

KRISTA MILLER
MONTANA HISTORY
ORAL ASSIGNMENT
NOVEMBER 22, 1994

Krista Miller
Oral History Assignment
Montana History
November 22, 1994

Preparation outline:

I will interview James Miller on a general level about his experiences and his life growing up in Butte, MT.

"Please tell me what life was like from July 22, 1931, (your birth date) to the present in Butte, MT."

I will ask him to recall issues such as:

- A. Religion
- B. Sports
- C. Cultures
- D. Social aspects
- E. The Columbia Gardens
- F. Schools
- G. Economics
- H. Rivalries
- I. Mines / Strikes

F. Economics

1. Times were hard during the 30's for everyone- and years after for others.
2. James Miller went to work at a young age so he could afford to attend school. He took on jobs like:
 - a. Shoveling snow
 - b. selling beer and pop bottles
 - c. selling Sunday newspapers
3. James recalled the movie costing 5 cents and a bag of popcorn costing 10 cents.
4. Since most of the businesses were owned by the Anaconda Company, when the miners were awarded a pay raise, prices went up all over town.
5. Almost all merchants were "uptown", people went "uptown" for all of their needs.
6. Some of the stores that were uptown were:
 - a. JCPenney's
 - b. Hennessy's
 - c. Sear's
 - d. Wein's
 - e. Weinberg's
 - f. Hub Clothing
 - g. Phil Judd's

G. The Columbia Gardens

1. Provided an inexpensive place for kids and families to go on the weekends and in the summer.
2. The trolley provided inexpensive transportation to the Gardens.
3. Later the bus was used.
4. The Miner's Union Day celebration was held here.
5. The "Old Mines League" played baseball at the Gardens.
6. Some of the attractions were:
 - a. rollercoaster
 - b. ballroom
 - c. giant swings
 - e. picnic area
 - f. parallel bars
 - e. hobby horse
 - g. flower garden
 - h. fishing area
7. After they decided to close the park, and were clearing out some of the artifacts, somebody set it on fire.

H. Mines / Strikes

1. The strike of 1959 was one of the most severe strikes in Butte history.
2. Extreme violence broke out against the management of the striking mines.
 - a. Boss's homes were broken into.
 - b. Boss's homes and families were terrorized.
 - c. Innocent bystanders were often severely injured.
3. Some good things came out of some of the strikes.
 - a. one agreement to let pump men to continue working so the mines would be free of water and the workers could return to work immediately after an agreement was made between management and the unions.

- b. A biannual cost of living raise was granted to miners.
4. Unions and related strikes are believed to have prevented other industries from entering Butte. Therefore, Butte remained a one industry town until the closing of the Anaconda Company.
5. The mining strikes had a very detrimental affect on Butte.

Butte History Interview

Interviewed: James Miller

Interviewer: Krista Miller

General topic: "Growing up in Butte America"

Krista Miller

"Please tell me what life was like in Butte, MT, from July 22, 1931 (your date of birth) to the present. Please include issues like religion, sports, cultures, social aspects, the Columbia Gardens, schools, economics, rivalries, the mines and any strikes you may remember."

James Miller

"High school actually, I was in the grades of some where in the vicinity of 1936 to about 1945. During that particular time I was in the latter part of the depression. And during those years things were very difficult as far as making a living was concerned hardly anybody had anything as far as money or material goods. But in that time religion was a very strong emphasis to my remembrance in Butte as far as the Catholics were concerned, and we had a strong element as well as a strong part of Chinese and the Serbian church was pretty dominant. As far as I'm concerned, I for the most part was raised a Catholic, even though I only went to a Catholic school for two years. During that time you had something like ten or eleven Catholic grade schools in town. You had St. Patrick's, St. Joseph's, St. John's, Holy Savior, Sacred Heart, St. Lawrence, Immaculate Conception, St. Ann's, if I didn't say St. Joseph's. Then on the other side of it you had 10 or 12 grade schools. If I think about this during the war or during these years the population in town was possibly 70,000 people or there about during my childhood and high school days. During that particular time if I remember ..."

"Did you mean there was 10 or 12 high schools or 10 or 12 grade schools?"

"No, 10 or 12 grade schools, and you had Butte High School, you had a girl's Central separate from the boy's Central. And of course they have changed considerably. But at that particular time, myself I went to a Catholic school for the first two years. Due to a change in our address and so forth, and due to a change in economics I decided to go to Lincoln school for the 3rd through the 8th grades. and then from the Lincoln school I went to the Butte High School. And at the time, the same time as I say. I was raised in a family of 2 brothers and one sister. and we always had a joke about this as we grew up because the one brother and myself were always pro-Butte High as opposed to my sister and my young brother who were for Central and it went that way through all our life. It was a constant argument when ever there was a ball game. For the most part schools at that time were a lot different. You didn't have a lot of excess teachers. You, it seems like to me you only had those that are necessary. I can remember not knowing of a man teacher until possibly I was in the seventh grade or something of that nature and I went to wood-working which we used to go to the Webster Garfield which was down on Aluminum St. and then that burned down. We went to the old Butte High School, until I got out of grade school. In any event, one of the things that used to amaze me was a man his name was Bill Cullen during those years and he was so helpful to me. Because for some reason or another, I got along good with him I ended up working for him, keeping score

in the American legion baseball. Which is the fore runner to what we have now in Butte and around the country of the little leagues."

"That's where the little leagues started?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact, I was going through my papers the other day and, I just found a certificate that I was on the Lincoln School class B champion baseball team. I didn't even know I was on that team looking back at it now. But the point I got a lot of good out of is that Bill Cullen being the athletic director for the whole school system would go from school to school, carry on athletics, help coach, advise and so forth he pretty much did it all by himself. And then we were able to go to what we called the old Butte High School gym and we played there. During those years the YMCA was used quite extensively. I was lucky, maybe because I became friends with the next door neighbor and his name was Lole Johnson and he was a former superintendent of schools. I guess he felt we were broke so what he did was pay for my scholarship for the YMCA on a yearly basis for several years which was his donation I guess, but in any event I benefited from it. During those years of course, being young we really didn't know everything that was going on, naturally. We didn't have a lot of problems then that they have now. As far as wants and needs and pressures because of course, there was no television and things of that nature so the best thing you could do was on Friday night or Saturday afternoon is go the Park Theater. It cost 5 cents and you bought a bag of popcorn for 10 cents and you stayed there all day."

"Where was that at?"

"That was down on east Park just where the First bank is on east Park where the drive in bank is, just about where the theater was. Then of course, for entertainment that's pretty much what we did. Then, from there then I guess as you grow up a little we would go to mixers that used to be held in the Carpenter's Hall on Granite St., and go to the ball games on Friday like the others. Hang around the Moxon Cafe and play the pinball machine, and that was pretty much it. Now as far as what we did for the most part, we stayed in our neighborhood hardly ever left if except as I said before to go to a movie. And if you wanted anything then you had to go out and earn your own money, or else you didn't go anywhere because your mothers and fathers didn't have any money to give you. So actually I spent a lot of time during my childhood days, shoveling sidewalks and doing things that I could to raise a nickel. If it be selling beer bottles, pop bottles, or whatever anything to make a nickel. Then none of us of course had a car during that particular time because cars weren't in the mode as much as they are today of course. When I think about it, personally, I had a good education. As far as rivalry concerned in the schools, there was a great deal of rivalry. We had as they do now, your school tournaments, your school leagues, basketball, football, track, and you took part in most everything. At least we did anyway. So there was a lot of rivalry. But, when I went on to high school, things changed quite a bit and it wasn't, I was there for maybe a year and I decided to go to work. So I got a job after school. So for the most part throughout high school I simply went to work everyday after school and that was the size of it. I quit playing sports and things of that nature. But as far as the money was concerned, we had to do that in order to help pay our way through school. Which I was fortunate enough to do."

"High school and grade school? How much was it?"

"Well as far as cost is concerned, you had to buy pencils, you had to buy notebooks, and as you got older, you had to have money to go out on the weekend. You had to buy your class ring, your pictures, your graduation outfit and things of that nature which I was able to do, because I made 50 cents a hour. During those years which was not very much money. But in any event, what I can remember there was a terrific amount of rivalry between the schools, which is still true today I guess. But there wasn't any real maliciousness that we have in our situation, our area today."

"How about between Butte and Anaconda?"

"There was a lot of rivalry between Butte and Anaconda.

As far as rivalry between Butte and Anaconda, it's just as bad, it was as bad as it is now. Some of the stories that I heard about former players who played with Butte High and Anaconda and their antics. I often wondered about it but we used to hear stories about Chow Maguirre, when somebody hit him, he'd go bite their finger and things of that nature, and between the two schools. I think this has carried on. The bad part of that particular thing is, it's the people who aren't playing the sport who are probably creating most of the problems outside. I think that's the way it has been. Then as far as the town during that particular period of time, most of the town was uptown as we call it. Now when I say uptown I mean that area north of Front St. We joke about it but if I was, when I was younger and had some money, I could have bought an awful lot of land out where Buttrey's is, and out where the mall is and things of that nature. But we didn't know. But in any event, "uptown" pretty much consisted of Butte being the main street which it is now but of course is dilapidated in that sense of the word. We had a number of stores uptown, whether it be JCPennies, whether it be Hennesy's, whether it be Sear's, Wein's, Weinberg's, The Hub Clothing, Phil Judd's, just to name a few. And everything that you wanted was uptown. The one thing we did have and that is of course bars, and that is a trait of Butte that goes back I guess to the early 1900's there were maybe 3 or over 300 bars in this town. But as a little kid, and looking to make money, I used to go out on Saturday nights and Sunday mornings selling Sunday newspapers, and be down in the Fin town, which was your location of your Finish people. I'd go through the different boarding houses and the hotels selling the Saturday or the Sunday morning paper, and this was pretty common. But I never felt that I was going to get hurt or anything like that because we didn't have that type of group. Oh, I guess you had a lot of your fights and so-forth, but being a little kid I probably stayed out of the bad places where ever they might have been. Like down on east Park with the C.O.D. area or the Silver King or down on Main St. with the Silver Dollar and that type of thing. Or the board of trade and I stayed away from those places. But in any event, during this time I felt that I had a pretty wholesome life and Butte had a pretty good city as far as the town was concerned. Now during this period of time of course, Krista just mentioned earlier about the Columbia Gardens, was it significant? I personally the Columbia Gardens in the Summer had more significance to Butte, MT as a child and a place for me and my family to go to then anything that goes on today. Just this brief statement here, when we were little, in grade school and so forth, during the summer time, we always went to the Columbia Gardens. Of course, we made up a bologna sandwich, we had a package of some cookies and maybe if we had fifty cents to ride on the rides and so forth out the Columbia Gardens."

"How far away was it?"

"It was out on the east side where Washington has his open pit now."

"Did you just walk there?"

"No, what they did is you went down to the Park and Main and by the old Rialto Theater and you got on the Trolley car, this is first, and we rode the trolley car out to the Columbia Gardens. But I can't remember now in my lifetime when they took the trolley car out, but they replaced it with the bus. So in reality, you went out to the Columbia Gardens on Thursdays free of charge. Now that didn't mean everything you got out there was free, it simply means they got you there to the C.G. and you had to bring the little sack lunch that I referred to. So then we would in turn do up on the hill or some area, and like most we'd probably go eat the lunch too fast. Then after we would eat the lunch, we'd go up on this playground. They had the hobby horse, they had the giant swings, parallel bars, monkey bars, and doll house and we used to play up on the playground, oh, for most of the day and I always remember some of the supervisors who were up there. Some of them were pretty stern, of course they wouldn't let you do a lot of things. Then we used to run around up there and of course, early they had a beautiful flower garden, a nursery up there. Where they raised a lot of flowers. We used to go in there and look around and things of that nature. They had a ball field up there but actually they didn't play too many ball games. They did prior to that, the old mines league and on Miner's Union Day they had a party out there."

"What's the old mine's league?"

"The old mine's league is oh..."

"That's not the legion team is it?"

"The old mine's league was a group of independent guys who played, but they played out, when they first were playing, they played out at the Clark Park. Do you know where Naval reserve is? Right there at Clark Park. Before they went out they played up at the C.G., there was a big area and picnic grounds. Once a year of course, the miner's union would have their union day celebration up there and there first aid contests, and things of that nature. Well in any event out at the C.G. they had the biplanes, they had the rollercoaster, and they had the merry go round that you paid to get on. I can't remember now but I think the rides were maybe 5 cents or 10 cents a run. They had the little concession stand, and if I remember right, Frank Panisco he ran a couple of these. Where the area where you'd try to catch some fish in the water, the fish tank and things like that. They always had good ice cream and pop and so forth. Then down the end they had your popcorn. Then if you went across, you had your big ballroom. So actually, where it was really good at is if you wanted your family to go out on a picnic and they didn't have a car, they could get the bus and go out to the C.G. If they had a car they could have birthday parties and so forth and they didn't have to go 10 or 20 miles away. They could go 3 miles up and they were next to the mountains."

"How long does it stay open for?"

"I think like, to me, it used to be open in the day time and then they would close it after 10 o'clock, the picnic areas had to be cleared out and they had to leave the area by about 10 o'clock, dark I think it was during that time."

"What year did it close?"

"Oh, I can't remember when they actually closed it, they closed it, I think, I don't think Arco closed it. I think it was closed before Arco came in here and they were looking for, just about that time anyway. I remember my brother Pig had a job working up there, putting up a fence and taking out a lot of stuff in that pit. I remember the big arguments that they had when they were trying to get all of the different artifacts out of the C.G. like the hobby horses and the playground areas and then they, somebody put a torch to the old ballroom. This really created a lot of problems. They lost a lot of things. Actually right now they've got that playground stuff, you know out there where the naval reserve is, they've taken the swings and put them out there and things of that nature. So actually, they've made use of it. I guess after they closed it they wanted to try to, they attempted to build a park out by the old girl scout camp, and they spent a lot of money for it and it went for nothing. Let me see now,"

"When they had the games at Clark's Park was there, the baseball games, was there a lot of people?"

"What do you mean?"

"The old mine's league, you said they played a Clark's Park."

"Well the old mines league, oh you had, I always remember one guy, Frankie Corzetti, he was the third base coach for the New York Yankees during their heyday, and he got his start here in the old mines league. Oh, they had a lot of future major leaguers that played out there. It was still, no television, and it was something for the people to go see, so naturally you're going to have a lot more people out there. I remember this copper league back in the early late 40's, early 50's. You had at the Clark's Park approximately 2 to 3000 people every night out there to see ball games because they were good baseball. But in any event, it was something to do. Also during that time as we grew up they had a lot more independent basketball leagues then they have now, more people took part, again for the sake of something to do. Not only in basketball, we had our little neighborhood football teams, we had our neighborhood track teams and so there was a lot of rivalry between neighborhoods, and I guess this was true all the way through Butte."

"What do you remember about the Butte mines, the strike of 1959?"

"Well the thing that I remember about the strike in 1959 and I'm not really sure on this but I think it's the one that either lasted either 5 months, 6 month, or a year and I'm not sure. What as far as I'm concerned about the strike, and you take the word strike and it's a dirty word as far as Butte's concerned, it always has been and always will be. My memory of the strike probably one that meant more to me, if you go back to 1946 and I remember I was a freshman in high school and they had this strike. And during this time we used to hang around this one guy's house, and Mack McArtin was his name and he worked on the hill and he used to tell us all these little stories. Well it just so happened, that particular strike, I used to live over on Edison St. behind the Enselmo Mine. And it just so happened that the guy downstairs of us which these people were good people too, I know nothing about what anything else, but Bob was a boss. Bob Cox was a boss on one, in one mine, across the street, John Kennis was a boss in another

mine and up the street and I can't remember the guy's name, he was also a boss in another mine. And here we were, I think my mother worked in a laundry, so we never had diddly-fiddle to do with the mines. But in any event we were terrified because this was a bad strike in the sense that they still had the guards manning the gallosframes because they were there during the war time and so they were still up there. Well I guess the procedure was that when there was a strike everybody was supposed to leave. Well you know as well as I, I guess, the bosses were not part of the union so therefore they stayed behind the fence. So if you stayed behind the fence, you were classified as a scab. Well that particular strike, I remember going up behind the Enselmo and maybe 10 o'clock at night, Cold, Cold as heck, and these guys had these fires in these 55 gallon drums and they were walking the picket line. Well in any event this went on, during this particular time the different strikers, protesters whatever, they went to these different bosses homes. Broke into the homes, broke out the windows, threw their furniture outside and so forth. In any event, it was a lot of violence. I remember this one friend of mine, he was just watching and somebody took a pot shot and shot his eye out, and he had nothing to do with the strike whatsoever. But when I look back at it and I see what they were doing, they were striking for 3 cents and hour, 5 cents an hour, whatever, but once they were out on strike, they lost a lot. So in the long run the unions became more solidified but I don't think anybody ever won any strikes. As far as I'm concerned that was probably the most serious one, I as a person, went through. I can remember the black cars coming up to old man Kennis's house across the street and throwing rocks at the house and things of that nature. And during that time these people had to send their wives and families out of state during the course of the strike so they wouldn't get beat up and things of that nature. Well that philosophy stayed the same as far as strikes are concerned during the years but probably the big difference came and I can't remember which strike it was, when they finally agreed to let the pump men go down the mines and keep pumping the water during the strike. As a result when the guys were ready to go back to work after the strike was over, then they would go to work the next day because didn't have the mines all flooded. So this was an asset. Then I guess as time went on, they gained a few more rights. Probably one of the best things through these strikes they ever gained, was that cost of living raise which they got a raise twice a year automatic as long as the cost of living went up. To make it short, or near as I can through my lifetime, Butte has always been a one industry town. Everything revolved around the Anaconda Company. If it wasn't the Anaconda Company, it would have been the Montana Power Co. But as time went on, it kind of stretched out. I remember the Montana Hardware which belonged to the company. I remember the Interstate Lumber Co. which belonged to the company, and so all these different side businesses, were owned by the Company, everything that happened. So when there was a strike, and the miner's did get a two cent raise, you went downtown to the store and a loaf of bread went up five cents. Or the price of a ticket to a movie went up a nickel. So because they got their two cents, everybody else raised their prices, and I felt, I have, that the strikes have been a definite factor in Butte. There's probably a lot of other things that you can think of. But to me, it hurt. Fortunately, I didn't work in the mines, now maybe if I did work in the mines I would have been a retired miner now, who knows. Maybe I'd have been dead. But the point is, I still survived living in this area because I was in an unrelated field, as I taught for 30 years. But in any event, if you, at least the way I'm looking at it and I probably don't know all the picture to it, everybody has a different view point on it. But I do think that the fight between the union and the company, stopped a lot of things from ever happening in this town. Other

people will tell me the company did this, the company did that. Well I felt the unions did this, the unions did that, and you had a case of two wrongs don't make a right. But as I grew up, I felt that strike time probably had a greater detriment to the town than it had a value."