Ursula Largey

Welcome to Butte, America’s Story. I’m your host, Dick Gibson.

Even though Urusula Largey and Julia Coughlin only lived about seven blocks from each other, it’s pretty unlikely that they ever met. The divide between 223 East Granite, where Julia lived as a teacher and grocery manager and 403 West Broadway, the Largey mansion, was deeper than the Mountain Con.

Ursula March was a well-known actress on the New York and traveling stage in the early 1900s. She played the female lead in the musical fantasy “Land of Nod” for two seasons about 1905-07. Butte’s E. Creighton Largey followed the company from town to town, courting Miss March, and they were ultimately wed July 22, 1908 with write-ups on the wedding in New York theater gossip columns.

Creighton was the younger son of Patrick Largey, often called Butte’s fourth copper king. Patrick started in Butte managing the Butte Hardware Company, but by 1890, when Creighton was three years old, Patrick had established the State Savings Bank, was a partner in Butte’s first electric and power generating company, and helped start the Inter Mountain Publishing Company. He would be a millionaire well before his murder in 1898, an event which set Creighton up as heir and co-manager of the estate.

After Ursula and Creighton married and established themselves in the Largey mansion at the corner of Washington and Broadway in Butte, directly across the street from the Charles Clark mansion (Arts Chateau), they became central to Butte’s social whirl. The home was not quite a mirror image to the Clark Chateau, but was comparable in its elegance.

In February 1910 Mrs. E. Creighton Largey threw a party to honor the first wedding anniversary of Mr. & Mrs. Phil Carr. It was a lavish affair, with Ursula and Creighton receiving at least 34 guests in the second floor red drawing room, likely comparable in size to one floor of Julia Coughlin’s home. An “elaborate, delicious” supper was served at midnight; miniature railroad cars honored the Carrs; “immense wedding bells of cotton sparkling with crystal dust” decorated the premises along with white satin streamers and asparagus vines; the edible ices were designed as flowers, doves, and hearts. Place markers at table were commissioned works of art. Guests included Dr. and Mrs. Frederick McCrimmon and Fred McQueeney.

The hostess wore a satin gown of orchid hue, and “her only adornments were diamonds.” She performed an impromptu musicale, recalling her stage career.

It was at a party similar to this one, also hosted by Ursula Largey, but across the street in the Charles Clark Chateau which the Largeys then owned, that the state song of Montana was written.

When Creighton and Ursula “tired of a life of ease” and left Butte in 1915, they headed to Los Angeles, where among other things Ursula helped form and directed the Venice Community Players, part of the growing “Little Theater” movement. She died in 1939. Creighton survived her by 24 years, dying in Los Angeles in 1963. The Largey mansion was lost to fire about 1965.

As writer Edwin Dobb has said, "Like Concord, Gettysburg, and Wounded Knee, Butte is one of the places America came from." Join us next time for more of Butte, America’s Story.