turned toward the road up the hill. Pounding hoofbeats and a cloud of dust mixed with snow announced Virginia Slade on her stallion. But she was too late. Legend says she had Jack sealed in a zinc-lined coffin filled with the whiskey that had been his undoing. She took his body back to the ranch, and when the snows melted, she took him to Salt Lake City for proper burial. (See #21)

5. Rockfellow House

Mollie McNiel Rockfellow

On January 28, 1867, the wedding of Mollie McNiel and prosperous Virginia City grocer John S. Rockfellow was a spectacular affair. The ceremony was conducted at the home of the judge. James Knox Polk Miller records the event in his diary, "The bride, Miss Mollie McNiel, was very beautiful, the very picture of self-possessed purity. The room was very small, the bride very little, and the ceremony very short." A stream of carriages then transported the bride and groom and 150 guests up the hill for a lavish wedding dinner in the elegant home over which Mollie was to preside. The house John Rockfellow built for Mollie had an indoor bathroom and the first spring-fed running water in the territory. Frescoed walls and ceilings adorned the seven-room home. The *Montana Post* noted that it was so lavish that it looked like the country estate of a retired banker. Mollie enjoyed her home on the hill for only a short time. John died on April 11, 1868, less than fifteen months after their marriage. Mollie returned to the East, but the *Montana Post* reported six months after her husband's death that Mollie remembered the people of Virginia City with affection and considered the mountains of Montana her home. Sue Bovey (see #9) and her husband Charles later acquired the home, which became Sue's Virginia City residence. She spent much time and energy on its restoration.

6. Gilbert House

Margaret McMinn Gilbert

Born in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1845, Margaret McMinn married Henry Gilbert at Fort Bridger in Utah Territory. The couple settled here in 1863 where Henry established Montana's first brewery. Margaret had fifteen children including eleven daughters. Among them were Ameilia and Clara, Virginia City's first set of twins, born in 1867. Henry was killed in a wagon accident in 1903 and Margaret outlived him by three decades. She remained at home in Virginia City close to her many children.

Frances Gilbert Albright

Margaret Gilbert's eldest daughter, Frances, who was born in Utah Territory in 1862, wrote a lively reminiscence about her childhood in Virginia City. Published in H. G. Merriam's *Way Out West*, Frances's essay details the life of a child in the mining camp and serves as a wonderful complement to Mary Ronan's reminiscence of the same period. These two sources give us a true picture of what girlhood in the camp was like. Frances recalled taking rides on a huge Newfoundland dog, sleigh rides under piles of robes, and a tumble into Daylight Creek. Before her marriage to Virginia City clothing merchant Jacob Albright at twenty-seven in 1889, Frances worked as a postal clerk in the Virginia City post office.

7. Lewis/McKay House

Flora McKay McNulty and Mary McKay

Born in Colorado in 1861, Flora McKay McNulty came with her parents to Montana in 1863. She was an exceptionally intelligent, generous, and highly educated Virginia City pioneer. She and her sister Mary went to school in Virginia City and then graduated from Iowa College at Grinnell, Iowa, at a time when women did not often seek higher education. In 1884, she married Dr. Charles McNulty in Chicago. Flora then went on to earn a medical degree from Women's Medical College in Chicago in 1887. The couple returned to Virginia City where Charles practiced dentistry. Flora, however, practiced little medicine. Her marriage was abusive and the couple divorced in 1890. Flora went back to school, earning a master's degree in art with a minor in music. Both Flora and Mary were active in the local social and political scenes and in the campaign for Prohibition. Flora personally financed the college careers of several local youths. Both sisters were good businesswomen and managed their parents' affairs. Flora eventually moved to Sheridan, where she died in 1945. Mary died a few months later.

8. Hangman's Building

Sarah Bickford



Sarah Bickford survived tragedies to become a prominent businesswoman and longtime owner of the Virginia City Water Company. Courtesy Madison County Library, Virginia City, Montana

Sarah Gammon Bickford rose from slave to businesswoman. The owner of Virginia City's water company, she was the first and only woman in Montana to own a utility, and probably the nation's only female African American to own such a business. Born into slavery before the Civil War, she was separated at a young age from her parents when they were sold and she never saw them again. After the Civil War, Sarah exchanged her services as a nanny for passage west to Virginia City. In 1872, she married miner John Brown. The couple had three children. The two little boys died of diphtheria. In 1880, she sued Brown for divorce on the grounds of abuse and abandonment, a courageous move for a woman in the nineteenth century. Sarah made her private trauma public, risking the stigma divorce brought, to protect her remaining child, seven-year-old Eva. The judge granted the divorce and awarded Sarah sole custody of Eva. Sarah went to

work in the French-Canadian household of Adeline Laurin and soon opened a bakery, restaurant, and lodging house on Wallace Street, perhaps with Laurin's financial assistance. Her advertisements for "meals and lunches at all hours" appear frequently in the *Madisonian* in 1880 and 1881 and testify to the value of traditional women's work in the mining camp. In 1882, nine-year-old Eva died of pneumonia. Sarah started over, marrying Stephen Bickford in 1883. A white miner and farmer, Bickford was also partner in the local water company. The couple had three girls and a boy. When Stephen died in 1900, Sarah inherited his shares. She took business management courses by correspondence and purchased the remaining third of the water company in 1902. She also bought the Hangman's Building for use as an office. She managed the business, personally collected bills, visited every customer, and learned their needs and those of the community. While she earned respect, she kept after her customers to pay their bills on time, and it wasn't always easy to dog her neighbors. Sarah Bickford stepped out of her accepted domestic role to become a top-notch businesswoman. When she

died in 1931, a portrait of Eva was at her bedside. The *Madisonian* noted the sadness of the community and declared that Virginia City had lost one of its most devoted mothers and loyal pioneer citizens. Montana honored Sarah Bickford in 2012 by inducting her into the Gallery of Outstanding Montanans in the Capitol Rotunda.

9. Fairweather Inn

Sue Ford Bovey



Sue Ford Bovey loved Virginia City passionately and helped her husband in its preservation.
MHS Photo Archives PAc 2007-31 M1

Sue Ford Bovey was the granddaughter of Thomas “Captain” Couch, a mining magnate who ranched along the Sun River, and Robert S. Ford, one of northern Montana’s first cattle ranchers and founder of the Great Falls National Bank. Sue married Charles Bovey, an heir to the General Mills fortune. Bovey was a Montana legislator when the couple visited Virginia City in the 1940s. Both became passionate about the town’s future. Along with her husband, Sue was involved in collecting hundreds of thousands of artifacts and antiques to furnish the historic buildings at Virginia and Nevada cities. The Fairweather Inn was one of Sue’s favorite projects and she furnished and decorated its rooms. She liked to pose in period dress in the furnished parlor and her favorite room was #10.

10. Gypsy Arcade

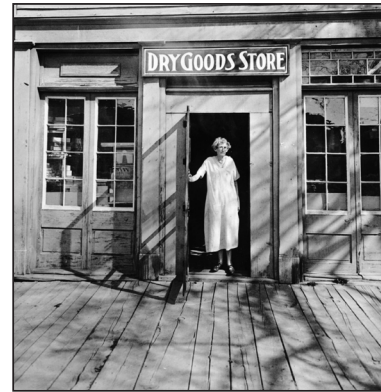
Gypsy Fortune Teller

Reigning over the Arcade, the famous Gypsy Fortune Teller is Virginia City’s most unusual and rarest treasure. Magician David Copperfield offered the State of Montana some \$2 million to add her to his private collection. For decades the Gypsy, acquired as part of Charles and Sue Bovey’s (see #9) massive collections, gathered dust next door at Bob’s Place, a local restaurant. The state inherited her along with the Bovey properties purchased in 1998 and had her restored, although she no longer “performs” for the public. She was one of ten made by the Mills Novelty Company around 1906. According to Copperfield, she is the only one of the ten that has survived. Other mechanized fortuneteller machines dispensed cards, but the Gypsy’s fortunes are recorded

on a hidden record player at the back. For a nickel, the Gypsy would flash her creepy eyes, click her teeth, and tell fortunes through a speaking tube.

11. McGovern Store

Anne, Ellen, Kate, and Mary Sheehan



The McGovern Store, with its antiquated inventory, was a gathering place for women in the community. Mary McGovern stands in the doorway circa 1930. MHS Photo Archives 956-139

Women hold a primary place in the history of this dry goods store, one of Virginia City’s earliest buildings. The first layer begins with the Sheehan family, who arrived at Virginia City in June 1863 as the rush to Alder Gulch was only several weeks old. Freighter James Sheehan secured this cabin for his wife Anne, daughters Mary and baby Kate, and his niece Ellen. The log cabin, incorporated into the present building, was unusually large and housing was at a premium, so Anne and Ellen took in boarders, including several of the men later hanged by the vigilantes. Mary Sheehan Ronan wrote extensively about her experiences in Virginia City in her well-loved memoir, *Girl from the Gulches*. Mary recalls her adventures as a ten-year-old with her friend Carrie Crane. The girls roamed the countryside, gathered wildflowers and goosefoot to sell to the local boarding houses, and cleaned miners’ sluice boxes. Mary met her future husband, Peter Ronan, over a ruined bonnet at the end of a sluice box.

Helena Goldberg

Because of the potential of boarding unsavory characters, James Sheehan soon moved his family off Wallace Street and sold the cabin. By 1865, G. Goldberg managed a clothing store in the building. Goldberg’s wife, Helena, was an excellent cook and a prominent member of Virginia City’s early and prosperous Jewish community. Mary Ronan writes in *Girl from the Gulches* about the delectable meal Helena cooked for Passover. The Goldbergs, like the Sheehans and many other Virginia City residents, followed the gold rush to Helena in 1865. Local legend has it that the town of Helena was named for Helena Goldberg because she cooked for the miners and made especially fabulous pies. However, Last Chance had already been christened Helena (after Helena, Minnesota) some months before the Goldbergs arrived there from Virginia City.

Hannah and Mary McGovern

From 1908, the McGovern sisters were the proprietors of the dry goods store whose inventory remains in the building today. The sisters never married, and they lived at the back of the store for decades. The store was not only a place where women could buy dress goods, millinery, notions, and order catalog items, it was also a gathering place for local gossip. A ledger from the 1910s records the sisters' customers. They included women from socially prominent families as well as Jennie Ashley and the ladies of The Brick (see #2). The antiquated inventory suggests that business was never very lucrative. Hannah died on September 4, 1945, and on that day Mary closed the store. Charles Bovey eventually acquired the building, leaving it as it was on the last day of business.

12. Sauerbier Blacksmith Shop

Hurdy Gurdy Girls

In the wild and early days of the mining camp, Virginia City had many drinking and dancing establishments. This blacksmith shop and the one next door began as dance hall saloons. Women who worked in these places of entertainment were not always disreputable. Many miners' wives supplemented the family income by working in the dance halls. A dollar bought a drink and a dance. The term "hurdy gurdy" dates to the California gold rush. A stringed instrument of that name produced music by turning a crank. Hurdy gurdies were obsolete by the 1860s, but the term stuck. Most Montana mining camp dance halls had stringed orchestras, fiddle players, or pianos. Prostitutes were "gold camp groupies" who followed the gold strikes to mine the miners. These fancy women mingled with the general population in the early years when the mining camps were mostly male. A few years later, when the camps evolved into towns and became more civilized, "public women" and their activities became more segregated. Virginia City's several later red-light establishments were at the south end of Wallace Street (see #16) and on Cover Street (see #2).

13. Dance and Stuart

Awbonny Stuart

James and Granville Stuart, along with Walter Dance, opened a mercantile here in the fall of 1863. This building is a 1950s replica of the original store. By October, Granville and his young wife Awbonny were in residence. Awbonny was a Northern Shoshone from Idaho. The couple likely met at Gold Creek in the Deer Lodge Valley where Awbonny's older sister Mary and her husband, Fred Burr, lived next door to the Stuart brothers. Granville and Awbonny



Pioneer James Stuart brought his young wife, Awbonny, to live at the store where she gave birth to Katie, the first of eleven children. MHS Photo Archives Lot 12 B1 F13/01

were married on April 15, 1862. She was sixteen and he was twenty-seven. Granville wrote that Awbonny was a quick learner, kept a clean house, did the laundry, and admirably starched his shirts. She was a good cook who fed her husband, his brother, their partners, and the many visitors who happened by. The first of the Stuart's eleven children, Katie, was born here on October 6, 1863, with Granville and James attending the birth. Mary Sheehan Ronan (see #11) was a frequent visitor and liked to rock little Katie in the hammock cradle Awbonny made of a blanket suspended from ropes. Once, as Awbonny silently went about her housekeeping, Mary asked Granville why he married an Indian. He replied, "If I married a white woman she might be quarreling with me." The Stuarts returned to Gold Creek in 1865. They spent twenty-six years together before Awbonny's death in 1888.

14. Aunt Julia's

Julia Elledge

Lucien Romey was a Swiss immigrant whose extensive truck gardens at the east end of town long supplied the region with fresh produce. The family arrived at Alder Gulch in a prairie schooner pulled by milk cows. Daughter Julia was born in 1867 and at twenty married Cherry Creek rancher Hiram Elledge. Widowed in 1914, she lived in Manhattan, Montana, until 1945. That year, "Aunt Julia" returned to her birthplace and made her home in this neat little cottage until her death at eighty-seven. Beloved by everyone who knew her, Julia Elledge inherited her father's green thumb. She was especially famous for the profusion of beautiful wildflowers that surrounded her home in the spring and summer. The colorful display never failed to attract tourists to her yard.

15. Smith and Boyd Livery

Eileen and Mary Funk

Now the Opera House, from 1900 to the 1940s this building housed a barn and livery stable. Children often hung around these places. Eileen Funk Yeager, a child of the early 1900s, tells a story in the Madison County history *Trails and Trials*

about games she and her sister Mary made up to amuse themselves. One game that they called "Bob and Bill" involved gathering old chewed cigar butts from behind the livery barn. Each girl had a cigar box that she filled with old stogies. They had made a sidewalk of scrap wood in their backyard, and beginning at opposite ends, they sauntered toward each other, dressed in their dad's old hats. They met in the middle and took turns. Eileen would say, "Hello Bill." Mary answered, "Hello, Bob." They had a set dialogue, and after a bit, Eileen would say, "Would you like a cigar?" and open her cigar box. Each would take a stogie, light up, and saunter down the sidewalk puffing away. Then they would switch roles and do it again. One day, Mary forgot and inhaled the cigar smoke. She keeled right over, and Eileen ran into the house announcing dramatically, "Mama, Mary is dead!" Their mother rushed out to find Mary violently ill. She called the doctor who immediately asked Eileen, "What have you been smoking?" Eileen showed him the box of damp, chewed cigar butts. This time her mother keeled over. Eileen didn't understand why her mother fainted, but the spanking made a lasting impression. Eileen quit smoking at the age of six, and neither she nor Mary ever took it up again.

16. Green Front Boarding House

Mattie Lee



Madam at the Green Front Boarding House in the 1890s, Mattie Lee's legacy is her 1903 mug shot. Powell County Museum & Arts Foundation Photo Archives, Deer Lodge, Montana

Mattie Lee (a.k.a. Mattie De Vere and "Dutch Matt") was supposedly the mistress of saloonkeeper Frank McKeen (see #3) and the madam here at the Green Front Boarding House, one of several local brothels. Mattie made the rounds in the 1880s, spending time in business in Fort Benton, Elkhorn, and finally Granite where she met Frank McKeen. In March 1891, Mattie got into an argument with Jack McDonald over a card game at her "house" in Granite. Frank, who then owned a Granite saloon, came to her defense and fatally shot McDonald as the two scuffled. Frank was charged with first degree murder. Mattie hired a defense attorney who eventually won Frank's acquittal. Perhaps in gratitude or perhaps

because the two were lovers, Frank bought the Green Front here in Virginia City and set Mattie up in business. The friendship however, apparently went sour and Mattie made her way to Philipsburg. Her hard-driving

lifestyle eventually robbed her of her charm and beauty. At forty, she was an alcoholic, "dissipated-looking woman" of little means. In December 1903, in a Philipsburg saloon, Mattie threatened Charles Hillman with a revolver, demanding payment of a small sum she claimed he owed her. When Hillman ignored her, Mattie fired, aiming for his feet and hitting his ankle. Hillman showed no response, even to the wound, and Mattie, enraged, aimed the revolver at the man's head and pulled the trigger. The bullet struck Hillman in the eye, killing him instantly. With few friends and no supporters, Mattie sent word to Frank McKeen that she needed his help. Feeling obligated to her, McKeen secured the services of William A. Clark, a Virginia City attorney (no relation to copper king William A. Clark). Clark claimed that Mattie was insane when she killed Hillman. Good counsel could not win over the jury, however, which convicted Mattie of manslaughter. The judge sentenced her to the maximum ten years in the penitentiary. She served her full sentence, was discharged, and disappeared from the public record.

17. First Madison County Jail

Margaret Smith

Margaret Smith was the first woman in Montana Territory convicted and incarcerated for a federal crime. She and her brother David owned a cabin near Nevada City where David worked as a miner and Margaret took in boarders. Neighbors suspected an improper relationship between brother and sister. When the Smiths sold their cabin in 1867, new owners discovered the remains of two stillborn infants buried beneath the floor. Brother and sister both pled guilty to incest. The sensational nature of the crime and the lack of funds for legal counsel plus lack of support from family or friends guaranteed harsh treatment before the bar of justice. Judge Hezekiah Hosmer sentenced the Smiths to the maximum ten years each in the territorial prison and expressed his desire to hand down a penalty much more severe than the law allowed. A reporter for the *Montana Post*, however, expressed sympathy for Margaret, describing her as a victim and her brother as a brute. Since Montana had no territorial prison until 1871, the Smiths were incarcerated in the crude county jail, built on this site in 1864. The jail was later incorporated into the current residence. The expense of housing prisoners was exorbitant, and keeping a woman in a man's facility nearly impossible. While David Smith escaped, the governor pardoned Margaret because it was impractical to keep her in prison.

18. St. Mary's Hospital (Bonanza Inn) and Sisters' Convent

Sister Irene McGrath

Three Sisters of Charity arrived in 1876 from their mother house in Leavenworth, Kansas. They were Sister Louisa Carney, superior; Sister Mary Leo Dempsey, a trained nurse; and eighteen-year-old Sister Irene McGrath, an unprofessed novice who was to train under the older two. The sisters opened St. Mary's Hospital here in the former Madison County courthouse. All Saints' Catholic Church lay to one side on the corner of Jackson and Idaho, and to the other side a few doors down, the Bucket of Blood Saloon served a boisterous clientele. (Neither stands today.) The house behind the hospital served as a convent. The sisters cared for miners suffering from tuberculosis, pneumonia, accidental injuries, gunshot wounds, and stabbings. Cholera and typhoid, spread through primitive water sources, haunted the population. The sisters drew and hauled well water, gathered their own wood, and kept a fire burning in the hospital yard. A huge kettle of water always boiled for the endless laundry. They hung clean bedding over the mountainside to dry, or freeze, depending on the season. They cooked meals and sterilized instruments on a small cookstove. To help cover expenses, patients paid \$10 to \$12 a week for the sisters' care. Pretty young Sister Irene had a winning way with the patients, and it was she who reached out to the community, teaching catechism classes and visiting the poor and homebound sick despite warnings that the camp was unsafe for a young woman alone. The gold played out by 1879 and the sisters moved on to other communities. According to their rules, "the Sisters of Charity were never meant to be ornamental." Sister Irene became superior of St. Joseph's Hospital in Denver, where her strict medical and surgical practices helped create a code of ethics for medical personnel of all Catholic hospitals across the United States. She later returned to Montana and served as superior at both St. James Hospital in Butte and St. Vincent's Hospital in Billings. Once at St. James, a longtime Virginia City resident was a patient and recognized Mother Irene. She confided that she had helped organize a group of Virginia City women who vowed to never allow her to walk the streets of the mining camp alone. Each time pretty Sister Irene had gone out, a volunteer closely followed her. The seasoned mother superior was taken aback and touched by this secret display of concern for her. When she died in 1944 at age eighty-seven, a Billings doctor said, "If Mother Irene and her smile aren't in Heaven when I get there, I'm not going in!" Courageous, charitable, gracious, and always hospitable, Mother Irene began her long service in Virginia City and thus has a special bond with its residents. Generations of guests at the Bonanza Inn claim to have felt her healing presence. It follows that she might return to repay a debt for that long-ago act of community kindness by taking care of those who need her.

19. Coggsell/Taylor Cabins

Parthenia Sweed and Minerva Coggsell

Sarah Bickford (see #8) is sometimes touted as Virginia City's first black businesswoman, but she was not actually the first. Sisters Minerva Coggsell and Parthenia Sweed may make that claim. The two were born into slavery. With emancipation and the gold rushes in Montana, they came west from Missouri. The sisters provided services that were essential to the male-dominated mining camp. Photos of Virginia City from the mid-1880s show loads of laundry hanging at the back of this property. Even before this, the sisters operated a restaurant on lower Wallace Street and advertised meals at all times of the day and night. Their ads appeared frequently in the *Madisonian* in 1879. Parthenia married and moved to Butte, but Minerva continued to take in laundry and may have run a restaurant out of her cabins. Purchase of muslin and wallpaper in April 1894 illustrates how Minerva decorated her home. Using a common frontier technique, Minerva stretched the fabric smooth over the log walls and then wallpapered the muslin to give the appearance of plastered walls. She enjoyed her wallpaper for only a short time. She died of a brief illness four months after completing the project.

20. Thomas Francis Meagher House

Elizabeth Meagher

Thomas Francis Meagher arrived at Virginia City in September 1865 to begin his appointment by President Andrew Johnson as territorial secretary. He promptly became the acting governor when Sidney Edgerton left for the East. The Irish general—a Civil War hero—was highly controversial and had both many supporters and political enemies. Elizabeth Meagher joined her husband in Montana in 1866 and their tiny log cabin in Virginia City quickly became the center of the social scene. During her brief time in Montana, Elizabeth was a celebrated hostess. James Knox Polk Miller, who socialized with her at the Rockfellow/McNeil wedding (see #5), described her this way:

Mrs. Genl. Meagher [is] a very good representative of the grand lady, a superb lady. Very much like an immense work. She is very good to be seen at a proper distance but too large and unwieldy for a life companion.... She is a highly educated, versatile, and very agreeable lady. A "Grin" among acquaintances.

On July 1, 1867, Thomas Francis Meagher became the subject of Montana's most intriguing unsolved mystery when he fell overboard into the Missouri River. His body was never found. Several months later, Elizabeth sold her home and returned east.

21. Mrs. Slade's House

Virginia Slade

Virginia Slade (see #4) returned to Virginia City after burying her husband in Salt Lake City and rented this house. She opened a millinery shop and began to keep company with Jack's friend, Jim Kiskadden. A year to the month after her husband was hung by the vigilantes, Chief Justice Hezekiah Hosmer married Virginia and Jim in a short ceremony in the home. The *Montana Post* of March 25, 1865, reported the wedding and wished the couple a smooth pathway in life's journey. But that was not to be. The Kiskaddens went to Salt Lake City to start a new life, but it was not long before Jim learned that only the devil himself could live with Virginia and her temper. They soon divorced.

Zena Hoff

Many decades later, the colorful and talented Zena Hoff, born in Denmark in 1889, was a longtime resident of the house. She lived to age ninety and did many things in her long lifetime, including working as an upholsterer in Seattle during World War II, but she was perhaps most successful as a stage personality. A former New York City Ziegfeld Girl, Hoff came to Virginia City and worked with Charles and Sue Bovey in their tourism endeavors. Hoff created many of the Boveys' displays.

22. Methodist Church Site

Sarah Raymond Herndon



School trustees hired plucky Sarah Raymond to teach Virginia City's first public school classes. After she married James Herndon, Sarah served as county school superintendent. MHS Photo Archives 942-725

Sarah Raymond crossed the plains with her family and arrived at Alder Gulch in September 1865. She was twenty-two and very independent. On the long journey, Sarah kept a detailed journal which was later published as *Days on the Road*. She and her horse Dick took many side trips into dangerous country and caused the wagon train much concern. Sarah was a seasoned teacher, having taught her first class at age fourteen. She was well prepared when Virginia City needed an experienced teacher for Montana's first public school, organized in 1866. Previous schools in the territory had been private. School trustees administered an exam at Sarah's home,

and she paid six dollars in gold dust for her teaching certificate. Sarah taught eighty-one students crowded into the log cabin that sat on this site. The cabin served a double purpose as schoolhouse during the week and church on Sundays. Sarah soon married James Herndon, and later, she served as Madison County Superintendent of Schools.

23. Daems House

Marie Valtsin Daems

There were few professionally trained nurses in Montana Territory. Marie Valtsin Daems, a native of Belgium, followed a nursing course and was a practicing nurse when she met her future husband, Dr. Levinus Daems. Dr. Daems immigrated with Marie and her family to the United States in 1856. The couple married in 1860 and settled in Colorado. Dr. Daems got gold fever and left Marie and their baby daughter to come to Montana in 1863. She followed with the child in 1864. Dr. Daems' office was on one side and the family residence on the other. Marie kept house for both and took care of their five children. Dr. Daems died in 1874, leaving Marie to raise the children alone. At the time her oldest child was twelve.

24. St. Paul's Episcopal Church

Mary Elling

The beautiful Gothic style church, built in 1902, replaced a frame church dating back to 1868. Mary Cooley Elling (see #26) paid for the construction of the new church with a \$10,000 donation in memory of her husband, Henry Elling, a prominent local banker and businessman. Mary was a person of character and integrity, and according to locals, she may have felt badly for some of her neighbors, whose financial circumstances had been hurt by the actions of her banker husband. Elling sometimes put his banking interests ahead of sentiment. Thus Mary wished to return some of his wealth to the community. The dedication ceremony was held in 1904. The large stained glass windows in the Gothic arches, crafted by Louis Comfort Tiffany, are among the Treasure State's artistic jewels. Mary's funeral was held here in 1925.

25. Sanders Home

Harriett Sanders



As a young wife and mother, Harriett Sanders was concerned about the adverse influence of the rough miners on her two boys. MHS Photo Archives 944-856

The author of a remarkable memoir, *Biscuits and Badmen*, Harriett Sanders was an enthusiastic pioneer whose husband, Wilbur Fisk Sanders, was the organizer of the Virginia City vigilantes, a brilliant orator, and a talented attorney. The family came west to Bannack in 1863 and soon moved to Virginia City. At the time Harriett had two young boys and she was concerned that the miners would adversely influence them, so in 1864 at her insistence this home—one of Virginia City's first high-style dwellings—was built three-quarters of a mile out of town. By 1867 the wild mining camp had softened and the house was moved on log rollers to this location. Harriett was later an enthusiastic suffragist, but during this early period she was a young wife who made a comfortable home on the Montana frontier. She brought yards of expensive Brussels carpet with her, and spread it on the dirt floor, but soon sold it by the yard to merchants who covered their counters with it. When the merchants moved on, they would burn the carpet for the gold dust that fell into the deep pile. Harriett was the envy of many housewives because she owned a rocking chair, a coveted possession. When Jack Slade was hanged (see #4), Harriett loaned his widow a pair of black stockings and attended the funeral because she was curious to learn what the minister would say about Jack in his eulogy. The minister cleverly preached a sermon but said nothing about the deceased.

26. Henry Elling Home

Mary Elling

Teacher Mary B. Cooley, daughter of a Madison County pioneer, married Henry Elling in 1870. The couple had ten children, seven of whom reached adulthood. When Henry Elling died in 1900, Mary stayed on in the house on Idaho Street. Even today, folks remain ambivalent about this town father, but not about Mary. After Henry died, Mary financed construction of the Episcopal Church, built in 1902 (see #24), and dedicated it to her husband. Mary was a generous citizen and always wanted to include everyone when she gave parties; her husband would only allow invitations to Virginia City's elite. So after Henry's death, Mary built an addition onto the back of her house to serve as a ballroom, and when she gave large parties, she opened it to the public. Mary Elling died on Christmas Eve in 1924 and her funeral was held in the church she helped build. Her obituary in the *Madisonian*, January 2, 1925, paid her this tribute:

The flowers were many and beautiful, but not more beautiful than the face that rested so peacefully among them. Beautiful in life, beautiful in death.... Thus would we leave her, and in memory keep her, as sweetly reposing among beautiful and fragrant flowers.