

Welcome to Mining City Reflections where we illuminate the history of Butte, Montana through the stories and observations of 20th century women who lived there. I'm your host, Marian Jensen.

The oral history collection in the Butte Archives has preserved the personal reminiscences of such women. In vivid detail they bring to life the challenges and achievements of the boom to bust town.

During the first half of the last century, more than 20 ethnic groups sought a new life in the city. By 1917, the Finnish population had jumped to 3,000 as Butte offered the highest industrial wage in the country. But the Finnish language created barriers.

HYPERLINK "https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FxrCNf8utsE&feature=youtu.be" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FxrCNf8utsE&feature=youtu.be> Finnish dialogue

With a mother tongue that few others spoke and English equally difficult to learn, the immigrants gravitated to the east side of the city and Finn Town was born.

In this segment Aili Goldberg, reminisces about her Finnish immigrant mother, Mary Maki, and their life in Butte. Her recollections are documented in an oral history recorded by Professor Mary Murphy in 1980. A detailed glimpse of the city, particularly its boarding houses, comes to life.

Excerpt 34:32-44 - tape #1 ...”I lived on...

Mary Maki, Aili's mother, had immigrated at age 16 from Vaasa, Finland to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan where she married a Finnish miner and had

three children. Mary's husband died in a mine accident when she was 25, so she moved her family to Butte because she had heard women could find decent work. She found a job as a cleaner and then a cook in a boarding house.

Excerpt 2:08-2:23 - tape #1

Many immigrant miners were single, having left their families at home, with the intention of returning with the money they saved.

HYPERLINK "https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ujeSPkTlxU&authuser=0%20%20" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ujeSPkTlxU&authuser=0> Finnish Folk music

Such men needed food and lodging at a reasonable rate which led to the era of Butte's boarding houses. By 1916 Butte had 53 such houses.

The legendary Riipi House, which Mary Maki would one day run, provided more than three hundred meals a day from morning until the last shift ended at the mine and the bars supposedly closed.

Excerpt 11:23-45 – tape #1

The boarding houses served an international clientele though Irish, Serbian and Finnish miners dominated the East side.

HYPERLINK "https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hFCixLn9qRw" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hFCixLn9qRw> Finnish lullaby

The melting pot of immigrant adults meant children like Aili had to learn

English at school.

Excerpt tape #1 - 8:40-9:01 (cut Murphy's comments)

Throughout high school Aili and her brothers worked to help support the family. By 18 Aili joined her mother to work at the boarding house. Despite feeding two hundred hungry miners a day, seven days a week, without benefit of running water or refrigeration, the boarding house meals were legendary. Served family style with a steady stream of refills, 3 times a day, miners paid a fixed price of seven dollars a week. In the Finnish Houses this also included a meal at 2AM when the night shift ended at the mine.

The holiday menus were even more elaborate.

Excerpt tape #1 - 37:18-37:40

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJ2NqylqsN4> Traditional Finnish Christmas music start at 4:42

The buckets the miners took to work for their mid day meal was another gargantuan job at the boarding house.

Excerpt tape #1 - 57:50-58:36

HYPERLINK "<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5FFESYX8Lg%20>"<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5FFESYX8Lg> Polka

The boarding houses employed cooks, dishwashers, and waitresses, all of whom were women. But there was always one man charged with among other things, the unique job of making salt bags.

Excerpt 59:58-1:00:40 (cut Mary's comment)

The boarding house sitting rooms and front porches became a place for political discussion. The Finnish miners often carried their socialist leanings to the new country, and frequently felt a greater allegiance to them than the church.

Finnish Vet song HYPERLINK "<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arKxCiTZoyQ>"<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arKxCiTZoyQ>

While Mary Maki did not necessarily approve of the politics, Aili and the other children enjoyed their holiday celebrations.

Excerpt tape #1: 38:36 – 39:07

More Finnish Christmas HYPERLINK "<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJ2NqylqsN4>"<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJ2NqylqsN4>

Despite the family's hard work and long hours, the Maki's lives were not without adventure.

HYPERLINK "<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vz4SSWFy6UQ>"<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vz4SSWFy6UQ> **Keystone cops**

By the late 30's they'd pooled their savings and bought a car.

Excerpt – Tape #2: 7:03- 7:20; 7:40-7:50

Aili's days on the east side overlapped with Butte's bootlegging era. Not surprisingly, the Mining City took a wide open approach to the production and distribution of illegal liquor.

Excerpt- Tape #1: 35:15-47

Bootlegger's Daughter -start at :33

HYPERLINK "<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vz4SSWFy6UQ>"<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vz4SSWFy6UQ>

After high school graduation, and working in the boarding house for 8 years, Aili finally married Clarence Goldberg, the son of Swedish immigrants who ran a dairy.

Excerpt tape #2 – 9:42 – 10:02; 10:44-55

Like many immigrant parents, the Goldbergs worked hard to provide a better future for their children. Their son, William, became a geophysicist.

Begin Sibelius and play throughout with alternating volume

<https://youtu.be/adKwG9ZuzFw>

The nearly thirty year span of boarding house operations came to an end after World War II. By then Mary Maki, was running the Riipi Boarding House. But the floating population of single miners had been replaced by families who created their own homes. The boarding houses were no longer necessary.

More Sibelius

Aili continued to work in the restaurant business while her mother, after a part time stint as an office cleaner, finally retired.

With Aili's help, Mary Maki learned enough English to become an American citizen and continued to live in Finn Town until the Anaconda Company bought her out to make way for its pit mine. Her final years were spent living with her daughter's family. She died at age 86, having never

remarried.

[More Sibelius](#)

[Move to end](#)

At age 76, when asked what growing up on the east side meant to her, Aili said:

“Living on the east side...2:09-2:20