

BUTTE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
TAPE INDEX

Interviewee: Lemm Margaret R.
 Last First Middle
Date of Interview: May 9, 1980
Place: Butte
Interviewer: Mary Murphy

Context of Interview: Mr. & Mrs. Lemm live on the Flat, in a house they bought in 1942. Mrs. Lemm and I talked in her living room, a plainly furnished room. The most prominent things are a piano and bookshelf filled with family pictures. The interview was interrupted several times by phone calls, a neighbor dropping by, and the need for Mrs. Lemm to check her zucchini cakes which were baking. At one point she went upstairs to get a copy of Copper Camp which has a picture of her father Mike McNichols in a drilling contest. Mrs. Lemm loved her life as a nurse, and is still involved with several groups which aid the handicapped. After the interview we talked politics, she is a Carter supporter. Then she drove me to the bus stop and sent me home with half a zucchini cake.

Tape # 1
Side # 1

Father was born in Ireland, came to U.S. when about 13 with 2 sisters who were nuns and mother. Had a farm in Minnesota. His father was dead, he was the oldest. When his sisters found out he was going to marry, they worried about where they would get income. Went to British Columbia after he married. Her mother was from Iowa. Mother worked in boarding houses, that's where she met father. About 1902 came to Butte.

He worked in the Kelly, Leonard, Nest Colusa, the Black Rock was the last. Every year on Miners Union Day had drilling contests. He, Bradshaw and Dickinson Page drilled, he and Bradshaw were champions. Had big rocks, 6'x5' in the back yard and men came down to practice drilling. Had a blacksmith shop where the miners sharpened their own drills in their yard. They laid off work for a month or two to train, ran and ate porterhouse steaks. Might split \$750 a piece.

Mother didn't work after she was married. Had saved her money when young, at one time had \$1500. The Clarks were distant relations, one came and said he was going to invest in some mining stock or something. She asked him to invest hers but he said no, that she couldn't afford to lose the little she had. He made a mint on his. She went and invested in some mining stock and lost every bit of it.

Lived in McQueen, a lovely community of Austrians, English, Serbians, French, Irish. Got along beautifully, took care of their homes, had gardens. Kids used to steal flowers and vegetables. Meaderville was west of them. Great eating places there. No restaurants in McQueen. East Butte was south of McQueen. Did some gambling in McQueen, but not like in Meaderville. Meaderville was the gambling spot. "I wouldn't give up my kid days in McQueen addition for all the rice in China." They were loyal people and would help one another.

Different groups got along well, but there were still their little festivals they kept to themselves. Were always looking in the windows at different weddings. Carried on own traditions and foods. Some raised pigs, smoked their own meats. Some had ovens outside to make bread. Povitica was one of main dishes, wasn't a Christmas or birthday that one of those families wouldn't send one over to their house. Mother would reciprocate. Her parents born in Ireland, but she in U.S.

St. Patrick's Day quite the celebration for the Irish. Didn't have too much to do with the Swedish and Norwegian, they were up around E. Park. Went to some of their dances when she was older. Austrians had a stringed band. The funerals

were big events, too. Thinks the tradition of going to funerals has lasted stronger in Butte than other places. Went to one Irish wake, but it was very sedate, "this was a highly respected man." Would never leave the body. Her father was waked in their home. Died in 1924 at age 52. Worked in the mines until 18 months before, had cancer of the jaw. Don't know whether it was a piece of steel that had hit him in the jaw which caused it. Had never been hurt before, never missed a shift, except for bouts with tonsillitous once or twice. Called it Quincy sore throat. Didn't have any superstitions. Was a foreman on the night shift at the Black Rock when left. A shift boss, never bothered him when they were on strike.

"The wages they worked for in those days, this was something, 'And it's still not right for the working people." Thinks unions are hurting the country now, but "when you look at the price of food, the cost of living, and if these people didn't have someone to fight for them...what in the name of God would they do?"

Father was a boss. "He was a diplomat, but never deceitful." "No one could run over him, but he was...mild-mannered with no meanness."

She went to Holy Saviour School. Everybody spoke English. Kids used to say to their parents who would speak to them in native tongue, "You're in America now, speak United States." Never had any trouble making yourself understood to neighbors. Tells story about Italian woman in the hospital.

Decision to become nurse: had seen what was going on when father was in hospital, two older sisters were teachers and it didn't seem worthwhile, had an aunt who was a nurse, remembered how kind her mother was taking care of neighbors. Were midwives at that time. Mother helped out with one or two births, but didn't want that responsibility.

Father died and they moved to St. Paul. She worked at Brown & Bigelow's, then the telephone company. Were going to train in a hospital out there, where aunt who was nurse/nun was in charge, but returned to Butte after a year and a day for sister to get teaching certificate. Her younger sister went into training and she still had to work. Worked at Christy's, a little store, worked there till Sept. Needed \$385 for training. All children except one were still living at home.

Went to St. James, started in 1926, graduated in 1929. Worked twelve hour shifts and took classes, lived in the dormitory, got \$10 a month. Had 3 month probation period. Nurses taught the classes, had lots of doctor's lectures. When first went in was leery of packing bedpans, finally could walk down the hall with two.

Tape # 1

Side # 2

Loved every phase of nursing. Sister worked in public health down in San Francisco. While students also had to clean up all the rooms, along with studying and taking care of the patients.

Worked on the miners' wards. Often filled: fractured legs, arms, backs. Were good patients, appreciated what you did for them. Hospital didn't treat silicosis, as soon as they recognized it sent them to Galen.

Never noticed any health problems that were particular to Butte, didn't work around TBs. Parents responded well to immunization. Was scary in the beginning. Set up immunization in the Civic Center, also done in schools. Too much paper work. So many bureaus.

When finished her training was hired as assistant superintendent for two years. The new mother superior that came in saw fit to have somebody else. After married quit work, between 1931 and 1942. Then worked to 1972. For a while it was true in

nursing that they didn't want married women to work. Then they needed them. Younger ones didn't want to come in and she doesn't blame them, wages are too low. Didn't have benefits.

Had the Montana Nurses Association in her time. It was a professional organization and they didn't do too much. Finally 150 nurses joined a union here in Butte, about 1953. Trying to defeat a bill which allowed the hospitals to hire cheap labor: nurses aides. "They might be tray girls one day and nurses' aide the next day." It was unfair to them, to the nurses and most of all to the patients. Tried to get better wages and conditions. Bill was brought up 4 times, they defeated it 3. Finally couldn't beat the hospital administrations and the Nurses Assoc. Tells story about finding gall stone in patient's stool to illustrate importance of having nurses by the bedside.

Called the Butte Nurses Union. At that time conditions were horrible. Union got some changes out at the county hospital. Union didn't last too long. Nurses have to work. Still thinks they would be afraid of a union.

Went into special duty nursing. Worked a forty hour week and then some. If you had to work overtime, never got a dollar. Were paid on a salary and that was it. There were favorites who were paid a little more. Did special work for about 6 yrs., then into ear, nose and throat. Then went into school nursing. Only three school nurses when started, had 18 schools. Now have about 9 nurses. Visit each room, call and find out why kids were out of school, sometimes do home visit. Did audio and sight screenings. Did two a year, weren't supposed to send to doctor on first screening, but she did. School nurse from 1956 to 1972.

Learned therapy at Kaiser clinic in Oakland, was sent there by family of patient. Whenever someone had stroke, doctor would send for her to see what she could do. Liked the therapy work best of all nursing experience. Had to stop because it was too much on her back and arthritis. Polio foundation paid her \$1.50 an hour. Talks about some of the people she worked with. Would use things around the home rather than expensive equipment.

Doctors "trusted you like no one's business." Treated nurses well. Feels should have more supervision over L.P.N.s and aides.

Her choice to stop working when she married. Had three children, (shows pictures of children and grandchildren)

Tape # 2
Side # 1

Still showing pictures, talking about kids. Son-in-law died of cancer at age 31, lived near nuclear testing grounds.

Not sure when, but during the Depression nurses worked for \$60.00 a month. Husband worked for the railroad, wasn't laid off during the Depression. Started to work when he was thirteen. They met in Butte just before she started training. Would have stayed in Minnesota if sister could have got work. But rents much higher there. Mother didn't go back to work after father died, was two years older than him and had a heart condition. Never want to leave Butte, loves it. "Wouldn't trade her work as a nurse for all the rice in China." Felt that if she saved one child's vision or hearing, she did her job. Only 13 graduated with her, 7 left. Her nickname was Mac. In nursing had the habit of calling each other by last names.