

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Agnes Mattson Cramer (1910- )

Agnes Cramer was born in Butte in 1910, the daughter of Swedish and Finnish immigrants. Her mother worked in boarding houses before and after her marriage. She remarried six years after her husband, a miner, died of pneumonia at the age of thirty-three. Agnes was an only child and grew up on the East Side. She attended the Grant and Washington schools, then Butte High.

Her parents took over the Belmont boarding house around 1926 and Agnes took care of the books, waited tables and generally helped out. It was there she met her husband, James Cramer. They married three months after meeting, rented a little place on East Park, but moved back to the Belmont when the Depression began.

Mrs. Cramer worked in boarding houses until 1945, helping an aunt run the Maryland and the Hazel. But the houses began dying out after World War II. Not so many men were needed in the mines and the single ones drifted off. She retired with the decline of the boarding houses, as her husband no longer wanted her to work. They had one son who was killed two years ago and now live alone in a trailer on The Flat.

BUTTE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
TAPE INDEX

Interviewee: Cramer Agnes  
Last First Middle  
Date of Interview: March 28, 1980  
Place: Butte  
Interviewer: Mary Murphy

Context of the Interview: Mr. & Mrs Cramer live down on Utah Street, much further than I had thought when I set out walking that morning. Thus, I was a little late getting there and a little harried. They live in a trailer, somewhat incongruous in Butte, but set in a nice lot on the Flat. Mr. Cramer was pretty silent throughout the interview. Mrs. Cramer seemed to be nervous with the tape recorder.

Tape #1  
Side 1

Parents came to Butte first from Utah and Red Lodge; were married in Butte. Mother came around 1905-1906, she was from Finland originally, father from Sweden. Father was a miner. Mother came by herself when was about 16 or 17. She worked in a boarding house in a mining town. She did everything: helped the cook, made the beds, put up the buckets, wash dishes, wait on tables, wash men's clothes. \$15.00 month and room and board--"that was good wages." Probably met her husband in a boarding house or at a dance at the Finn or Swede Hall. Mother was in some of the plays at the Finn Hall.

Mrs. Cramer born in 1910, only child. Grew up on the East Side. Father died when she was six, mother went back to work. Father miner, got pneumonia, only 33. Mother remarried after about 6 yrs. Was working in the Finn boarding houses: Central house and Kingston, downstairs where the Helsinki Bar is.

Went to school at the Grant and Washington school and Butte high. Remembers the streets and sidewalks full of men coming home from work with their lunch buckets. The only thing she could say in English when she started school was a swear. Mother didn't learn English too well, wanted Agnes to speak English when she got home from school, but she didn't want to, was afraid she'd forget Finn. Finnish community was close-knit, now scattered. Not more than 10 old country Finns left. Tore the east side down house by house as they cracked.

Mother continued working after remarried. They took over the Belmont house after about two years, about 1926. Mrs. Cramer waited on tables, took care of the books, generally helped out. Mother did most of cooking. Served about 200 men in 1928-29. Was about 26 rooms, had a chambermaid. Men would wait in the lobby until it was time to eat and then dash in. Women didn't eat in the boarding houses very often. "Some of the guys would bring their lady friends in."

Not too many Finns at the Belmont, didn't cook too much traditional food. Also served the cold lunch after 2:00a.m. Lots of Irish. Parents ran the Belmont for about 15 yrs, then another Finn man took over. Then parents ran apartment house in the Borner Block, corner of Mair & Quartz. \$9./ week room and board. Short orders for breakfast and lunch, family style for supper.

Butte still predominantly single men, shortage of rooms. Put three strangers in one room, nobody ever lost anything. Very rare to have a single--one man who hanged him self had a private room.

Not very much trouble in the boarding houses with fights, etc. One payday from 4:30 to 5:30 the police car was up there five times, between our place and Silver Lake. Last time they called said "I don't know what we go down to the station for, we have to come right back." Just drinking and fighting. "They had to do that...never knew when they were going to let loose. But on paydays always." "Then Sunday morning they'd come in: 'Oh, Aggie, give me a quarter, lend me a quarter. I'm so sick I'm going to die. I'm not going to drink anymore.' Next week the same thing." Never bothered women, a woman could go out anyplace, any time of night, no body made any remarks.

At least in Finn community not many boarded with families, were so many boarding houses.

Mrs. Cramer's aunt packed the buckets. Only other member of the family that worked there. Put up about 150 buckets a day. Parents worked 14-16 hours a day. Father did the heavy work, lifting, cut meat, cleaned chickens, and go upstairs and separate fights, and got mixed up in them too.

During Depression, served two meals a day for \$5.00 week. Almost all the miners were layed off. 25¢ meal some would eat once a day. Parents carried a lot of the men until times picked up. Men would later send money--from Alaska, Hawaii. Things picked up around 1935. Mother never had one of the relief boarding houses. After things picked up mother didn't dare to serve beans in any way, shape or form for years. Was a soup kitchen at old St. James.

Mr. & Mrs. Cramer met at the boarding house were married in 1929. Got married three months after he came, had to get out quick, didn't tell her mother they were getting married. Rented place in 500 block on East Park. \$5. week for two rooms, a dollar extra a month because she used the iron. Moved back to the Belmont when the Depression started. "Mama got over it." Had one son who was killed two years ago. Moved down onto the Flat in 1934.

Had 4 yrs. of bookkeeping in high school, but didn't help when she actually kept the books, just did it her way. Was about 10-12 working there. Union wasn't as strict as it is now, could help out with other jobs. Built up gradually. Tried to make the people who ran the boarding houses run them like restaurants. Didn't work out well, then boarding houses died out.

Talks about the beauty contest put on by V.F.W.

Helped aunt at the Maryland and Hazel boarding houses. Some men stayed for a long time at one house. "When they owed too much and got kicked out they'd go someplace else." Most gave an assignment on their wages if they didn't have enough to pay. Liked the work then, didn't think too much about it.

Mr. Cramer: "People didn't know any better. If they had a job, they went along with it." He worked in the mines for 10 1/2 mos., got hurt. Would have given him another job when he went back but didn't want it.

Mrs. Cramer: "best thing that every happened to you." Mr. Cramer: didn't have the safety had now. Lot brought it on themselves. Had worked on the pipes in the mines. Later drove truck, did odd jobs. Had come to Butte in 1928. Was born in Kalispell. Lived in Polson for 18 yrs., time to move on, went to Missoula, then caught a freight train to Washington. Worked there being hay, hopped another freight coming this way. When train stopped started looking around and thought this was a good place to jump off. Lots of people rode the trains.

Butte had a lot of hoboes, would mark the places where they could get a feed. Mark the houses or the gates with chalk. Had some down at their house.

Mrs. Cramer worked till '45. Not that many single men around any more--not that many men, were cutting back in the mines. Single men just drifted off. Enough work for the married men, they were the ones that stayed. Seemed that anyone who came to town then could eventually find work.

Single men came in during WWII, when aunt had the Hazel block. Men came from East Coast, all over. Not so many from Europe any more.

Different ethnic groups got along alright. Kids would fight, "not fistfights, but we could sure holler." Was a Chinese family on East Side. Katie started school with Mrs. Cramer, kids used to tease her, throw rocks at her, got into more fights over her. Her dad ran tailor shop on east Park. Lived downstairs. Went to call for Katie one time and asked where her mother was. Replied, "Downstairs. She hasn't been upstairs for twenty years."

Butte was a wild town, but not like it is now. Wasn't any vandalism. Were a few people who got shot for burglaries, etc. Didn't monkey with Jerry Murphy. He'd meet people at the train and tell them to keep on going. Was chief in 1928.

Went to Columbia Gardens and Lake Avoca, learned to swim there. Schools had playgrounds. Hike up to the mine dumps and bury stuff up there. Retired after the boarding houses. Wanted to go to work, told her husband. He said, "Go ahead. The first shift you come home your suitcase will be on the porch."

Underground mines just faded out gradually. Pit started in Meaderville.

Name: Cramer Agnes Mattson Sex: F Race: W  
 Last First Middle Maiden  
 Present Address: 1952 Main Ave Butte Silver Bow MT 59701  
 Street Town County State Zip Code  
 Telephone: (406) 733-5028 Birthplace: Butte DOB: Dec 10, 1910

Years of School: h.s. Church Membership: \_\_\_\_\_

Grandparents:

Name	DOB	Birthplace	Yrs of School	Occupation(s)	DOM	DOD
Pa:						
Mo:						
Pa:						
Mo:						

Parents:

Name	DOB	Birthplace	Yrs of School	Occupation(s)	DOM	DOD
: <u>Victor Cramer</u>		<u>Sweden</u>		<u>miner</u>		
: <u>Katie</u>		<u>Finland</u>		<u>work in boarding houses</u>		
: <u>Lawrence Fors (stepfather)</u>		<u>Sweden</u>				

Children (in order of birth):

Name	Sex	DOB	Birthplace	Yrs of School	Occupation(s)	DOM	DOD
<u>none</u>							

Occupational History (List jobs in order):

Position	Company	Date of First Employment: Dates

Spouse:

Name	DOB	Birthplace	Yrs of School	Occupation(s)	DOM	DOD
<u>James Cramer</u>	<u>January 7, 1910</u>	<u>Kalispell</u>		<u>miner, truck driver, mechanic</u>	<u>1929</u>	

Children (in order of birth):

Name	Sex	DOB	Birthplace	Yrs of School	Occupation(s)	DOM	DOD
<u>one son (child through spouse)</u>							

INTERVIEWEE AGREEMENT

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

BUTTE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

The purpose of this program is to gather and preserve information for historical and scholarly use.

A tape recording of your interview will be made by the interviewer, and a typescript of the tape will be made and submitted to you for editing. The final typescript, together with the tape of the interview will then be placed in the oral history collection at the University of Montana. Other institutions or persons may obtain a copy. These materials may be made available for purposes of research, for instructional use, for publications, or for other related purposes.

\* \* \* \* \*

I, Agnes Cramer, have read the  
(Interviewee. Please print)

above, and in view of the historical and scholarly value of this information, and in return for a final typed copy of the transcript, I knowingly and voluntarily permit the University of Montana the full use of this information. I hereby grant and assign all my rights of every kind whatever pertaining to this information, whether or not such rights are now known, recognized, or contemplated, to the University of Montana.

Agnes Cramer  
Interviewee (Signature)

7 Mar. 28, 1980  
Date

INTERVIEWER AGREEMENT

University of Montana  
Missoula

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I, Mary Murphy, in view of the historical  
Interviewer (please print)  
and scholarly value of the information contained in the  
interview with Aenes Cramer, knowingly  
Interviewee (please print)  
and voluntarily permit the University of Montana the full use  
of this information, and hereby grant and assign to the  
University of Montana all rights of every kind whatever pertaining  
to this information, whether or not such rights are now known,  
recognized or contemplated.

Mary Murphy  
Interviewer (Signature)

3 16 56  
Date