

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

While the Butte Archives' Oral History collection has preserved the personal reminiscences of many of the city's women, nothing captures the essence of the Mining City spirit more than the story of the Women's Protective Union.

<https://youtu.be/YsvGPj0LH0M> here and after the first quote

In 1995 the Archives began the Women's Labor History Project to collect and catalog materials about this historic union including oral histories of retired members. Whitney Williams, Director of the Project, and a descendent of no less than 6 union members, collected numerous oral histories.

LABOR PAINS excerpt: 28:33 - 28:55

Butte's underground miners, working in one the most dangerous occupations in the country, had begun to organize as early as 1878, and

34 unions in related crafts and trades existed by 1900. Women workers would not be left behind.

The mines operated around the clock, but the women who cooked and cleaned for miners struggled for respectability and decent treatment while they provided what was called commercial domesticity. Despite the need for their services, working women at the turn of the 20th century were often maligned.

<https://youtu.be/LWkVcaAGCi0> start at 1:54

Butte police who arrested the city's prostitutes routinely allowed them to claim waitress as their occupation. Not only untrue, this misrepresentation disparaged the many women working in Butte restaurants and boarding houses. These workers were often miners' widows and older daughters forced to leave school to work to support their extended family. The Women's Protective Union sought to secure rights for these women. The organization was founded in 1890.

LABOR PAINS - 21:32 -22:02

The Women's Protective Union became the second all female union in the country and a formidable representative for their members.

LABOR PAINS - 22:25 - 22:45

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hm6obfnJ4XM>

Early leadership from two remarkable women, Lena Mattaush and Bridget Shea, provided stability following troubling miner strikes in 1917 and 1920. Both had been born in Ireland, but UNLIKE many immigrant women had learned to read and write. They understood the pressures working women had to face both at home and on the job, and used their skills in organizing.

They visited employers regularly to address grievances, and to make sure their membership understood the importance of solidarity. While no recordings of Bridget Shea exist, her influence is apparent in the reflections of those who came after her.

Solidarity <https://youtu.be/djTK6zGsi2E> play in background and in between these quote that follow

Laitinen 6:15 -6:29 Bridget Shea 7:13-7:19 you talked about your problems  
32:42-32:44 - 'they went to bat for ya.'

Webster 52:39-41 - 'we'd watch for Bridget to come in, but I loved her.'

The union's accomplishments were nothing short of extraordinary. Even without their members' right to vote to influence elections or legislation, the WPU led the fight for a 10 hour day — achieving it before other cities in the West.

LABOR PAINS -22:50-23:04

<https://youtu.be/rRajPS7L1ds>

Play between these two sections

Likewise, thanks to the WPU, Butte women's wages exceeded those in major cities across the country.

LABOR PAINS - 23:11-23:23

And here <https://youtu.be/rRajPS7L1ds>

The influence of these women could not be ignored at home either. The men's union asked for their help as well.

LABOR PAINS -23:44-23:57

<https://youtu.be/QnbCRdGcuyE> here and after the audio

But make no mistake, these 20th century women faced challenges unique to their gender. For example, during strikes, motherhood dictated they wear WPU picket banners across their backs.

LABOR PAINS: 26:32-26:45

The Women's Protective Union's existence came to an end in the 70's. Ironically, under the Civil Rights Act of 1964, it was required to end its all female status. The union eventually merged with the local, all male waiters and bartenders union.

LABOR PAINS: 29:12-29:24

<https://youtu.be/u1ISWyKv0f4>

