

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 recollections of these women in vivid detail. They bring to life the challenges and achievements of the boom to bust town.

In this episode of Mining City Reflections, we'll listen to excerpts from an oral history of Anna Stefanac (Marenavich) who was born in 1901. Montana historian Mary Murphy interviewed Anna at her home in Butte in 1980.

Despite hardships including harsh working and living conditions, the Marinovich story is one of delight and gratitude. A jovial woman with a knack for storytelling, Anna's recollections reflect the gusto with which she lived her life.

Excerpt Tape # 2- 41:18-19 "I was a little rascal from the beginning."

Poor economic conditions in Croatia and Slovenia led to an influx of immigrants from those countries. Anna's parents, George Stefanac and Agnes Rauch, met in the Smelter City of Anaconda, Montana.

Speaking no English, Agnes had traveled alone from Slovenia at age 16 to marry an older, wealthy man, sight unseen. The match arranged by her mother brought the teenager to hysteria. She refused to marry, and was relieved to get a job as a maid in a boarding house instead. It was there she met George, a Croatian immigrant.

Excerpt Tape #1- 3:04-3:14; 4:31-38

Eventually, the couple married and moved to East Butte so that George could work in the mine, as work in the smelter had affected his lungs. Her mother began taking in boarders to make ends meet, and to have enough food to feed her growing brood.

Often solitary men who had temporarily left their families for the high wages in the Mining City, many of the boarders treated the 9 Stefanac children like their own.

Excerpt Tape #1 – 16:50-17:12

The mines ran three shifts a day. Someone was always in need of a meal, which meant endless duties for Anna in the kitchen.

Excerpt Tape #1 - 20:00-20:12

As the oldest child, Anna's responsibilities helping her mother took precedence over going to school. Not that Anna seemed to mind.

Excerpt Tape #1 - 22:23-46.

Anna's role in the boarding house included delivering lunch buckets to her father and

their boarders when work at the mines was sporadic. Here we get Anna's firsthand account of the conditions on the hill.

Excerpt Tape #1 - 26:05 – 27:32

No task was too daunting for Anna. She enjoyed the challenge of pinching coal from the train yard, so much so that the railroad watchmen knew her by name. Though coal was cheap, every extra bit helped to boil the water to wash clothes all the faster.

Excerpt Tape #1 – 36:04-13

In her teenage years, life at the boarding house began to wear on Anna, whose mother kept a close watch on her. She began to think about a different future. The story of Anna's courtship with Tom Marinovich reflects her determination.

Excerpt Tape #1 - 37:15-54

Tom was resolute about marrying Anna. His English was not good but he wasn't going to give up. Conniving to become a member of the Stefanac household, he switched places with one of their boarders.

Excerpt Tape #1 -44:02-44:23

Sparking ensued in the stairwell, no less. But Anna's mother was suspicious.

Excerpt Tape #1 - 44:46-45:15

Eventually the trysts led to more.

Excerpt Tape #1 - 46:29-46:57

Anna refused to meet that first night but soon the pressure became overwhelming. Tom drew on 'old country' customs to convince Anna's parents to let them marry.

Excerpt Tape #1 - 48:25-38

Anna's father was soon won over, for he liked his future son-in-law from the start. But her mother would not relent, fearing the loss of her daughter's hard work in the boarding house. Tom finally felt compelled to speak up.

Excerpt Tape # 1 - 50:52-51:09

George Stefanac finally agreed to the union, and the couple were married December 29, 1918 in Holy Savior Church, 4 months short of Anna's 18th birthday.

The wedding celebration lasted for three days. No one was happier than the newlywed groom who had known all along he had competition.

Excerpt Tape # 1 - 55:45-56:11

Excerpt Tape # 2 - :02 - :44

We can only imagine how many times similar stories played out among the young, lively residents of the Richest Hill on Earth.

Tom and Annie set up house on Ash Street in McQueen and raised three sons. And Anna continued to help her mother.

Tom worked for the Anaconda Company for more than 45 years. They had 8 grandchildren and 12 great grandchildren. Tom died in 1975. Anna would live nearly another twenty years.

The irrepressible Anna Marinovich died in 1994 at the age of 93.

Excerpt Tape #2 – 40:52 - 41:03

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Excerpts – 6 min 37 sec

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