BUTTE MEMORIES

OUR KELLEY/MONDLOCH FAMILY

John E, Murphy

October 24, 2019

While assembling my thoughts on the Kelleys, it occurred to me that the most important thing is not the place where life happens but the little vignettes of the lives of the people who lived there. Butte was the stage and these people were the actors. The people changed their environment and the environment changed the people.

The creation of the Kelley family in Butte begins in several places. We know that both the Kellys and the Ashes were of Irish descent and both were from mining families however, where they came from in Ireland and where they landed in Canada remains a mystery. The following is a timeline for the Thomas Edward Kelly family:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1839 | Thomas Edward Kelly born, native of St. Stephens, New Brunswick |
| 1/1/1850 | Winnifred Ash born, native of St. Andrews, New Brunswick |
| 1857 | Came to Pacific Coast |
| 1862 | Came Comstock |
| 1865 | Helped organize Gold Hill Miners Union |
| 1868 | approx moved to Virginia City |
| 4/20/1872  | files for Chief of Police of Virginia City (D) |
| 5/7/1872 | won election by 8 votes |
| 12/11/1872 | Winnie Ash and Chief of Police, Thomas E Kelly |
|  | attended 6th anniversary of Gold Hill Miner's Union |
|  | not noted as being there together |
| 4/10/1873 | Tom files for reelection as Chief of Police |
| 5/6/1873 | Tom wins by 584 votes |
| 11/20/1873 | Tom Kelly and Winnie Ash Married |
| 9/22/1874 | Tom Kelly nominated to run for Sheriff by acclimation |
| 11/10/1874 | Kelly wins by 1009 votes |
| 3/2/1876 | Tom Kelly Jr Born |
| 4/13/1876 | Kelly elected as delagate to the city convention |
| 9/26/1876 | Kelly nominated for Sheriff by Democrats |
| 11/14/1876 | Kelly re-elected by 687 votes |
| 12/20/1877 | Isabel Kelly born |
| 9/7/1878 | Kelly elected as delagate to the county convention |
| 9/30/1880 | Kelly nominated for Sheriff by Democrats |
| 11/611880 | Kelly loses by 23 votes |
| 4/18/1881 | Walter George Kelly born |
| 9/20/1883 | Laura T Kelly born |
| 5/14/1886 | Kelly before Us Senate nominated for US Marshall by Pres Grover Cleveland |
| 6/22/1886 | Kelly now duly installed as US Marshall of Nevada |
| 5/12/1888 | Winnifred Ash, wife, dies leaving Husband, 5 children and 3 sisters |
| 7/8/1888 | Marshall Kelly dies in Virginia City NV |
|  |  |
|  |  |

Two months after Winnifred died, Tom also died leaving five children orphaned ages five to thirteen. Winnifred’s sister Elizabeth had married John Flood and they lived in Butte, Montana where he was a mining engineer. Elizabeth who went by Aunt Lizzie and John took in the three youngest children Laura, Isabel and Walter. Two other boys went to California to live with relatives. Lizzie was not enamored with the spelling of Kelly. She said that Kelly was the “shanty Irish” or lower-class way of spelling it so she changed it to Kelley which, according to Lizzie, was the “lace curtain” or higher-class way of spelling the name. John and Lizzie had three boys of their own, Winfield, Albert and Clarence. The Kelley kids were absorbed and raised as their own. Walter was my grandfather and his sisters my great aunts. The exact dates they arrived in Butte is unknown, but it was probably about the time Montana became a state in 1889.

At family gatherings when I was a child, my senior citizen great aunts would relate stories of when they were children. The Butte air was so polluted from the smelting activity that their parents would walk them to the streetcar because they could not see the end of the block. Another story was that Butte didn’t have any trees. They had all been killed by the arsenic in the air from the smelters. For a Sunday drive, they would hop in the family car and drive out on the flats to see a tree that was still alive. A third story was that there were no cats in Butte. The arsenic pollution would settle on the ground and the cats would walk on the dust. When the cat licked its paws to clean them it licked off the arsenic and that was the end of the cat. Laura said “when we went to school, we wore masks. The smoke burned your eyes. But we didn’t mind it.”

In Hancock, Michigan, Katherine Josephine Koch married John Peter (JP) Mondloch in 1883. Katherine who went by Katie was of German descent. The oral family history indicates that she was related to Robert Koch who was a Nobel Prize winner for his work in microbiology. He is known as the father of modern bacteriology. The Mondlochs had two children born in Hancock while JP learned carpentry and set up his own contracting business in the copper region around Hancock. Their third child, Mary Evangeline, was born in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin in 1887 near the place her father grew up. Why they were in Fond du Lac is not known. Mary was my Grandmother. They returned to Hancock and in 1889 travelled to Butte where JP set up his own contracting business. They had six more children bringing the total to nine, 3 boys and six girls. JP’s parents came to America from Luxembourg, Germany. John Mondloch, JP’s father was a shoe merchant. An article about John Peter Mondloch was written up in “A History of Montana” by Helen Fitzgerald Sanders, Vol 3, pages 1418, 1419,1420, published in 1913. At the World Museum of Mining in Butte on Hell Roaring Gulch, there is a replica of the JP Mondloch carpenter shop. Inside are some of his actual woodworking tools. His carpentry shop was on West Quartz Street. Their first home was on West Park Street then JP built a new, larger home nearby at 968 W Broadway.

There were nine children. William was the oldest then Anna, Mary, Ed, Leona, Lorin, Stella, Rita and Dorothy. Rita died in childhood. Anna married Vincent Carey and they had two children before Vincent died. Later she married Joe Maes of Anaconda and they had three more children. Ed married Helen Cohan and had two children ………

Lorin married Mary Powers. He became a prominent Butte Physician for many years. He was the doctor who delivered me.

The Kelley’s reached adulthood and started careers. My Grandfather started working in the hardware business first in the Montana Hardware Store in Butte. Then as a travelling salesman or “drummer” for A. M. Holter Hardware Company of Helena. Around the same time, young Mary Mondloch started working at the same store in Butte. The two started dating and were engaged. He travelled all over western Montana by train and horse driven wagons. He wrote letters to Mary from the road, mostly telling her where he was and what he had sold that day. He reported that he was in Missoula the night they had a celebration to turn on their new electric streetlights. He said he wasn’t too impressed because Butte had streetlights for years. Also, in Missoula he had an incident with a local farm implement dealer Gaspard Deschamps. Walter said that he thought there was nothing as frightening as a mad Irishman, but the French could put the Irishmen to shame. Half a century later Gaspard’s grandson Charlie Deschamps would marry my wife Judy’s sister Nancy.

In September of 1912 Walter Kelley and Mary Mondloch were married. In Their first home at 915 W. Woolman, the first three of their seven children were born Katie, Isabel and my mother, Rita Jeanette Kelley. The family kept growing so they moved to 1123 W. Steel. This house was very crowded especially in the summer, so Walter and friends and relatives built a summer cabin near Mt Fleecer at Buxton. The children named the cabin “Pamanus” (Pa ma an us). At the cabin, there was plenty of room to roam for the six girls and one boy. They would all climb into the family pickup for the drive out to the “cabin.” Mary and one other would ride in the cab and the rest would ride in the open bed of the truck. There were some neighbors nearby, Rube and Ella Travers lived in a small farm at the bottom of the hill. Mel and Charlotte Ivy and Joe Shultz live to the north as did Bud and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Christie. There was no electricity, so a wood stove was used for cooking and heat and kerosene lanterns for light. Water was hauled in from a nearby spring. The cabin was one large room with beds around the walls except for the dining area and kitchen. A screened porch in front provided additional sleeping space and place to sit and view the beautiful valley below. There was plenty of room to roam and plenty of chores to do. My grandmother Mary or as we called her “Mom” or “Merry Mom, “was an expert organizer and taskmaster. Their only son Walter Jr. started calling his father “Gov.” To this day, even though they are long gone, the family refers to them as Mom and Gov.

The cabin was not only a refuge for Mom and Gov and the kids, but it became a social gathering place for the aunts and uncles and, as the children made families of their own, in-laws, cousins and friends. My mother had mixed feelings about the cabin because to her it represented work.

Gov would commute to Butte or stay in family house on Steel street. He no longer traveled around western Montana selling hardware but had gone into the furniture business with Mr. Shiner. It was called Shiner-Kelley Furniture and was located at \_\_\_\_\_\_ East Park Street. Gov had many good stories because of the location of his stores near Chinatown and the Red-Light District. He was a very gregarious person, so he was a good salesman. As he would say, he would jolly the customers along. He was known as being an aggressive furniture and hardware dealer.

Walter’s older sister Isabel Kelley came to Butte in 1898 after graduating from The University of Nevada. She taught at five schools, Lincoln, McKinley, Sherman, Webster and Jefferson before assuming the principalship at Grant School in 1908. She presided over 38 graduating classes while principal at the Grant. An annual Halloween parade was organized by Miss Kelley. The parade was open only to “children pledging not to sin. She retired from teaching in 1946. She was a member of the City Teachers Corps, the Retired Teachers Association and the Immaculate Conception Parish. She died at age 84. When Belle was in her 80’s some of them held a party for her. Many of her old students had themselves retired. She looked at them and said, “my how you all have grown!”

Belle’s younger sister Laura attended the new Butte High School that had been completed in 1896. She studied at Dillon Normal College and became a teacher. Her first teaching experience was at Darby. For the next 20 years, she taught at the Lincoln School. Then, she raised her two boys and acted as the inspiration and “assistant thinker” for her husband. Just before she died at age 96, she was interviewed by the Montana Standard. She told the reporter “do you realize that if live four more years, I’ll be a centipede.”

 In 1923, Laura married Charles Henry Gallagher who came to Butte from County Mayo, Ireland around 1893. He attended Butte and the Butte Business College and worked for several grocers. He was older than Laura. They had two sons. Kevin and Charles. “Uncle Charlie” was an entrepreneur. He developed the concept of the open grocery store. Up until then, you would get your groceries by ordering at home from a person called a solicitor who was an employee of the store. Eventually he had stores at 422 N. Excelsior, 324 N. Main, 1651 Harrison and 129 E. Park. He named his stores Wizway and they were one of the first self-service stores in Butte. He eventually sold his stores to a company which would become Safeway. He also owned the Muller Apartments.

When he retired, he was active in the Chamber of Commerce. Maybelle Hogan, the Superintendent of Schools, encouraged him to run for the school board. He was on the board when the new Butte High school was built in the 1930’s. He was on the draft board. Among his friends were Dan Coleman of the Hennessey-Connell store, Burton K. Wheeler, and Congresswoman Jeanette Rankin. He donated his large mineral collection to Montana Tech. He died at age 90’

Charlie was an Irish patriot. He belonged to the Hibernians and the Robert Emmet Literary Association. He supported the effort in Ireland for independence from England. He told the story of living in Mayo just down the road from a family named Boycott. The Boycotts were loyal to the crown. The work went out to shun the Boycott family and to not have any dealings with them. Thus, the term boycott was coined. He didn’t talk much about his Irish activities, but I believe he was involved in sending money and arms to the Irish revolutionaries.

Laura and Charlie lived just across the alley from Laura’s brother Walter. They had a large two-story home at 1116 W. Platinum. This home absorbed some of the bodies from the Kelleys as the Kelley home only had two bedrooms and one bathroom. The Gallagher boys were just like brothers to the Kelley kids.

Directly across Platinum at 1119 was where Isabel or “Belle” lived. It was a tiny home but also a refuge for stray Kelley kids. When I was in grade school, I would spend a whole day cutting the three lawns with a hand push mower. The gardening job included trimming the lawn and gardens and cutting the tall caragana hedge around Gallagher’s. My grandfather Govvie was the supervisor and the job had to be up to his standards before I got my $2.50 for the days work. AT the time I was doing this, all the owners of those houses had retired, and I cherished the time I spent being near them.

Late in 1916, my grandfather ended his partnership with Shiner and opened a hardware store with a Vincent Alton. It was called Kelley & Alton. When that partnership dissolved, Walter was the sole owner of the hardware store. It was located at 209-211 East Park Street where, years later, Tony the Trader would have his store. He sold the store just after I was born, and I have a picture of him standing in front of the store holding me as an infant.

Kevin, the older of the two Gallagher boys graduated from MSU in Bozeman then joined the US Air Force. He advanced to Lt. Colonel. He was a genuine spy. For a while he was a diplomatic attaché to Moscow. His wife Betty Ann Erickson from Glasgow, Montana and their children were in Moscow with him during that assignment. He spent a lot of time in Washington D.C. in the higher echelons. His two children went to JFK kids’ birthday parties. During the Vietnam war, he ran the SR-71 Blackbird spy plane program from Kadena Air Force Base on Okinawa. This was a top-secret program and the public was unaware of Blackbird at that time. He told me some remarkable stories when my wife Judy and I visited him in D.C. long after he retired.

Charlie Gallagher Jr. graduated from the Notre Dame Law School. He went to work for The Hamilton Company which ran all the stores and gas stations in Yellowstone Park. Charlie was managing all of the gas stations in Yellowstone when he retired. He loved to tell the story about submitting an claim to his homeowners insurance company. A buffalo scratched itself against his mobile home in Gardiner and rubbed the siding off. The insurers weren’t used to that type of claim. Several years before he retired, I had the opportunity to work with him. Yellowstone Park Service Stations and Montana Power were both concessionaires in Yellowstone Park. I was managing the electric contract with the concessionaires and he was managing YPSS. We sat in many meetings together and attended some of the same YNP social functions. He was a bachelor.

The Kelley clan was expanding too. Kathleen or Katie married John Alley and they had two girls and three boys. John owned the RWB (Red White Blue) root beer stands in Butte as well as working for the Anaconda Company. One of the stands was on Excelsior St. in front of their home.

Isabel “Izzy” married Hugh van Swearingen and they had eight children, five boys and three girls. They lived in Butte for a while then moved to Great Falls.

My mother, Rita married Emmett Murphy and had five children, girls and three boys. I will write more about my mother later.

Lenore “Len” married Phil Karsted. They had three children, two boys and a girl. Phil was a civil engineer and travelled all over the country working on projects. He worked on the Canyon Ferry Dam, The Fort Peck Dam, The Glen Canyon Dam and the California Aqueduct. Often the construction camps on these projects were remote and not very family friendly so the kids would come live with the relatives in Butte. It was great, we got to know our cousins. Len said that Ivan Doig’s book “Bucking the Sun” was a good representation of life at the Fort Peck construction camp. Their three children were all in the military and were recently honored at a baseball game in Hartford, Connecticut for their service. Their father was a combat engineer in Europe during World War Two.

Walter Jr. was the only boy in the family and very much mothered by his six sisters. He was a very happy individual, always quick with a story or a joke. He attended MSU in Bozeman and became an Electrical Engineer. He married Barbara Rooney from Red Lodge and they had two daughters. Barb is my only surviving aunt at this writing. Walt went to work for the Montana Power Company as a Junior Engineer. When he retired years later, he was the Chief Operating Officer for MPC. He was a raconteur and had endless stories of his adventures. He joined the US Navy in World War Two as an enlisted sailor and had just graduated from officers’ school as an Ensign when the war ended. Barb was the choir director at St Ann’s Church for many years. She also formed and directed the singing group The Note A Belles.

Frances or Frannie married Jim Shaffer. They had five children, 4 girls and one boy. Their son James VI died in a bicycle accident while attending the U of M in Missoula. He was the cousin closest in age to me. Jim was an engineer and worked in the aerospace industry in California. My wife and I visited them in California and Jim took us to his plant to see a mock-up of a lunar lander that they were developing and testing. Jim retired and he and Frannie moved to Polson, Montana. He opened a small foundry and built a tour boat the Retta Mary (named for his mother and Frannie’s mother) from the keel up. He and Frannie conducted tours and dinners on Flathead Lake until she suddenly died from a stroke.

Winifred was the youngest child. Winnie married Bob Vine and they had six children, two boys and four girls. Bob was an artist and he worked for the Anaconda Company in public relations. His baritone voice could be heard as the voice over on many Anaconda Company ads. He was the voice on the loudspeaker in the Berkeley Pit viewing stand explaining the operation. In World War Two he fought in the Battle of the Bulge. The horror of that haunted him for years.

The time that the greatest generation grew up in was different. My aunts’ careers were raising these large families and taking care of their husbands so they could support the family. There were no day cares and the sole responsibility for the children fell on them. Often, they were taking care of their parents or other aging relatives. It was a huge job forming the baby boomer generation into adults.

My mother Rita was an exception to the rule. After she died, we found out from her sisters that Rita was the organizer and director of her siblings. They called her “Sarge” although never to her face. At Mom’s funeral one of the sisters said, “now that she’s gone, who is going to tell us what to do?” These organization skills lasted her whole life. After high school, she attended the Butte Business College. Then she went to Seattle and worked as a secretary. With the start of WWII, she joined the newly formed WAVES (Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service). It was the women’s branch of the United States Naval Reserve. She lived in Washington D.C. and worked in the Pentagon with the Signal Corps where they made propaganda films and recorded the war. She met many people who were or would be successful people in Hollywood for example, Darryl F. Zanuck the producer. Her brother Walter was in D.C. and they were very close especially since both were in the Navy.

A mutual friend of the Kelley and Murphy families in Butte was living in D.C. Helen Lally invited Rita and Emmett to a dinner. They had attended St. Patrick’s Grade School together but had lost touch of each other. The reunited friends were married at Fort Belvoir, Virginia in December of 1945. They were married the day after Emmett was commissioned an officer in the Army Corp of Engineers. The story of the Murphy’s explains how they got back to Butte and started a family.

My mother was a caretaker. Whether it was raising five kids, taking care of Dad, taking care of her elderly parents and aunts and uncles or running her bridge club, she was always in control. People relied on her and she always knew what to do. The house ran like clockwork. Dad to work, kids to school, meals, laundry ironing while watching a tv show or two. Her final act of the evening was retiring to the kitchen before bedtime and sitting on a barstool at the kitchen counter with her cigarette and beer we knew that this was our time. If we had a problem, needed advice, or just wanted to talk, this was our time and we had her undivided attention. She called them her “kitchen conferences.” There are so many of my memories associated with this special time. One night, mom and I were talking in the kitchen around ten PM. I just finished a Navy school in Virginia and was on my way to a new assignment in California. It was my grandmother Mary on the line. Gov, my grandfather just collapsed while getting into bed. My grandparents sold their home on Steel Street and moved in next door to us on North Drive so they could be closer to my mother. Mom and I rushed over and my mother started mouth-to-mouth while I searched frantically for the numbers of the fire department and ambulance (these were the days prior to 911). Mom’s efforts were unsuccessful, and my grandfather was dead when the rescue people arrived. She didn’t hesitate to jump right in. It probably had gone through her head before.

Whenever the Kelleys’ got together, it was a good time. Beer was their drink and singing was their entertainment. I remember being at gatherings at the house on Steel St. After a big dinner, the Kelley girls and their brother and assorted spouses would gather in the kitchen to do the dishes. This was the era before automatic dishwashers. My uncle Walt and his wife Barb would start singing and soon the others would join in and harmonize. It was wonderful fun. Walt and Barb harmonized so well together. Years later they would sing at my wedding.