

Laura Hart, interviewed at her home, #505 Finlen Hotel, by Teresa Jordan, 12/9/85.

Laura was matron of women prisoners at Butte/Silver Bow Jail from around 1973-1981. Still works, on contract, part time.

Born in Wisner (sp?) NE, January 13, 1917.

Husband, Edward, with U.P railroad. They came to Butte about 1941. Daughter, Jackie, was about 2 years old. Lived on Platinum St. where the Town Pump offices are now--there was an apartment house there. Didn't take too long to make friends--by time moved to 1st street, after couple years here (?) had friends, felt at ease. Butte was, to Laura, a scary town-- had heard so much about it. Men coming and going 24 hours a day. Butte has to grow on you. You don't like it when you first come like you do some towns. It just grows on you. What grows on you most is the people. Butte very ugly. Wisner lush--here a blade of grass struggled to grow. Very cautious about being alone-- wouldn't walk down East Park.

Husband was machinist in the round house. Belonged to International Association of Machinists, out of Pocatello. Had had no experience w/ labor--it was entirely new. Nebraska sort of anti-union--farmer independence. Farmer thinks the laborer is making a lot of money.

Edward died 14 years ago. L started working in jail 13 years ago. Had been practical nurse at the hospital 14 years--actually, started as aid, and went back to school to get practical nurse degree. Had friend who was matron at the jail--she getting married. Said I should apply for the job. Not many wanted to apply--it was not considered an appealing job. Sounds worse than it is. I was working nights and thought I don't want to spend the rest of my life in the hospital.

Matron at jail--care of women prisoners. There 24 hours a day. Search them, feed them, take care of their needs, get them ready for court.

Have two separate categories, juveniles, and 18 and above. Goes through trends. For awhile, all juvenile; at that time, they put them in jail for being runaways and things that are now called "status offenses" & you can't jail them for it. At that time, could put drunks in jail, which you can't do now. Had some regular customers. Picked up at M&M, places like that. Now drunks taken home; some sent to Care Unit. Unless they have committed a crime. Law changed 4 or 5 years ago.

Lived at jail 8 or 9 years. until '81. Now have someone there-- L works graveyard, fills in for her 2 days off. She works the 40 hours, L only goes in when they call. If there is nobody there,

don't have to go.

W/ layoff, increase in family violence. Last few years, especially around the holiday (Christmas). Might have become alcohol related, but awful lot of them were good family men, good providers. They become frustrated. Lot of the men didn't even believe in women working. Not the common ordinary drunk. Jail population--not so much among women as among men--is really increasing. They have practically a full house right now. This weekend, they said if they got any more, they'd have to use the women's quarters for men and we would have to give women notice to appear.

Last week, signed people up for Christmas baskets at Salvation Army--Christmas toys. Frustrates you because so many of the ones you sign up are the very ones I have in jail. Talking to the Lt at the Salvation Army and he made the statement that, when we signed up so many last Monday, he said, Now we took care of the greedy, but he didn't feel we really got down to the needy.

Usually take a family at Christmas w/ Son and daughter in law. I found one as I was signing them up. Woman, in her 30's, and her 9 year old. Said, "what would you like most for Christmas" and she said, "some heat." It breaks your heart. Just to be warm, she wanted.

Women in jail--primarily for bad checks, problems caused in bars, drunken driving. More women brought in for drunken driving than men.

You will find divorce rate is up. Maybe not even divorced, but separated--easier w/ welfare. Woman that is separated--man can live independently and get it, and the woman can get hers, aid to dependant children. That way they have more to live on. A sad situation.

Layoff increase problems--man and woman situation, living together 24 hours a day and no money, and you get on one another's nerves. My husband was retired, and it was a great deal like that. To be together--there's too much togetherness. Party for retired nurse--she gave little talk, someone said, how do you like retirement. She said, "It's a lot less money and too much togetherness." Layoff a great deal the same. And then you had this big class of people who knew nothing else--all they knew was mines and smelter. My son was one of them. Fortunate he married a girl who had grad from college and she had a job.

They made good money at the mines, now. And they made good money at the concentrator and the smelter. But they were big spenders. They bought everything. But Alan was always tight. He's not like I am--I give mine away. Well, I wouldn't say that he was tight, because he tithes in the church. But he knows where his money goes.

Q: Statistics show, and people say, things a lot better. Do you

see it? I worked last year at Sal. Army, and things are worse this year than last year. Maybe last year still had savings, unemployment. But signed up about 200 more people this year than last.

Like working at the jail, like the girls. I can always say, that's the only people in town I know. They are human beings, and especially the teen agers, as you talk to them, there's always something, a step father or step mother or something that has caused them to do the things they do.

When first came here, thought this would be a horrible place to raise a family. Had been in Lima, MT, a small town; when they closed out the RR there, Butte, the next place, and I just didn't know how I would raise a family here. Now, daughter, Jackie, married to PhD, head of research for Dow Chemical, says, I wish I had a town like Butte to raise my family. Kids here had a lot of independence--lots of places they could roam.

Started working in around 1957, when Al in first grade. Women didn't work. It was a long time before told some friends I was working. But believe that a woman should know enough to be able to make a living.

Tape 1, Side B

Butte was a town of widows. Friend Josie lost father in the mines; her mother brought then up by working in a Boarding House. Got \$7 a week; later raised to to \$9--Josie said they thought they were rich! But everybody good to one another. In Butte, people will always spend their last dollar for a raffle ticket to help somebody out. Food bank--last week, putting up baskets, figured there was \$72 food in each one, put up about 80 a week. That's a lot of donations. MT Power is very generous. Really don't know who else gives that kind of money.

Our Lady of the Rockies--good idea to start having memorials, much better idea than flowers. Flowers at a funeral are crazy.

So much uproar over Our Lady--at one time, Butte really divided in religion. Knights of Columbus vs. the Masons, practically a war--and now some people belong to both. Joe Roberts who spearheaded Our Lady is the greatest--he can do anything he sets out to do. Think it would be good if he took over the skating rink project. He has had all sorts of upheavals in his life, his business has been boom or bust. But he has such faith, and they all work out. Politically involved. Helped get Micone voted in over Powers for mayor--didn't think he had a chance, an Italian in an Irish town.

Laura is German, never identified too much with ethnic group here; not many Germans. And Germans so out of favor w/ WWI. Butte has no tolerance of colored people--came to work in mines and men went on strike. They (the blacks) lasted one day. Whites said they smelled.

When son Al decided to work for Co--his father was against it. He was sure we would get a call on the phone that he was dead. I said, they better not call me. They better come and tell me.

Six of them hired out--went to look for a job one afternoon and they all were hired. They were going to work for 6 months and then they were going to CA. I think one of the boys went to California and the rest are all here. Read A Mile High and a Mile Deep--good about the feelings of many boys that they were only going to work for a short time, get a nest egg, then they would leave the mines. About several of them being killed in the mines.

L wonders how many men through the years were killed in the mines here. In the cemetery, wandering through, L will jot down names, go up to archives, find obituaries. One section of the cemetery filled w/ men killed in the mines. In obituaries, they didn't find them for two or three days. They didn't even know they were missing. Butte had an awful lot of single miners--reason for all the boarding houses. And I suppose nobody cared.

Marilyn Meaney (sp?) went to England. Woman learned she was from Butte, gave her a list of names, maybe 20, of people who had come to Butte and they were never heard of again. Marilyn and her two little girls went through the cemetery and found many of them, the headstones, took pictures, looked up the obituaries, sent it all back to lady in England. Marilyn said that through it her girls, one is, L thinks, 13, one 15, got interested in history.

Butte's future? We will rise again. I really believe it. We've had so many disappointments--Haven't made up mind yet about Washington Construction. Somebody who understood tax laws and tax loopholes would probably know if Washington Const is really going to operate here.

If did start up, would probably provide very few jobs at first. But even a couple hundred would be a big boost to Butte. Sure of one thing--that the unions are going to have to give. If they don't, there is no chance. Thinks they are just about ready to. Unions have a place, they are very needed. But they had too much power. People sit around and blame the Anaconda Company, but it isn't all the Anaconda Company. The unions were to blame, too. The men were to blame.

So many people move from Butte, but come back to live here. And they know nothing is here.

Wonders what is going to happen to Montana Tech. Also, to MHD--every years they have a battle over being funded. L worries that when Mike Mansfield dies--he brought MHD to Butte--it will end.

Concerned, also, that Montana Power will leave Butte. Paul Schmechel seems committed to Butte, but what about when he's gone and they bring somebody in who doesn't have ties to Butte?

W/ B. M. Place in as head of Anaconda, a banker rather than a local boy, change in community involvement. Columbia Gardens closed. We lost the good jobs in the Anaconda to people who didn't care about living in Butte. That's when they built complexes in Denver and Los Angeles. Traditionally, Anaconda had been home grown boys. And they cared.

Columbia Gardens--when L first came, they had the greenhouse and you would go out there to buy your plants. Young people, like Al, had their proms there. The proms haven't been so great since they lost that setting. It was just beautiful.

Remember standing above where they had the Anaconda Company shield planted all in flowers, and on the other side was a harp. Remember an elderly fellow standing there saying, this is the closest place to heaven I'll ever see. I think that was right. It absolutely was a peaceful, beautiful place to go. The rollercoaster was nice, the merry go round was nice, the seaplanes was nice, the picnic grounds were nice. Everything about it was just beautiful.

Maybe CG wouldn't be used if we had it now--what with transportation so much better, everybody doing different things. But the merry go round there was a nickel. When they closed it, L was living at the jail. Al called--said, "It's gone." Don't think that anyone here thought that they'd close Columbia Gardens. Don't think anyone thought mining would ever go down. But now, when somebody says they don't think something will happen, I say, look at Columbia Gardens. Never thought Company would go. Thought there would always be some copper mined in Butte.

Tape 2, Side A

L kind of thinks underground mining will start again.

When ARCO came in, remember an article--that they were the best corporate citizens that Butte could ever get. We were going to have a swimming pool--I don't know, four or five. Going to have playgrounds, everything. I think it was four or five that was in the planning stage. There used to be a Mr. Marvin. Everytime Mr. Marvin came to town--he came first and he promised, all these promises. Then he came and he started chiselling away. Everytime I saw him on TV I'd say, Oh God, that bald headed bastard is back in town. Because it seemed like something would be going down. They were just chiselling away at us.

Think sincere when first came in? No. I really don't. Don't know if there is a person alive who can understand everything about taxes and tax structures, but they have written off as much as they could. Afraid that is what Washington is now. Is Washington going to do the same? Is it just going to sit as a big hole in the ground. Worry about the water sitn in the pit--its going to be a menace. Jailer lives in that area, said some

boys, 10,12 years old, last summer were caught down in it swimming. Fences around it, but they are down. And who is going to be responsible?

Butte Forward movement--Had a boarding kennel on Harrison Avenue at the time. I thought they were crazy--and you had several different factions--some man come along and it was going to be Timber Butte. Sometimes when I look back, think maybe it would have been a good idea. Maybe they would still be mining here if we had gotten off the hill. I don't know. Do think gambling would help. Butte has so much more to offer than Las Vegas, so much more around. Used to have gambling here. Brother came from Nebraska some time after Laura & Ed moved here. He won \$50 in a slot machine. He was just sold on Butte! And farmers usually don't put their money in slot machines. Gambling was probably shut down between 35 and 40 years ago.

Always had gambling in Butte--legal, illegal. Like bootlegging. Still there. There was an old part to the jail that used to be juvenile quarters on second floor and then it was just left there. L has key to it, stored bikes in it. Used to go in and see names of people who later became legislators and prominent people in Butte who were in there as juveniles who had carved their names on the wall. Saw one man who was a deacon in the church I attend, said, you know what, I found your name carved in the wall. He said, yup, I was there. Maybe shows that it did some good to lock them up. Those names--one was a Millar (sp?) that was in the legislature. Children on a farm live a much more protected life. Everynight, Butte kids go out. Farm children don't. They are more protected, have more to do at home.

Butte people--greatest people in the world. During 1st part of WWII, lived in little Mormon community in Utah. We were only people not Mormon. Here, people take you in. We aren't Catholic, but they took us in. W/ the Mormons, you never quite made it. Butte people the friendliest, greatest. I've had people say to me, I don't know how you can say that because I don't think people of Butte are friendly at all, but I think you have go part way. You have to have an interest. And then they are very caring people.

Wouldn't want to live anywhere else. And I could now because I have my pension from the state, railroad retirement, social security. I could move. But don't want to.

From old time miners up until today, still have respect for women here. When I think that I was afraid to walk E. Park--it was not the town, it was me. Now I wouldn't think anything of walking to the jail to go to work at midnight. Butte is frightening when you first come.

Division between people who mined & others who worked at other jobs? Yes--miners looked down upon. Remember during a strike--I don't see how you could see men go on strike, families go hungry and say it didn't affect you. But L remembers a nurse at the

hospital said, "I don't give a damn if the strike is settled. It don't affect me in any way." But I don't see how you could say that. You are affected by that. When people are suffering, you are affected.

Had miner friends, lots of them. Learned a lot from them. You learned--coming from NE, you do't think that much about labor. From a small town in Nebraska. One friend I had here, she pulled out this piece of paper one time when I was visiting, and she said, "In case you want to see it, here's the list of scabs." And she had them, and she'd say, "so and so's Dad was a scab." People didn't associate with scabs people, their children. That has held true to time the mines closed.

McDonalds opening in Butte--for years, on radio show Party Line, that's all we heard. I thought if McDonalds came it would be our guardian angel to these people on Party Line. I don't know what it's done for Butte. That's where our dog kennel was--if we had kept it, I'd be rich today. But on the show they'd say, "We don't even have a McDonalds." To me, it isn't that great. One of salesmen that sells to jail, L asked him, he said that McDonald's buys nothing locally, not one thing. He said McD's was built in Butte because they have one or two in Helena and Livingston and this completed a route where they make their deliveries. This is what he said and he was a salesman out of Billings. That didn't make really much sense, did it? But for years, old people would call in--we don't even have a McDonald's! L thinks that someone who pays minimum wage--and I guess under Reagan's administration can pay less than minimum to students--can't see that it is going to be that great for the town. See McD's probbly squeezing out someone else--Wendy's, Artic Circle, Taco John's. Hurt Pork Chop John's.

Difference between uptown and the flats? Two different worlds. When first came, area of Buffalo St, Anaconda road and stuff--that was almost like living on the wrong side of the tracks, like in a small town. And you just didn't want to get up here because you didn't want your kids to associate with those miners kids. I always remember an incident of a woman, she lived up on Boardman Street--that's where the Goodwill Tavern is. And she said, I've got to get out of here. I'm not raising my two kids up here. And they moved to the West side. Well, she had two of the rattiest kids you ever saw. But there was Mrs. Murphy, that lived right next door. She stayed there, in, I think, a one bedroom house. And she had four boys. She stayed on Boardman Street. Three of them became doctors and one a CPA. There is no wrong side or right side. And there never was. I guess it was in people's minds but it never existed.

Son in law one of Butte's professional kids--PhD in chemistry, came from a poor family here. Ted Tabor. m. Jackie Hart.

These people that came from Europe, they came for one reason--that their children would have a better life than they had. They believed in an education. In a lot of European countries, they

were deprived of it. Parents pushed children--not in the wrong way; encourage would probably be a better word--to get an education, to be something. Butte has lost a lot of young because there no jobs here.

In L's circle of miner friends, a lot of their kids would work for company during the summer--Anaconda Co at that time was good to give kids a job. Would work, but only temporary. Went on to get education.

Tape 2, Side B

Son in law has one desire--that he can come back to MT and teach--either at U, or maybe research lab down at Hamilton.

L now loves uptown, but didn't think she ever would. Took moving to the jail to make her think "The flat hasn't got it like uptown Butte, it hasn't got the flavor." Flat could be in any town. L retired as Matron of Jail four years ago. Lived there 8 years--3 room apartment, with 20 foot ceilings. Jail is at Quartz and Alaska. 3rd floor, 3 rooms. They never wanted to spend any money in the apartment. There was a Mrs. Sullivan in the days before social security, that raised her three daughters in there. She didn't even have a sink. Some old fellow said he could remember when the commissioners put a sink in there, the whole town was in an uproar over spending that money. And she raised three wonderful girls--one married to a doctor. She had no other income when she was there. She had to do something. someone said the girls hated it so bad, and I can see where it would be hard--where do you live? I live at jail. L always kept her address down at the house where Al lives because she said nobody would ever cash a check if you put County Jail on it.

Mrs. Sullivan was there quite awhile, L was there longer than most people stay. One that was there before L used to say--L worked at jail 2 days a week when worked at hospital, on days off. that would be other matron's days off. She used to say, "if I can just get out of here before they find me dead in jail. I don't want to die in jail." Never bothered L, where you are when you die. One of ladies that was before Mrs. Sullivan, they found dead up there. One of the deputies, Dick, used to say to L, "I helped carry her down. And if you die up here, we're just throwing you over the side." Dick many years younger than L, and he's dead. Didn't get to throw me over the side.

Interesting life. L developed a closeness w/ the deputies that she really treasures. Butorovitch is a good sheriff but just can't bring them together. W/ consolidation, sheriff and police combined, and as long as you have one left from old dept, you're going to have a separation.

Dept does well for number of men it has. Don't have backup on calls that they should have. Dept cut from 65 to around 39. Couple appts going to be made. Only a couple weeks ago, up at jail and one of the deputies came in, said, would you guess that



for today I'm it? I'm the only policeman on the street." What if you had a bank robbery? It worries you. They have a lot of bad calls. L doesn't believe in one man car at night. One man should never go into barroom brawl alone.

Women on force? Yes--when Pat Hagle (sp?) sherriff-- had been highway patrol, then undercover in Billings. Came, won sherriff by landslide. Had a woman deputy (hired under previous sheriff), cute, long-haired blond. He left his wife, she left her husband. They rode off into the west. Probably around 8 years ago. She left husband w/ good job at MPC. They are really nothing today--both got into drugs. he car salesman, she campus policemen at Billings, Eastern. People not at all accepting of it. The family was a holy place in Butte, the home. You didn't fool around with it. Maybe the men went to Mercury St. But there was this--the home, the family was protected.

Pat Hagle and L had difficulty. He decided she wasn't doing enough to earn money. L was deputy sherriff. Decided she should be working the streets--she was 63 years old. When he wrote her a letter said she had to go out on street, she said, I won't do it. Went to union, president said, we want to get rid of him, that will be one good way you can help. So L went on street for one night--press coverage, etc. He called her the next day, we don't really want you out on the street. He put this thing in the paper, the reason I was going out on the street was because they were short of policemen and they needed me to protect 'em. Me, that's scared of a gun. Made kind of a fool of himself. That was around October and he was gone by the end of the year.

Not so many years ago that Mercury Street was still operating. Can remember a nurse who went to special a madame. Told L she looked up and down the street before she went in. And lots of the girls had dogs--little Pekinese, that sort of thing. Would bring to dog kennel. Sometimes at any time of the day or night.

Had dog kennel before became a nurse.

Involved with Food Bank, Salvation Army. Was involved with Red Cross for 1 year. Always take personally a family at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Wouldn't be as involved in a small town--they just don't get out in the world as much. Now, kids are sent off to college, do get out more.

L graduated from H.S. in 1935. Middle of depression. Was valedictorian of class, never had chance to go to school. Six in the family. You had to hold onto the land, that all her father knew. That's why L still hangs onto it. At one time, could have sold the piece she owns for \$80,000. Today, for \$24,000. So have to keep it now. But you feel a closeness to it. Grandfather had homesteaded farm at start of civil war. Andrew Jackson's name is on deed. Could have sold it and invested the money, but what would I have? Nothing. Nothing to cling to. Money isn't everything. Money is only what you make it do for you.

Had always wanted to live at Finlen Hotel. It was the hub of everything. Feel like a copper king to live here. At night, when L goes out at midnight to go to work, the lights in the lobby kind of flicker, and I wonder what all the shennanigans that have taken place in this building. A lot. The stairway, the rungs are copper--really highly polished, beautiful. One missing, someone must have taken it for a souvenir.

Butte is as close a community now as it used to be, but the neighborhoods are not as close. When everybody had a front porch and you used to have a cup of tea with them, a cookie. That in the days when women didn't work, they had a little more spare time. Their whole life was their family.

Don't know if they weren't right. But L sure would't want to go back to that time. Wonders how these women even survived when the husband was killed in the mine. Someway they did, but they were just servants. They must have cried themselves to sleep many a night wondering how they were going to feed and clothe their families. Schools were more flexible. Friend who lost mother started school at 4.

Tradition in Butte of girls raised in good families marrying wild men--like Evel Knievel's wife. From family that has sign company. Don't know what it is that these girls from good families want to marry outlaws.

Irish believe in education for sons, but not for daughters.

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Other people to talk to: Lt. Brookleman at Salvation Army, and wife Shirley.

Maury Mulcahy--about Evel Knievel, about labor, politics. Retired from Police dept. Organized the union here. Old time Irish family. Use Laura's name.

Agnes Moran--father was old time soloon keeper. Tells about father bootlegging. Put in jail, but could have meals catered. Not kept with the others. Her husband was a policeman. she raised in a beautiful house up on N. Main--house said to be built by Clark for his girl friends. She sold it for \$4,000. She lives 110 N. Washington. Probably wouldn't want you to use her real name.