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May 29, 1987
Date of Agreement

Lwen Mitchell
Narrator

3701 Hancock
Address

Butte Montana 59701
City, State, Zip

Mary Murphy
Interviewer

Butte Historical Society
P.O. Box 3913
Butte, MT 59701

Nov 30, 1987
Accession Date

Mary Murphy
Archivist

Butte Oral History Project

LIFE HISTORY

Name: Mitchell Gwen Sex: F Race: W
Last First Maiden

Current Address: 3701 Hancock St. Butte Silver Bow MT 59701
Street Town County State Zip

Telephone: 494-4013 Birthplace: Butte DOB: July 26, 1909

Years of School: college Church Membership: Methodist

Parents:	DOB	Birthplace	Occupation	DOM	DOD
<u>John Mitchell</u>	<u>1880</u>	<u>Cornwall</u>	<u>Farm/ Miner</u>	<u>1916</u>	<u>1958</u>
<u>Clara Winifred Oatfield</u>	<u>1889</u>	<u>Cornwall</u>	<u>Boarding House/Mother</u>	<u>"</u>	<u>1982</u>

Siblings (in order of birth)

Name	Sex	DOB	Birthplace	Occupation	DOM	DOD
<u>Dorothy Enid Mitchell Kilmar</u>		<u>1907</u>				
<u>Winifred Elizabeth " Williams"</u>		<u>1911</u>				

Occupational History (List jobs in order)

Position	Company	Date of First Employment Dates
<u>Teacher</u>	<u>Franklin School</u>	<u>1929-1957</u>
	<u>East Junior High</u>	<u>1957-1973</u>

Spouse:	DOB	Birthplace	Occupation	DOM	DOD

Children (list in order of birth)

Name	Sex	DOB	Birthplace	Occupation	DOM	DOD

Gwen Mitchell
3701 Hancock St.
Butte

Interview: May 29, 1987

Miss Mitchell lives in a modern house on the Flat at the corner of Hancock and Hannibal Streets. It is impeccably clean, neatly cluttered with a multitude of knick-knacks, rugs she hooked after she retired, and dozens of photographs of her family. Miss Mitchell is a small woman, scarcely five feet tall, if that, with carefully waved gray hair, hazel eyes, and a lined face. She dressed in a gray dress with silver necklace and earrings for the interview.

Miss Mitchell was reluctant to do the interview--worried that she really could not be of much help and did not have much information. She was also nervous throughout, fiddling with the placemat at the kitchen table. I'm afraid the tape will be filled with my uh-hus and ohs of encouragement. She was also reluctant to have the tape deposited at the Archives, though I thought I had explained that earlier. She is terribly concerned not to offend anyone or to say anything against the town. She agreed to sign a release with the provision she could edit the summary or transcript, whichever is done.

Miss Mitchell is a shy, very gentle, genteel woman. She had polio as a child and is severely limited on the use of her right side. But she, contrary to her expectations, had a great deal of information and seemed to enjoy talking once she got started.

GWEN MITCHELL
May 29, 1987

WOMEN AS COMMUNITY BUILDERS PROJECT

TAPE I - SIDE A

- 0-5 How family came to Butte. Grandfather came to Butte first, worked in mines. Then went to work in Bingham, Utah mines, got copper water in arm, lost arm to blood poisoning. Returned to Butte. Company gave him settlement and with money bought tickets for family to come to U.S. Then family came to Montana from Cornwall, England, 1903. Grandmother had boardinghouse because grandfather could no longer work. Grandmother had three girls and boy. Grandmother had sister who operated boardinghouse in Meaderville. For some reason she gave it up and grandmother took it over. Had rooms for some to stay; others just got board. Raised family in Butte. Later another boardinghouse on E. Park Street. Thinks was called Oldfield Boardinghouse. Many Cornish people came to work in mines. Centerville and Walkerville where most Cornish settled but "There were enough in the Meaderville area that they established their own Methodist church there." There was Methodist Church in Walkerville, Centerville and on the "flat" and in town. Grandparents were Methodist.
- 5-10 Most who stayed at grandmother's boardinghouse were Cornish, but not all. Aunt married American, grandmother's children married boarders. "My father was a boarder. My father came out from Cornwall too. He came from another little small village called Braig (?) and then he came out, I think it was the next year, probably. My mother didn't know him, of course, until they were at the boardinghouse." Father's side of family remained in England, except for a brother. Brother came to U.S. but he didn't stay. Duties that mother and her sister had at boardinghouse. Packing buckets for workers. "Certain days of the week they made hot pasties and my grandfather took the hot pasties to the mines for them." Mother enjoyed working at boardinghouse: "She was grateful that she could help the family, but of course, her education stopped there." Education of family members. Mother was fourteen when came to U.S. Was 17 when got married. Built home in McQueen, where Gwen born and lived there until 61 years old. Father worked in mines.
- 10-15 Father was shift boss, some at Leonard; Tramway mostly. Trying to think of other mine where worked, eastside. Mother continued to help her mother in the boardinghouse. Grandfather died 1912, Grandmother

continued with boardinghouse. Father's mother came out and helped with boardinghouse. Grandmother sold boardinghouse in 1916-17, then came to live with Gwen's family and worked as midwife. People very fond of her. She remarried a soldier just back from the war who was younger than Gwen's mother in years, but "in actions" as old or older than Gwen's grandmother. "Because my grandmother was anxious to go and do things all the time and he was more ready to stay home." Continued briefly as midwife after marriage in 1920s. Demand at the time for midwives. Not that many gave birth in hospitals until late 1920s-30s when this occurred. Just made enough to take care of herself; lived with them and didn't pay board or room. Gwen born July 26, 1909, was middle child. Had two sisters. One brother died. Mother birthed her children at home with doctor. McQueen was distinct community. Franklin School there existed until torn down to dig Berkeley Pit. Meaderville grew up right along the hill because early mines didn't have showers and miners needed to get home and clean up. Houses built as close to mines as could. McQueen closer to East Range. McQueen well planned; all streets checkerboard, N-S; E-W. A little to the south was East Butte with Pittsmt Mine. Three stores and movie house in McQueen. Went to town occasionally, streetcar connected with major line, "We called our little streetcar the dinky." Twenty minutes to town. "As children we went to town every Saturday. The Empress Theatre was there on West Broadway and they gave ... matinees for the children. You know, the plays, it was live theatre."

15-20 Didn't pick pansies with children who visited Columbia Garden; had polio. Sisters would go to pick pansies. "Most of the time we didn't go on Thursdays... we would go out on a day when it wasn't so crowded. We nearly always went with neighbors on a certain day. We'd go out early and get our tables. We youngsters would play and we'd have our lunch. They had stores out there so we would cook dinner and our dads would come out after work. So it was a day out for all of us." Activities and attractions at Columbia Gardens. Zoo, roller coaster. Remembers animals at zoo. Beauty of Gardens. "It was beautiful and especially beautiful because, you see, Butte--in the early days when the smelters were here, we didn't have grass, trees, gardens, so the Gardens was really something, because it was beautiful. It had the mountain, the natural mountain scenery and then they had beautiful gardens, along with the pansies they had a butterfly made of pansies and all that...it was a real treat. Course, when people began to get cars, then they didn't go there as frequently."

Mentions William Clark who was responsible for Gardens. Describes what new company officials did when Clark sold it. Moved playground into grove of trees. Blacktopped roads. Company used snowplows to make area for sleigh riding.

20-25 Remembers when family got first car, 1928 Chevy. "Oh it was a big deal. It really was, because...we had depended on the streetcars and buses and so forth, and the train. Our summer vacation was a week or two down at Maiden Rock and we could take the train down." Mother never learned to drive. Remembers when older sister learned to drive car and was in rollover accident, but no one was hurt. Were out at the reservoir with youth fellowship group (Epworth League); used to go out and have dinner and a service and stay out in the moonlight. Coming back from reservoir, gave another car too much of the road on a corner. Car rolled over and threw some things out. Bible was lying open on ground. Dad working on night shift; girls waited up till he got home, "but he was so grateful that nobody was hurt that he didn't scold." Sister never learned to drive after this incident. Gwen didn't learn until after many years later. Never needed to learn because had other forms of transportation available to her when teaching. When buses were phased out, learned to drive out of necessity. Other teacher "pressured" her to drive. Describes learning to drive automatic transmission.

25-30 Now is glad had learned to drive. Describes three-mile walk home when attending Butte High School. Tells how became teacher. "I had always wanted to be a teacher, I guess, because I remember as youngsters we had wainscotting in our kitchen. And I used to sit and those were my pupils. So, I always wanted to be a teacher. And I went to Normal, it was then, the Normal College, at Dillon. And at that time, of course, it was just two years, we had diplomas." Older sister went to Butte Business College. Younger sister was student nurse, contracted TB from patient, went to Galen and survived, married, raised daughters. Gwen wanted to stay in Butte and near family and friends, taught at Franklin School where had gone when she was a girl. Spent one month teaching at Wisdom.

30-32 Describes how got first teaching job at Franklin School. Principal and others knew her already. In 1929 many were looking for jobs, was competition. Had to apply to School Board for job. Wanted to teach primary grades. Opening was in 7th grade, so took this job. Was certified to teach through 9th grade.

Depression-era cutbacks in teachers, worked half-time. Describes how obtained sixth-grade class. Then returned to 7th grade. Stayed in 7th grade classrooms. Went to summer school in Dillon and obtained degree. Extension courses. Stayed at Franklin School for 28 years.

TAPE I - SIDE B

- 0-5 Loved teaching. Immigrant children in classrooms: Italian, Austrian, Yugoslavian in Meaderville. Some English but many had moved to other parts of city. Children's desire to learn; most born in U.S. Parents very cooperative, wanted children to learn English language and culture. Teachers very highly respected by immigrant families. "The parents held you in high esteem. They still do. Parents that I see now, they still are calling me Miss Mitchell and . . . I have often said to them that's not necessary. (laughs)" Past students now in their 70s. Recalls conversation with one parent: "You know, Miss Mitchell, these children are good. But, you know, they need a pat on the back once in a while if it's low enough." Remembers spanking kids in class: "Yeah, you could give 'em a little swat if they got sassy." Despair of teachers today. "When I first started to teach, if you married today, you didn't have a job tomorrow." Reason for this rule; "I suppose the reason was to give the children, young people who had teaching experience, it was taking jobs from them. And they felt that the parents needed to be home with the children. And of course, if you had children in those days and you had to wash on the washboard, and you know, get wood and coal into the stoves and take out the ashes and all of that, there wasn't much time to work." Wouldn't wait until teacher had child though; as soon as married were out of a job.
- 5-10 Wouldn't be surprised if there had been teachers that didn't marry because wanted to keep jobs. Some teachers had boyfriends of a different religion so that also kept them from marrying. At one time, married women also didn't work as clerks in stores. But at Christmas, women could get special permits from union to work in stores. Why left Franklin School. 30 years ago had last 8th grade class graduation. 60 years ago graduated from high school herself at the Fox Theatre. Remembers her graduation ceremony. Thought about perhaps moving up to become principal, but required masters degree. Wanted to be principal at Franklin School. Wouldn't want to move to new community and

pursue this; so remained teacher. Started teaching at East Junior High in 1960 and stayed until 1973.

10-15 After school social activities. Teachers got together for parties and dances. Sometimes went to Anaconda or Whitehall for dinner. Meaderville was in its heyday. Eighth-grade parties, and PTA meetings and Dad's Night at Meaderville. "I can remember walking up Main Street for the last streetcar or the last bus and never a word said to me, never. And there was the red light district right there." Mother belonged to Ladies Aid in church, "The Ladies Aid [was] organized almost as soon as they built the church." Mainly helping raise money to support church, cleaned the church. Sponsored harvest Festival, "carryover" from Cornwall: "Not much to harvest around Butte, but we celebrated." Had pagan origins. Choir put on special musical program; special speakers. This was morning and evening on Sunday. Before that would go out to farms to get wheat, apples, etc. They solicited business people in wholesale district who contributed cases of corn, beans. They'd get pumpkins from out in the country. Displayed all this on a table by the altar. Then on Monday evening served roast beef dinner: mashed potatoes and gravy, pickled beets, cole slaw, apple pie.

15-20 Name of church was Unity Methodist Church. As community grew, first Meaderville church was replaced with larger church, seated 350 people. Mother involved in church. Ladies Aid put on plays to raise money. Comedies. Would take up to Walkerville, too. The ladies in the group would play the parts. Always had picnic at Gardens; Sunday School picnics. Took the train to Gregson and to Washoe Park in Anaconda. Describes events that accompanied picnics. Sisters were in plays also. Minister wrote some plays, sometimes with religious theme. Mother and grandmother had a lot of fun with plays. Methodist South Church, stricter discipline. English church was stricter than new congregation in U.S. Allowed to dance. Gwen couldn't dance. Younger sister did. Had a photograph and danced in the kitchen and went to school dances.

20-25 Father belonged to Sons of St. George Lodge, from England. Number of lodges that existed in early Butte neighborhoods. Met regularly at Oddfellows Hall in Meaderville. Names other lodges. Insurance provided, but social aspect of lodges a main attraction. Sons of St. George always had big dance in Centerville Hall on April 13. Whole family went; was a big part of social life in the spring. Would take streetcar. "One night-my younger sister, she loved to dance, and, of course,

she got as many dances as she could. This one night she said she'd be through and so we got down to where the streetcar was and it had gone. So then we walked down Main Street--and it was night after Easter and we were wearing our Easter shoes and I was tired--we saw the car cross Main and we knew we wouldn't make it. So then we had to walk all the way home. And my father had had a case of pleurisy. At that time you had to walk right straight down Park St. beyond where the pit is now and then up around the mines and down into Meaderville and then across the creek and then up to McQueen. It was a long walk, but, you know, my father didn't have any more pleurisy. (laughs)"

25-30 Social events for 9th-graders that teachers helped with. How got involved with West Side Shakespeare Club. "Well, one of the teachers, her name was Mabel O'Leary, was a niece to Mrs. A. F. Rice, who was the wife of the man who owned the business college. And Mabel was a member, her aunt encouraged her to join. And I don't know how long she was a member before she encouraged me, and Mrs. A. F. Rice invited me to a meeting. I would think that would have been in the '40s... Late '40s, I would think Well, I was a little frightened about it because I wasn't too sure that I could review a book. (laughs) There were a number of teachers in the West Side Shakespeare Club, a good many of them were teachers.... I guess I was a little bolder as time went on. So then I joined..." Knew teachers in club. "That was probably part of the reason I joined. As I say I was rather shy about going into new groups." "They were very, very lovely people. And very, you know, considerate. I enjoyed it very much." Had twenty-five members. Had waiting list.

30-32 Met in homes, had to limit the space. Prominence of women in club in early years. Names women who were well-known in community: Mrs. Burke, [wife of banker] Mrs. McPherson, but most were teachers and principals. "I think by the time that I was there, they had a program committee. They weren't studying just Shakespeare. Originally, it was just Shakespeare, but I think if you wanted to do something from Shakespeare, you could, you could inform the program committee. But, often the program committee went over books and assigned you a book." "My real joy is biography." Didn't limit to fiction only. "We also devoted one day to Shakespeare." Gave oral presentation sitting around in living room. Refreshments. When got to small group had luncheons. "We're down to only five of us."

TAPE II - SIDE A

- 0-5 Discusses background of women, no rivalry. But had one member that had very good memory and was kind of picky if something got left out of meeting minutes. Shakespeare Club gave books to library, contributions made to art fund of state federation. Club was funded by members themselves; dues, etc. State federation meeting; president has project. Shakespeare Club hasn't done much with federation. Only reason still affiliated is that club is second older in federation. Club now says is only a literary club to avoid affiliations with other groups. Rotana Club worked on free milk program for children. Other activities/ contributions to community.
- 5-10 All women who belonged were interested in doing book reviews. One lady didn't write reviews, but entertained; doesn't know what education was; a lovely person with fine manners. Many didn't have college educations, but most had at least high school. For her it was mostly a social activity. Reviews were limited to an hour and 15 minutes, preferably an hour; then question and discussion period afterward. Women's Club building. Major contribution to the community was "fostering the idea of good reading...and support to the library." Sometimes contribute as a group or individually. Gwen stayed in group because liked the people and the "opportunity to discuss good literature, and some of my dearest friends are there now."
- 10-15 Business and Professional Women's Club, knows some teachers did belong to this club. Recommends a woman who is active in Professional Women's Club, and other groups as well. Haven't had a new member "for years and years." Future activities planned for Shakespeare Club. Never any exclusiveness in Shakespeare Club; there were Catholics as well as Protestants in club. In the beginning, being called the West Side Shakespeare Club, there was a feeling that it was only for residents of the West Side. "And, of course, when we went to high school, we were from 'across the tracks.' There was a feeling that the West Side was something.... Well, the wealthier families lived there. That's where the bankers' homes were and lawyers' and so forth.... Some of the teachers seemed to favor the West Side kids, rather than the ones from 'across the tracks.'" (laughs) Never invited to kids' houses on West Side.

- 15-20 Members who didn't reside in the West Side who were members of the club. Women's causes were never undertaken by this club unless it was the subject of a book that was reviewed. Club didn't take position on ERA. Wouldn't consider any of the women in the club as feminists. Doesn't think of self as feminist. "I'll tell you what, when I was going to college, now, I went to a Sunday School class and it was our professor ... that was at Sunday School class. And at that time if a girl was caught drinking she was sent home. You could not drink, and you could not smoke. If you were smoking or drinking, you were sent home.... So we got to asking about this in the Sunday School class, 'Why? The boys are allowed to drink, the boys are allowed to smoke, why not the girls?' And this professor said, 'You know, down through history, women have been looked up to for keeping the moral standards high.' And I've always felt that way. And I think sometimes that women have lowered themselves in the estimation of the men. And I've always felt that behind every good successful man, there's been a good woman. And I can't see why we can't just say, well, okay, I don't see why women have to do everything that men do. Why can't we be a little different?" "You know, today that the moral standards have dropped because some women have been so anxious about the feminist movement that they've forgotten that the moral standards are in the hands of the women.... I definitely think that a woman should be paid as much as a man if she's doing that kind of work, and I think that's what we ought to work for."
- 20-25 Feels some people expected teachers to set good example. "Well, the Bible tells us if you're going to teach, you're going to be judged more strictly." Need to set example for youth. Some teachers had drinking problems that were ignored. Doesn't think teachers should tend bar. Can't tend bar till 2 a.m., then teach well in the morning. Also belongs to United Methodist Women. Describes other Methodist Churches in Butte. This organization is a national group. Has state United Methodist Women, and districts. - Belongs to Western District. State and local meetings.
- 25-30 Circles that make up the United Methodist Women. Small groups so that women get closely-knit. Once called Women's Society of Christian Service. Ladies Aid. The Wishing Well, young women's group. Had to give up own church when dug the pit; had to join Aldersgate. Formed own circle called Unity Circle. Missionary program of this group. Contributions of members. Foreign and home missionary programs. Fundraising

projects for church. Harvest Festival Dinner. Pasty Sale.

30-32 Describes pasty recipe of mother's. (phone rings, interruption) "She'd slice a layer of potatoes, and then her meat and the meat was not ground. The meat was chopped, cubed. And it usually, she used loin tips in hers. And then you'd put your salt and your pepper and onions and rutabagas, a layer of onions and a layer of rutabagas and then little bits of butter and then roll 'em. And she curled 'em, you know some people just pinch them and so on. But she really could curl them." Gwen didn't care for rutabagas so mother put carrots in her pasties. Gwen still does. Relatives in England call rutabagas "Swedes." Teaches Sunday School now; has taught for a long time. Was Sunday School superintendent for 20 years at Unity Church before torn down.

END OF INTERVIEW

1 HOUR, 36 MINUTES