

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Marjorie Dunstan (1924-)

Mrs. Dunstan is a soft-spoken woman. She is too young to remember Butte's boom days, but she does have a great deal of knowledge about the Scandinavian community which is still in existence. She is interested in preserving her Norwegian traditions and culture, and she is actively learning as much about it as she can.

Mrs. Dunstan was born in Butte, and she has always lived there. She and her husband, Fred, have four children. Because her husband has always worked for small businesses rather than for the Anaconda Company, and because most of the other members of her family worked for the Montana Power Company, which never had a strong union, Mrs. Dunstan has a view of unions not shared by most people in Butte. In her opinion, they have done more harm than good.

BUTTE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

TAPE INDEX

Interviewee: Dunstan Marjorie
 Last First Middle
Date of Interview: April 23, 1980
Place: Butte, Montana
Interviewer: Helen Bresler

Context of the interview: When I first called her, Mrs. Dunstan did not seem enthusiastic about being interviewed. However, an aunt of hers had been interviewed earlier, so she was familiar with the procedure, and was not hard to persuade.

The interview took place in Mrs. Dunstan's home. Her husband was present, but he wasn't feeling well, and was napping most of the time his wife and I were talking. Mrs. Dunstan seemed comfortable talking to me.

She is too young to remember much about the old days in Butte, but she is very active in the Norwegian community, and she knows a lot about Norwegian traditions and culture.

Tape #1
Side 1

Mrs. Dunstan's grandparents came to Butte about 1890. Her grandfather's brother was already here, working in a mine as a ropeman. Her grandfather also became a ropeman. There were a lot of Norwegian families in Butte at that time, so her grandparents felt at home.

The Norwegians went to Gold Hill Lutheran Church on Copper and Alaska Sts. The minister was also a shoe repair man. He kept in touch with peoples' families back in Norway for them.

There was no specifically Norwegian part of town.

Mrs. Dunstan's father died when she was two years old. He worked for the Montana Power Company. When he died, Mrs. Dunstan's oldest brother took over her father's job. Her second brother also went to work for Montana Power when he got old enough, and between them they supported the family.

The two brothers married during the early 1930's, and her mother went to work at the sewing room. This was a WPA project in which women sewed clothing for poor people. A lot of women in Butte were employed by this project.

Several other WPA projects went on in Butte. In one, the banks of the Silver Bow Creek were rip rapped. The WPA also worked on the road out the Nine Mile.

Mrs. Dunstan went to Monroe grade school and Butte Public High School. The high school had a good band at that time. Mrs. Dunstan was in the band for four years. She played the French horn.

Mrs. Dunstan is very active in Norwegian cultural activities. She belongs to the Daughters of Norway. There are not very many pure Norwegians left in Butte, although there are a lot of Scandinavians. Mrs. Dunstan's grandmother was the first president of the Daughters of Norway.

The Daughters of Norway had a celebration on May 17 for Norwegian Independence Day.

Mrs. Dunstan doesn't remember any friction between the Norwegian community and the rest of Butte.

Mrs. Dunstan went to work for the Metals Bank when she got out of high school. She stopped working when she got married, in 1947. She was married in Gold Hill Church. They had a reception in the church.

The Dunstans' house is built on a lot that her mother had bought. At the time she bought the land, it was a chicken ranch out of town.

Mrs. Dunstan met her husband at an American Legion dance. He was working for a produce company. His next job was as an apprentice parts man with Wellman Motors. He now manages the HO Auto Parts store.

When she first got out of high school, Mrs. Dunstan wanted to move to Seattle, but she couldn't get anyone to go with her, so she gave up the idea.

The Daughters of Norway have a Norwegian embroidery class. Several of the ladies are learning to speak Norwegian. They have also had a class on Norwegian cooking. Their next project is to learn rosemaling.

The Norwegians celebrate twenty days of Christmas. Lutfisk is a Christmas Eve food.

Two of the Dunstans' children still live in Butte. They are not particularly interested in their Norwegian heritage. Mrs. Dunstan thinks they may develop an interest later. She didn't join the Daughters of Norway until after she was married.

Mrs. Dunstan didn't take part in the activities of any other ethnic groups.

Tape #1
Side 2

Churches aren't as strict as they used to be. The members of Mrs. Dunstan's church were not required to marry within the church. The German Lutheran Churches are much stricter than the Scandinavian ones.

Mrs. Dunstan's mother wouldn't teach her Norwegian because she wanted her children to be Americans and to speak English.

When Mrs. Dunstan's grandmother came to America, she filled her basket with crochet cotton because she had heard that you couldn't buy it over here.

Mrs. Dunstan belongs to Eastern Star, a Masonic organization.

Mrs. Dunstan's oldest brother wrote songs. He wrote "Beneath Montana Skies."

Mrs. Dunstan is very much against unions. She feels that they've ruined Butte. Her family always worked for Montana Power, and they never had a union. Mrs. Dunstan feels sorry for the Anaconda Company.

Mrs. Dunstan used to go to Columbia Gardens on Thursdays. There were rides and concession stands and a baseball field and a green house. People always went to the gardens for picnics.

During the war there was a Navy station at the School of Mines. It was called the V-12. Lots of Butte men went away to the war.

Mr. Dunstan's father was a miner all his life. He came to Butte from England in 1922. When the company started mine tours, his job was to show people through the mines. The Holland Rink used to be where the Safeway store on Montana and Front Streets is now.