Oral History Number: 098-014, 015
Interviewee: Margaret Cunningham
Interviewer: Helen Bresler
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Helen Bresler: Do you know when your father came to Butte?

Margaret Cunningham: He was in Alaska at the gold rush of 1898, and he came to Butte shortly after that, maybe about 1900.

HB: Why did he come here?

MC: Because he followed mining, and I guess the gold rush was about over. He was following an old uncle of his, or a great uncle, that came west from Pennsylvania after the Civil War. He was accounted as the man that drove the first pick in where the Alice Mine is. Marcus Daly got the honor of finding the Alice Mine. He [my father] followed him [his uncle] around. When he left Pennsylvania, his mother said, “Now you can go”—he was seventeen years old—“you can go if you promise to go to Uncle Ed. He’ll take care of you.”

He went to visit Uncle Ed and he would get behind him. He would go a little bit and miss Uncle Ed. Uncle Ed was a gambler, and he went to Alaska so my dad followed him up there. By the time he got there, Uncle Ed had come back to British Columbia and then the coal mines of Washington: Roslyn and Buckley, Diamond—Black Diamond. I remember him telling us so much about it. He lived in...What is that valley? The Okanogan Valley. He was always telling us, “Next summer we’re going to go to the Okanogan. You never saw anything so beautiful.”

“We’re not going to go to Okanogan,” we’d say. “We like it here!” We never did make it to Okanogan.

He worked in the mines in Pennsylvania. When they were ten years old, they took them in the mines to work as box boys—they called them—and breaker boys. They’d crawl in these little ledges with a box and carry out coal that was in there; bigger men couldn’t get in. He quit school and went to work there. When he was 15 years old, they must give them some kind of a test. He got his coal miner’s license they used to give the men to give full-fledge coal miners. He was pretty smart that he thought he had the world by the tail as a coal miner.

He came to Butte and lived in Walkerville. There was a lot of boarding houses in Walkerville then, and the men that worked in the mines lived in these boarding houses. That’s where he met my mother. She worked in the boarding houses as a cleaning lady and waitress and cook and everything. The Palace Boarding House in Walkerville. They met and they married in 1905.
We lived in East Butte when I was born. I was born in East Butte. Like I told you, there was a panic on then—no work. My father decided it would be a good time for my mother to meet his parents. They lived in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. She picked me up and off I went to Pennsylvania. Took about four days to get there. I guess we went early in the spring, maybe May or June. I was only five months old then. We met the family. In the fall, he came and brought us back. It was four or five days by train to go to Pennsylvania. No such thing as planes.

When I got about three

We lived next to a boarding house down in East Butte. All kinds of men had just come from the old country—from Austria—and they lived at this boarding house. Most of them were out of work then because there was no work to be had. They’d be out in the yard drinking beer and sawing wood. I was out there pestering them. They would talk to me in Austrian and try to put the run on me. I’d come in the house crying and say something I can’t say it right now, but everyone knew what I meant when I’d say it years ago. Something like hodo doma spa (?). I’d go in and say this to my mother, and she would just take a fit. She’d have to call the lady next door and say, “Can’t understand this kid. She’s crying and she must want something to eat, but I don’t know what she wants.”

So I’d say it to her and she’d say, “Oh, they’re telling her to go home and go to sleep.” (laughs)

We moved to Walkerville in 1910. I was three then. We lived up there, and my dad worked at the Berkeley. He always worked on the east side of the hill. Where the Berkeley Pit started, that was the mine he worked in at that time. He used to have to walk from North Walkerville to the Berkeley every day, back and forth. I remember one time he worked at the Bullwhacker. That was an old mine that used to be right up close to where the Gardens is. We’d often go up there on the Columbia Garden cars and go to his...He had an office there. He was a shift boss, I guess. We used to go there and wait for him to come home from the mine. Lots of fun. Kids had more fun than they do nowadays.

I went to school in Walkerville—the Sherman School. I graduated from there, and then I went to business college. I didn’t go to high school, but I took high school training at business college and secretarial and book keeping. I worked some. Work was bad then, when I graduated from business college—’24 I guess. I worked until we got married and then I worked more.

HB: When you went to Walkerville, was it pretty separate from Butte? Like a real separate town? Did you come down a lot into Butte?

MC: Walkerville was an incorporated city of its own and Butte...I think Walkerville was incorporated before Butte, very shortly and around the same time. There used to be streetcars going to Walkerville then. There had been cable cars in earlier days that went right straight up Main Street. I know my mother always talked about the cable cars. The Regular Butte Railway—it was called—went up around the reservoir and up to Walkerville until 1933 or ’34 the buses took over. You still see the streetcar tracks on the streets!

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Walkerville was quite a city. I remember them saying that there was 5,000 people lived in Walkerville. Of course, there was an awful lot of people in Butte then. Maybe three times as many as there are now. Butte was quite a city. Have you ever seen those pictures in the Memories of Butte?

HB: Yes.

MC: There are so many...The streets always seem so crowded! Now you go uptown, and it really makes you lonesome. It really is a different, a changed place. I came out here...I had a friend that lived in a house next to us in North Walkerville. The lady that owned it lived over here on Wynn. She used to come out here to pay her rent. We’d take the streetcar and come out...She was always afraid of the dogs. There was a lot of houses out in that direction. I’d come with her and we’d just have a picnic. It would take us all day to pay this ten dollars a month rent to this old lady. There was hardly any houses out here; you just looked for miles. Of course, there was no place in the world like Walkerville to us. We’d look up and see Walkerville and knew there was no place in the world but there to live.

When I married, I moved down into Walkerville from North Walkerville. We bought a house there and that was the Depression time. That was ‘29, ‘30. I know we had just moved into that house on the day they called Black Friday, when the stock market went broke. Oh heavens, it was the worst thing that ever happened was that crash in ‘29! We lost our house. We moved to North Walkerville, which is this house we live in now. This was up there.

HB: Really?

MC: This was where I was raised—in this house. There is only four rooms, but we remodeled, built on another kitchen. There was five of us kids and this old uncle, Uncle Ed. He lived in this room here was his bedroom. The girls all slept in here; the boys slept in there with my mother and dad in their bedroom. But when we had one son we had to put another bedroom on. (laughs) Shows how things change.

We moved down here—it was 31 years ago—1951 I think it was. The house next door to us...The houses were built up there, like in all north of here...The houses were built so close together. There was a 25-foot lot, and they’d build a house on it. This house is 24-feet wide, so you see we didn’t have much alleyway between this house and the next. I guess 1950, the Christmas of ’50, the house next door to us burnt down intentionally. The people got tired of living there. Christmas night about midnight, the fire broke out. We were lucky to have saved our house. This was a brick house—the only reason it was ever safe. I said to my husband one day, “I’m going to call Mr. Perry, see if he’ll move the house.”

He thought I was kidding, but when he come home that night Mr. Perry was there and he said, “Well, if you take the bricks off and you do this and that, and I’ll move it for you. That’s all I’m going to be responsible for moving that house is just moving it.”
We had more work than I ever imagined! Then, about five years later, the county bought out North Walkerville. A lot of the people bought their houses back, and they moved them right down here in this neighborhood. Some of them are the same distance away that we were up there they are down here. I’d say maybe ten or twelve families live down here.

HB: Is that all?

MC: There are still people living in North Walkerville, though, parts that they hadn’t bought out. I never did sell my lot. I still have it. Sometimes I dream I move my house back. (laughs)

HB: How far is North Walkerville from Walkerville?

MC: It’s not far. It’s kind of a continuance. There’s a break where the Alice mine was. You can look out there and see that dump; that’s the Alice dump. That dump, they took out of the pit. There’s a pit up there—the Alice pit—right up the east side of that is a pit they started. My house is right at the northeast end. My lot is the only lot on that street there.

(MC moves away from the microphone, most likely to a window. Seems to be pointing out landmarks.)

MC: Walkerville. That’s North Walkerville and then Walkerville is...You see where those green houses? That’s the Sherman School. That was Walkerville proper. That’s the main street in Walkerville. There was another town beyond that. It was quite the place at one time. Butchertown, it was called. There had been a...something like Hansen’s. The Butcher brothers run a place there where they slaughtered cattle. It was really named for the Butcher brothers, but they called it...Many people thought it was named because they butchered cattle there. Beyond that one time there was another town called Stringtown. That was all the French woodcutters lived there. I can remember when their cabins were still there; they built them in a string of cabins. They cut wood poles and all kinds of wood—there was a lot of wood north then—for the mines. They used to sell it here to the mine companies.

HB: How did you meet your husband?

MC: I told you when we moved from East Butte to North Walkerville it was in October. I had to ride on the wagon with my uncle. It was moving our furniture from East Butte to North Walkerville. When we got up there all the neighborhood kids were out in the street in front of our house. The man in the wagon was giving them things, and they’d run in the house with them. I had a rocking chair, and he reached it out to this little boy and I grabbed it. That was my husband, later. He lived next door to us.

HB: How long did you know you were going to marry him before you did?

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MC: I’d say about a year is all. Maybe not that long. A year, I’d say. We went together, on and off, all through my school. He was working. I went with his sisters, and we were family friends. I had a lot of other fellows too, but I always went back to poor Lester when I needed a boyfriend.

HB: What kind of things did young people do for entertainment then?

MC: Then? We went to the Dreamshow (?) almost every night of the week. They changed the show. Every night was a new show. I think it was ten or fifteen cents admission, so we went there almost every night. Maybe once a week we’d go to town, to the Rialto. There was vaudeville at the Broadway. We went there. There was more shows in Butte, more theaters. The Empress Theater had a stock company, and they had a different show I think every week. It was marvelous, the theaters that there were. The Broadway had vaudeville. Once a week we’d splurge and go to town to the shows.

We went skating, and we went dancing. There was more dance halls. The dance hall that the Pioneers own in uptown Butte now was called the Rosemont then. The school I went to—the business college—every month had a dance. They had prom—quite a big deal—and we went to that every month. The Winter Garden—that was a public dance hall. Oh, it was a beautiful dance hall! It had a big orchestra and it was...I guess they played every night! They’d have contests. I remember the Charleston contest and the waltz contest. Every week they’d have a different contest: foxtrot. They didn’t do the polka very much or things like they dance now. There was always someplace to go. Then the Gardens—the Columbia Gardens—they had that beautiful pavilion out there. They had big bands come in here all the time, and everybody went to the Gardens. It was a big deal.

HB: Did people get all dressed up for these things?

MC: You never went out if you weren’t dressed up! Never went to town! Long after I was married, you didn’t go to town unless you had a hat and a bag. You never had pants. Then, you wore a dress and had a good coat. You always had a town outfit to go to town on. You never saw people in town like you do now, dressed casually. They always said Butte was one of the best dressed cities in the world, and I don’t know but everybody was dressed up. It was fun to go out and see them. I’ve been going to eat in town...People were dressed up with their hats and their bags, and they had a little gadget they’d put on the end of the table to hang their purse on. I know I have mine around here someplace. Now you go and you don’t have a pair of slacks on and you don’t care. It’s easier living, but it was really something to go out then.

HB: What were the big stores like in town?

MC: Hennessy’s was always a big store, and then Connell’s was kitty corner from Hennessy’s store. Simon’s—that was another big store. There weren’t hardly any chain stores. They were all mostly Butte home stores. There was all of Park Street and Broadway that had all little dress shops—real nice dress shops. There was nothing out of Butte. You had to go to Butte to get
your clothes. Up in Centerville, Hennessy’s run a store one time, more of a general store, and they did have things to sell: dresses and aprons and stuff like that.

Walkerville had stores and saloons. There was a Walkerville Mercantile. When I first remember it was run by a private party. Mr. Bone, his name was. They had meat and groceries and they had liquor. They had different departments. They had a little department in the back where you could buy stockings and thread and aprons and yard goods.

There was a big store in Centerville. I remember going there when we were going home from school. We’d walk home and we’d always stop in there, this girl I went with. They traded with...What was his name? It was on the corner of Main and Center Street. I want to say Brophey’s, but it wasn’t Brophey’s. Darn it, I know it so well. But we’d go in there and they had beautiful yard goods. I’d go home and tell my mother, “Oh! They’ve got some pretty yard goods!”

My dad would say, “Give her the money and she can buy some yard goods and make a dress.”

We’d just make a plain dress, but we always had new dresses to go everywhere. If you had to make them yourself, you did.

HB: Did you eat out much in Butte?

MC: Yes. I had an aunt that worked in different restaurants. When I was small, there were two or three restaurants on Main Street that were real nice: the Chequamegon and Rompos (?). The Leland Café that was on East Park Street. She worked as a waitress. She worked the gamers. I would go there when I was going to school. She was my favorite aunt because she lived there...or worked there. We’d go in after school just to say hi, and she’d say, “Wouldn’t you like to sit down and have a piece of Boston Crème Pie?” I remember that was my favorite! (laughs)

We always went to town, maybe once a week, and ate our dinner. We’d go to the show and then stop in and have a sandwich. We always went to the Rialto. That’s where the Miners...or Metals Bank is now. Down below there was a real classy restaurant right next to the bank building now. It was called the State Café. We’d go there, and I remember my specialty was a clubhouse sandwich and I think it was fifty cents! You’d have coffee. Truzzolinos had a place on West Park Street. They made their own tamales there. They had a regular restaurant—a beautiful restaurant—all the length of that block with booths and tables. When we went to school, we’d go there and have a hot tamale. You’d just sit there and enjoy that tamale so much. Now I don’t like them at all. (laughs)

HB: After business college, you said you worked for a year before you got married?

MC: Yes, I worked two years because I worked at this auto wrecking place. I worked for a doctor...I can’t remember his name, but it was in Metals Bank. The first job I ever had...It was
funny, he gave me a telephone book and said, “Now you go through this and get all the people that live south of Front Street.” There’s so many little streets I never knew the name of, and living in Walkerville, I had an awful time. I had to call them and tell them there would be a meeting. I don’t know where the meeting was now. I’ve forgotten. I had to tell them this meeting was at a certain time, and it was to see about putting a road from this side of...from Harrison Ave to Montana Street. There was no road then. They put it in, and it was Rowe Road. It comes out from Montana Street and joins on to Holmes. I remember for days I called people and some of them were so crabby. They’d say, We don’t care where they put a road in there! We’re not interested. Others would be so interested, and it was really fun. That was my first job, and that was just temporary.

Then I worked at a wrecking place down on Mercury Street where they took in old cars and wrecked them and sold the parts. That was interesting work. I thought it was fun seeing those cars...great big leather cars and Packards and just about all the old cars that people were through with. They used to have a problem of radiators freezing up. They might have had it, but they didn’t use it here: Presto. I remember one time Simon’s store had a whole fleet of trucks—paneled truckes—that they delivered. Everybody delivered then. They had these beautiful trucks. They were Fords. They left them one night in the garage, but they all froze up and broke the locks—the whole fleet of trucks. So they sold them to this old fellow that run the wrecking place.

He sent me up town to the drugstore. I wish I could’ve remembered what he sent me for, but it was some kind of powder that came in about a pound can. He was a Jewish fellow and he was a crook to begin with, but he took this stuff and put about a tablespoon in about a bucket of water, maybe a gallon of water, and poured it into the radiator of the trucks. It stopped them up, but they didn’t leak. So he sold them all! I know my husband really brought a good car. I heard them talking about, “Lester’s got a new car.” When I found out what it was...here he’d gone and bought one of those old trucks! Paid him up 300 dollars for this darn old truck. It was new looking, but it didn’t run very long.

There were so many businesses in town then. There was everything you could think of. I think the only business they didn’t have in Walkerville...Walkerville had all kinds of businesses: stores, butcher shops and saloons galore, a skating rink they had up there, and a show, one show. But they never had a cemetery or an undertaker. They had to use Butte for that. They had schools. They had lots of school in North Walkerville, earlier than I went to school, but I know my mother went to lots of schools up there. I think they have record of seven or eight schools that were up in North Walkerville.

HB: When you first started working, was it hard for you to find a job?

MC: No, I went to business college, and they’d find you the job. That’s where I got my first job. I worked for the Chamber of Commerce for a while, maybe a couple of months. I worked for some freight office that used to be on Montana, right down below where the Broadway show

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building is. It was just a little one room place. They had horse and wagons to truck with. They’d get a call...I used to take the calls, and they’d say, Would you have this man pick up our trunks at the depot? Or pick our trunks up and take them to the depot?” All the freight that would come in, they would haul it in those wagons. I thought that was the best job. I just loved that. That was temporary too. A girl would be off and the business college would send you out to take their job for a while.

HB: During the Depression, did you have a hard time then?

MC: The Depression? No, it was really fun! I made a recording not too long ago about what we did during the Depression. We took everything and moved out to North Walkerville, way out...it was close to the reservoir if you’ve ever been out there. We put up tents. It was about six families of us, and we stayed out there all summer long and lived. We played games. We had a real good time. Sometime I’d like to have you hear that recording of me.

HB: I’d like to.

MC: There was no work, but we went places. As long as we had enough money to put some gas in our old Model T Ford, we’d go out north and we gold mined. Heavens, we made our living gold mining up in Missoula Gulch. My husband—him and a friend of ours, they made a rocker. They used to pan gold, but they made this rocker and it was run by sewer water because there was no other water. There was no sewers in Walkerville then. The water was clean by the time it got down to Missoula Gulch. You know where that is.

I guess in early days a lot of Chinamen lived in Walkerville, and they came here to gold mine. They gold mined Missoula Gulch. There was an old man in Walkerville that had lived then—Mr. Gainer who ran the butcher shop. We used to talk things that happened years ago. He said, “You know, the Chinamen used to gold mine in Missoula Gulch. I bet there’s a living down there yet.” So my husband and his friend Mark went down there and gold mined. Every day they went to work. We made a living panning gold...or they made a living panning gold.

We had one nugget, I remember, that was...I just could kick myself because I had to sell it to buy radio tubes and a pair of socks on Easter. I think it was five-eighths of an inch long and it was about an eighth of an inch thick. It was kind of a flat rectangular shape thing, but it was gold and quartz in it. I know when I sold it. I think we got 90 dollars for it, and that was a fortune.

It was all fun for me during the Depression. You’d worry about your water bill, and your light bill, and all that, but heck...

[End of Tape 1, Side A]
MC: They started out in 1932. They worked two weeks on and one week off. It kept getting worse and worse until, finally, there was no on or just all off. There was WPA [Works Progress Administration]. He worked on the WPA. They did different projects around Butte. I remember he worked at Hansen’s meat place, over here on [La] Platte? They used to work there. I think he used to make 97 dollars a month, and that was big wages. He was a blacksmith there.

Then he worked...you know that football field that’s up at the Tech [Montana Tech of the University of Montana]? That was done all by WPA work. They call that the Bean Bowl because there was the Orange Bowl and the Cotton Bowl, and they call that the Bean Bowl because on that they only got their...Beans is what we got. I know at that time we got 10.65 dollars every two weeks. That’s what we lived on. There was some surplus foods that they gave us about once a month. They’d give maybe a roast beef, which was a luxury—a luxury now, too. They’d give you beans and oatmeal, dried milk. You just got so sick of beans and oatmeal. You just couldn’t use it up from one month to the next! We made cookies...they’d give us prunes. We had prune cake until it was coming out of our ears. But because we were young, that was one thing we could enjoy. I guess we’d enjoy it now, too, but we have better times now.

My father died during the Depression. He died in 1933. There was no such thing as Social Security. He died without insurance because they were people who didn’t believe in insurance. No one had insurances years ago. There was no hospitalization or any kind of insurances. My mother had two young kids to support. When he died, she went to work in the sewing room. That was another WPA project in Butte. She used to make dresses and overalls, and they made quilts. They were given to the people that were on relief. It wasn’t welfare. It was relief. Just a government project they put on to keep the people alive until better times.

HB: Did you mother like that kind of work?

MC: Yes, she enjoyed it. She had to work. She had these two young boys, and the rest of us were married. When my brother got older...My oldest brother—he was always complaining because momma had to work. When he got old enough, he went to work in her place. I don’t know what he did, but it wasn’t long after that things picked up. The war started, and that seems to always bring people out of a depression. I think that’s what they’re waiting for now.

HB: I think you might be right. Once the war started, did a lot of men from Butte go?

MC: Oh yes. I think Butte was always a patriotic town. They signed up...Even in the first World War, I can remember I had three uncles that went—all volunteered. My brother was 18 in December, and he left in May to go to the service. He was in the infantry, and he was overseas in all the east...or the west battlefield—Japan. He was in Bougainville. He was injured several times there. My brother Charlie—he joined the Air Force in 1943. He had two children, but he
couldn’t stand the thought of his brother being over there in all this. He joined and went overseas, and he was killed in the service. He was shot down. He was a pilot over Formosa.

They were missing in action for...They would send you a notice. I remember sending my mother the notice: “Your son is missing in action, but we hope to find him.” It went on, and six months after that they would send you another notice: “Your son is presumed dead.” Hadn’t heard any more.

That was trying times for people that lost sons in the war. He had those two children at home. It was funny, his son followed in his footsteps. Joined the Air Force, and when he got out of the Air Force, he joined the Navy. He’s just returned last year. Made a life career of the services. He has a daughter living here. She teaches at Butte High School I guess. That was a lot worse than the Depression. The war years were worse.

HB: Did Butte really start booming again then though?

MC: Oh yes! They brought in men from Idaho and lots of states where things were kind of dull. They brought them in here and they worked in the mines. The mines were going full blast. Seven days a week they worked then. That was long before the [Berkeley] Pit.

HB: Did you used to worry about your husband working at the mines, or was his a dangerous job?

MC: Oh heavens, when they go on the hill, it’s a dangerous job. Yes, of course we worried about them, but they’re more fortunate than in the mines. He had a bad accident in the mine when he worked in the mine once. He fell into a chute of ore when the ore was coming into it. A friend of his that worked with him then held on to him and saved him. They’re still good friends. That kind of scared me. I remember him coming home and he was really shook up about it. Told me what happened and I said, “Well you’ve got to go back out and get out of those mines, and you’ve got to get something else to do.”

So he did. He had a friend that was a master mechanic on the hill. He had worked in the shops before, but whenever the shops got dull they always went back into the mines to make their living. He worked for—I don’t know—42 years in the mine for the Anaconda Company.

HB: Did he like that work?

MC: Yes, I guess if you have to work, you have to like...Now some men wouldn’t like that work because they’d rather something different. He liked it, and he did a good job. He must have enjoyed a lot of it. He worked steady and hard. Worked all his life.

My son likes it; although, he’s a lot bigger than his dad. Lester was a small man for a blacksmith, but he did it all his life. Frank is bigger and he works hard too, but I think they have easier
equipment to work with now than they did. Everything was sledgehammers. Now they have big hammers and presses and things they didn’t have when he was working in the shops.

HB: Was your husband involved in the union much?

MC: You had to be a union man if you worked in Butte. Yes, they all belonged to the Blacksmith and Boiler Makers’ Union. The Miners’ Union when they were miners. All union men. I don’t think they can work in the mines if they’re not union. When they’d go to work when times were good, they gave them so many days to get their union card or else they lost their job. They had to be union men.

HB: What kind of things did the union do? Did it have a lot of meetings and stuff?

MC: I think they have a meeting maybe once a month. I don’t know. Sometimes, they were required to go to union meetings at least once a month and pay their dues. He wasn’t an officer or anything like that, but he went and lived by the union rules. They have to if they’re in Butte.

HB: Have you always belonged to the church you belong to now?

MC: No. I was from Walkerville. I was baptized at the Sacred Heart Church. That was the old church way down on East Park Street. I think it’s gone now. When we moved to Walkerville, we belonged to the St. Lawrence O’Toole. We made our First Communion, our Confirmation, and we were married at that church. When we moved down here, we went to St. John’s. That’s St. John’s the Evangelist up here—on Warren I think it’s on. We’ve only been going to this... The church isn’t built yet that we go to. We have mass in the downstairs of the rectory. They plan—this year, I think—on building a church. They have a lot of people. They just finished taking the census. I think they have over 400 people that would go to that church. We live further from St. John’s than we do from that church. We live three miles from St. John’s and only two miles from there.

HB: The Catholic churches are kind of divided by neighborhood? You go to the one that’s closest to you?

MC: Parishes. Different parishes. Yes, but that’s where we all... I’ve gone to every church in town, I think, at one time or another. St. Joseph’s is a beautiful church. The Immaculate Conception—we go up there a lot. St. Anne’s—that’s the big church on this side of the flat—we go there occasionally. I see where they’re having an Austrian mass sometime soon over there. It’ll be all in Austrian or Slovakian or whatever it is. Phil asked me today—he knew I was from East Butte—he said, “I suppose you’ll be going to that Slovakian mass.”

I said, “I might go.”

He said, “Oh, I thought you’d be...”
HB: Are the churches—the different Catholic churches—very different from each other in the way they do things?

MC: No, there’s no difference. When the Catholics had Latin masses...I remember I went home from school one time and I was complaining to my dad. I didn’t like it. I didn’t know what they were talking about. We had to learn Latin in school. “Well,” he said, “no matter where you go,”—you could go to the old country or go to Mexico or you could go to Africa, you could go anyplace—“the mass, you would know it because it was all in the same Latin, a universal language.”

The last few years, they have changed. Everything is in English now unless they have some occasional Latin mass that some parish might put on for a special occasion. I think the people like and understand the mass in English better. I suppose in foreign countries they have it in their language. I know the children enjoy it a lot and anyone that has never studied Latin. I had studied Latin in Catholic school. You had to answer the mass in Latin when I was going to school. I don’t know whether they do that...There’s no need for it now because the masses are all in English.

We went to Mexico once and the mass everywhere was the same. You’d think you were right home.

HB: That’s kind of nice. Your father was English, is that right?

MC: He was born in England. His mother was English. I imagine with a name like Mooney his father must have been. His mother died when he was very little, and his father left England and came to America. He had a little sister, just very little older than he. I think she was just 15 months older. When they were about three years old, their uncle heard that their grandmother was moving to Australia. An awful lot of English went to Australia. There was a gold rush down there. His grandmother that he lived with and his brother...or his uncle took care of the children after their mother died. They were planning on going to Australia, and they were going to take the children with them.

The other brother, the Mooney brother, heard about this. He thought, “They’ll never take them kids!” Then you couldn’t correspond like you do now. You couldn’t track people down. So he went one night, picked them up at their porch, took them to the dock, put them on a ship, and sent them to America to their father. He was three, and she was four—a little over four. He said he remembered that, and she remembered it.

She came here when my dad died. She had never lost her English accent. Wasn’t that strange for being so little? My dad had a little English he probably picked up from his father. He would...
say, “Now there’s no ‘arm to doing that.” We’d always make fun of him. Anything with an h he
didn’t sound. It was always ‘arm or ‘urry or something like that. We were always kidding him
about it. His father had remarried shortly after that, and he was raised by his stepmother which
he adored. He didn’t know his own mother.

HB: Was that unusual? For English people to be Catholics?

MC: Preston is north of Lancashire. I guess there was a mixture...I think maybe my dad wasn’t
Catholic when he was young or when he was born maybe. Maybe his parents weren’t, but
when they came to this country, his father married a lady. Her name was Annie Rooney. They
definitely were Catholic, and they probably became Catholics then. They were of no
religion...They were too young then. I know he was baptized in Pennsylvania, so he might have
never had any religion until he came there.

HB: Did you belong to any sort of clubs here in Butte?

MC: Yes. I belong to a nice little club that goes to St. Joseph’s Church. It’s called Golden Age.
First, we had about 30 members, and some of them have passed away. Some of these ladies
that go there, they don’t go there to sew or knit or anything like that. They play keno. There’s
about half, and we sew and we crochet and we make things. About once a year, we give them
to the underprivileged children. We take them up to Head Start and different places: caps,
gloves, socks, and little sweaters. The best of the knitters. There are some women that are just
beautiful knitters. I crochet. We take them to the homes and make little things like this lap rug
to put on their laps in the homes and that.

Then we belong to the Upper Generation. That’s another senior citizen group. That’s just for a
good time. We play keno and once a month...We’re having a big dinner the sixth of next month
over at the War Bonnet. We go on a trip maybe once a year to Helena or Missoula. Big deal!

Then I belong to Daughters of Isabella, which I don’t usually attend, but I belong to it.

HB: What’s that?

MC: It’s a Catholic order. Knights of Columbus is men and Daughters of Isabella are the ladies.
It’s just a social organization. That’s about all. I’ve never gone in for clubs much, but these are
just fun things.

HB: Butte seems to have a lot of clubs. A lot of people I talk to have belonged to things.

MC: Yesterday was our club day. We had refreshments. All those senior citizens clubs—they’re
allowed a certain amount of money if they have a club to keep the social activity going I guess.
We belong to the Pioneers, too, both of us do, and they get a certain amount of money from
the county and the government—subsidized. We get a little bit of money, and they buy us the

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yarn that we crotchet with. We bring our own refreshments, and we meet for a couple hours on Wednesday and gab and gossip and laugh. (laughs)

HB: You mentioned that you went to Columbia Gardens sometimes. What was that like?

MC: It was just wonderful. I just hate to talk about it. I made a tape for Janet Cornish (?) about children’s day at the Columbia Gardens. Did you ever hear that?

HB: No. I’d sure like to.

MC: I’d like to get a copy myself. We’d all go to the Gardens on children’s day. It was free rides. The bigger kids would go in the morning and take all the neighborhood kids with them. We’d go up there and get the table and hold it for the day for when mother came. We’d have lunch when she came, and then we’d go to the playgrounds and play. They had beautiful playgrounds: swings and all kinds of hobby horses and a roller coaster and the Ferris wheel. If you had the money, you’d go on those; otherwise, you’d go out and play on the playgrounds.

In the afternoon, Mom would come, and our grandmother would come and our aunts. We’d have a family day every week—every Thursday! The weather always seemed good! Then my dad would come in the night after work. The men would come out there, and we’d have supper. We’d either take something all ready, maybe pasties and cookies, and we’d buy ice cream down at the ice cream place. The men and women would play cards in the evening or sit there and gab—talk to their friends. The place was always full of people. People always went to the Gardens. You’d always meet your friends maybe you hadn’t seen for years. You’d meet them at the Gardens.

They’d have dances. The kids used to go out there early in the spring. They’d practice for some kind of regular festival. Different groups, little itty bitty kids, and as they grew older, they were kind of folk dance affairs. Near the end of the season, they’d have this festival. All the kids were dressed up in their costumes, and they’d have this big festival there on the lawn in front of the pavilion. That was just real nice. There was beautiful flowers. I remember there was butterflies and harps and different things made of flowers on the hillside. It was a beautiful setting. The kids, they would go there early in the day and they’d have this festival. That was a big day—all free rides on the streetcars.

Every Thursday, after the pansies were in bloom, you could go in there and pick all the pansies you wanted to carry home. You’d pick them and take them home. That was a big deal. Big pansy beds. Oh heavens! Two lots square. They had an overseer there to watch. They always had overseers to watch the small children on the chutes and swings and Ferris wheels.

Then there was a flower house up there; that was a nice thing. They had fish ponds up there at one time where they raised baby fish. There was maybe a dozen different tanks and they had little tiny fish. As they grew, they would take and move them into lakes or streams someplace.
The flower house had all kinds of plants, and it was such a pretty place. You’d walk through there and always pretend you were in a jungle someplace; it was real nice. You could buy plants there for your gardens. It was a real nice place.

The pavilion, the dance hall pavilion: that was the most beautiful place in the country! It was a balcony around where you could sit if you didn’t want to dance. They had big bands there that came in from California. Now they’d be on television, but they traveled then. They always made Butte a stop. I remember the last one I went to out there was Frankie Yankovic and his Yanks. He was a great polka king. He came...I just don’t know how long ago it was, but it was the best time to see the people have out there. There was old, old Austrian people—men and women and some that never dance—but they just went to see their dances. He came, and I know we went. It was just marvelous. The people that turned out...They always did for a dance at the Gardens. It was a big deal. You couldn’t find a parking place...because there was cars then. People went in their cars, but you couldn’t find a parking place up above the Gardens or below where they had a big parking area. So many people.

Square dancing was very popular here 30 years ago. Thousands of people square danced. I know they’d have a festival at the Gardens. They’d have two or three. One festival they had out there, there wasn’t room for the people to sit. They were sitting on the floor. It was such a big place, but all the seats were taken by spectators. The people that danced, they stayed close to the dance floor and they sat on the floor. Thousands of people! They came in from Anaconda and Deer Lodge and all over. It was just marvelous. I think that was 1951 and they had a guest caller from California. He was quite a popular caller. His name was Pappy Shaw [Lloyd Shaw]. He was an old crippled man. He came in, and I remember we went to the airport to meet him the day he came or I did with some friends. My husband was working then. He called. He was marvelous! I don’t think there was ever a bigger crowd at the Gardens than when he came.

HB: Were the Gardens that busy right up until the end?

MC: Yes, I think so. People went to the Gardens; they knew it was going to go, and I think it made them appreciate it more. A lot of people that never went to the Gardens then because they just hated to think of it being gone. I still say, sometimes, fooling my husband, “Let’s take a ride up to the Gardens.” We took a ride up there just to walk around a little bit and come home, just walk down the boardwalk. It was really a nice. It was a great day to go someplace. You always met so many people there. It was real fun.

HB: Did they used to have Miner’s Union Day stuff out at the Gardens?

MC: Yes, they had Miner’s Union Day, and everybody went to the Gardens. They had a big...first aid. Every mine had a first aid team, and they competed for prizes. There were prizes given by the company. There would be the Leonard Team and the Belmont Team. Every mine had its own team. It was fun to go there was watch them. They’d have a patient—one man would be a patient—and the rest of them would be workers to give him first aid.
In the night, they would have a big dance. It was the Miner’s Union Dance, and it was a big affair. Everybody was there all day, so they just ran over into the dance. It was nice, yes, it was. The 13th day of June was Miner’s Union Day, and they’d have a parade that day...

(A plane passes overhead, MC becomes unintelligible)

...All the unions joined in, not only the Miners’ Union, but every union joined. I can remember not too long ago, with my husband, they still had Miners’ Union day. They would carry their banner. I remember they were boiler makers and blacksmith banner. He paraded. They used to all have to parade, or they’d be fined by their union. It was a nice day.

HB: What other parades were there in Butte besides the Miners’ Union Day parade?

MC: There was always a Fourth of July Parade. Years ago, I can remember parades...They used to have circus parades. I guess they’d bring their animals in, and they had them in big wagons, real fancy like. They were barred wagons, but you could see the animals through. They would parade through the town. When we were kids, we’d have to come to a circus parade more than we ever went to a circus because the circuses were always kind of held out here on the flat and there was no transportation to come unless you had a car. We lived so far north that we didn’t get out here, but we’d always get to see the circus parades.

They would have Labor Day parades, but that’s about all. Fourth of July was always a big parade and Labor Day. And of course St. Patrick’s Day. Always had a St. Patrick’s Day parade. I remember one time when we were going to school—we were old enough to have better sense—but we decided we wanted to stay off and watch the St. Patrick’s Day parade. The [Ancient Order of the] Hibernians marched, and they had big bands. It was a regular big day.

[End of Tape 1, Side B]
MC: ...you’d get caught if we played hooky, so we would ask if we could get off for this parade. Mr. Rhys (?) asked us, “Why do you want to go to this parade?”

I said...I was pretty quick at lying, good practice, “My grandfather is going to be in it.”

“Oh, well then, you can go.”

“Also, my father is going to be in it.” He was the most bitter partisan that ever lived! (laughs) My grandfather was crippled. He never paraded in his life, but he let us off to go to the parade.

By the time the parade started, the heavens opened. In March, it isn’t dependable. It snowed and snowed. The flakes, I think they were big as saucers. We were soaking wet, and we couldn’t go home because our parents knew we were in school. So we went to Walkerville and we thought we’d visit the lady that lived in the Mount Bethel Church. She wasn’t home, so we had to sit in her outhouse until it was time to go home from school! So that was the last parade that I ever attended—the 17th of March parade. But it was fun. You know how kids love parades. They still celebrate St. Patrick’s Day here pretty much. I guess last 17th of March was the biggest day they ever had uptown for a long time.

HB: Yes, I went uptown and looked. I saw a man up there with a green beard that day.

MC: Don’t they go crazy? Some of them like poor Alice’s father, he wouldn’t have gone to any kind of St. Patrick’s Day parade, but when she told him that...We always kid about it. She lives in Seattle now. I’m going to visit her pretty soon.

HB: Did the Irish and the Cornish really have a lot of friction between them?

MC: I guess in early days they did, but they’re more sensible now maybe. The Irish were so bitter against the English, and the English were the same against the Irish, for what reason I don’t know what it was. They had an organization here called the APAs [Anti-Papist Association]. I don’t know whether it was very general in Butte or not, but I can remember this old uncle of ours talking. If he didn’t like some man and he happened to be an Englishman…He wasn’t. He was born in this country, but the worst thing he ever said about anyone was, “Well he was a dirty APA.” I thought he was spelling some cuss word out but it meant Anti-Papist Association. They were a group that was just against Catholics. But I always wanted to know what APA spelled.

People, I think, are getting more civilized. They don’t have the frictions between them. They held over to the mines a lot. They’d call one mine the Sacranubby (?). That was the Elmer Lee (?) mine. It was mostly all Englishman who worked there. Of course, my husband worked there in later years, but at one time you had to be English to…A lot of them came, and there was
always this story that. When they came to this country, they put a tag on them and tell them to go to the mine where it had the seven smokestacks. I often wonder if that’s true or if it’s just a story someone made up.

HB: Do you remember much about the other ethnic groups in Butte? Did you mingle pretty much with everybody?

MC: Yes, we always mixed with them, seeing as I started out Austrian. Walkerville had a lot of Italians. In North Walkerville, we were the only family up there that weren’t English. We were Catholic and Irish. We were the only ones up there. The Cunninghams...Cunningham is a funny name. You don’t know whether it’s English or Irish. I guess it is an English name, but there’s more Irish has it than English. Someone told me that any name that ends in ham is English, but I don’t know. Everyone I know is Irish.

I know my mother, until she straightened them out herself, had trouble with a lot of English people that lived there in little groups. She mixed with everybody. We always did. We went to every church. I went to the Mount Bethel Church with this friend of mine. She came to my church, unknown to her parents.

One time, we were late for school. We came down Main Street, and we decided we would sit in the Paxton and Rockefeller drugstore until this test we had to take was over. So we went in there and sat. The old druggist came out, looked at us, and wondered if we weren’t going to school. We just said, “Well, we’re waiting for someone.” Who came in but Mr. Spencer. He was the minister from the Mount Bethel Church in Walkerville. The old pharmacist said, “I don’t know. Those girls are up to no good. I think they’re playing hooky from school.”

Mr. Spencer said, “Oh no. They wouldn’t. They’re nice girls. They’re both in my Sunday School class.” (laughs).

So he didn’t know whether I was in his school or not because we went around to...there was all mixtures in Walkerville and all of Butte.

Dublin Gulch was supposedly all Irish, but a lot of people live up there that aren’t. Walkerville was a mixture. North Walkerville was mostly English, but then people moved in, different people. Now the whole place is just one big happy family.

HB: Do you remember much about the Chinatown here?

MC: No, I don’t remember anything about Chinatown here, but hearing my mother tell about it because she worked in Butte. I guess Chinatown was real active when she was young. She worked for a lot of people as kind of a maid I guess, before she was married, out on the west side. They would have a cook and she wasn’t particularly fond of Chinamen. She was a little bit leery because she had worked with a Chinaman cook.
She said one time they worked for a Jewish family. They entertained widely. They’d have a big party and entertain all their friends. This particular time they had lamb chops. She’d always tell us this story when we had lamb. They were real skimpy on buying their food. They didn’t buy enough, and when they would serve it, they would have one chop for each guest. Must have been an extra couple come or something, but the chop that was to be for Mama and the Chinaman. They were ate. The Chinaman, she said, got real mad when he realized they wouldn’t have any chop for their dinner, so she said he went and spit on the dish of chops. (laughs)

She said she was always kind of afraid to have anything much to do with Chinamen because she knew they would do anything to get even. There was Chinamen that lived in Walkerville. They had laundries up there at one time—Chinese laundries. I can remember when Chinese had laundries on Mercury Street and Galena Street. I had seen them there, ironing and washing.

HB: Do you remember when East Butte and Finntown and all that started to go?

MC: Oh yes.

HB: When was that? Was that very long ago?

MC: I don’t know. I can’t just remember when it was. It just came along gradually. We were square dancing at that time. Very often after a square dance, we would go someplace, a group of us, and they would have dances later in the night. Square dancing usually broke up around 11 ’o’clock. But down on East Broadway, that was Finntown. We’d go down there because they always had an orchestra or an accordion player. Usually they had an accordion player there who played dances, and we’d go down there and dance. I know it was quite an upsetting thing when they heard they had to move. I think they all moved about the same time.

HB: Where did they all move to? Did some move away from Butte, or did they mostly move down here?

MC: I don’t know where. Now, there’s an awful lot of people up in McGlone Heights that came from Meaderville. Out here, in this parish that I belong to now, most of those people that are Catholic...When they took their property in Meaderville, they would pay them for it. A lot of them moved out and bought houses out that side of the flat along Continental there and Hillcrest. There’s an awful lot of people from Meaderville that go to that church that I have met since I have gone there. There’s some that moved up to McGlone Heights and Meaderville, but most of them...I think they maybe scattered around all through Butte if they lived here.

HB: Do you think Butte is quite a lot different than it was when you were growing up?
MC: Yes. It’s so different. You can’t imagine the difference. I was raised in Walkerville, and I went to school in Butte. I knew kids from all over the flat. What do you call it over here...over there? There was a place, and that was mostly people that were Austrian. The Tony Turpin’s Rosehall (?) it was called. I met the girl that lived there just two weeks ago. She goes to this church over there and we went to school together. There was an awful lot of kids from Meaderville went to business college, and an awful lot from over there at the flat, that part...They had a name for it. I just can’t remember what it was called.

They were Austrian people over there. Every Lent—like they have a Mardi Gras in Louisiana—they would have a festival something on that order over there. It was called the Mesopust. Everybody went to that hall and they had a big festival just like they do before Lent. They would make a dummy of Satan and they would take it out and burn the effigy.

I went around to all different parts of Butte. Wherever there was dances, we went. Then there was the lake. Lake Avoca. That was quite the place to go! It had a big dance hall and then a lake there. They had boat rides and an amusement park there, but it was never compared to the Gardens. We’d go out there and go for a boat ride.

HB: The lake is gone now, right?

MC: They drained the lake. That’s where the golf course is over there.

HB: You said you traveled around Montana some. Did you ever think that you might like to move somewhere else?

MC: No. I never have. We went East one year—went to Pennsylvania. I couldn’t adjust to the people in Pennsylvania, although my relatives were there. The people were very aloof. Butte people—they’re so friendly! You just meet them—and sometimes you’ve never seen them before—but you can strike up a conversation, and they’ll tell you all their troubles. In the East, it’s different. Altogether different people.

I remember when my husband goes out or always did, and my son, when they would leave to go to work, or go to anyplace, they always would come and kiss me goodbye. My husband especially. There, we were sitting on the porch one day—my aunt and I—and my uncle and my husband were going someplace. He came and just kissed me and went off. When she was talking to my aunt later, she said, “You know, the people from Montana must be awfully promiscuous. I see your niece kiss her husband every time!” She must have watched pretty close. She said, “Please don’t do that. People don’t do that here.” They don’t walk...fellow girls, going out, they hang onto each other. There, they’re sidewalks apart, or they were at that time. Maybe they’re getting civilized.

HB: Do you still like living in Butte now?
MC: Yes. We’ve gone lots of places. We’ve gone to Kansas and Pennsylvania. We’ve gone east quite a ways, southeast, and California. We’ve been there dozens of times. Seattle and San Francisco...San Francisco is more like Butte than anyplace I have ever been! You meet people. They had a place...somebody told us to be sure to go there when we went to San Francisco. I think it was called Tiny’s Place. It was on Market Street. We were there, and we thought we’d go in. People knew us! Just because we were from Butte, and they had lived in Butte before, sometime or another.

HB: Yes, there’s really something special about Butte.

MC: There really is. No matter where you go, when you...meet people...and when outsiders come in they don’t mix like the older people who have lived here a long time. That’s one nice thing we have about this club I go to. The Golden Age Club, it’s called. We talk—and they’re all older women—we talk about “remember this.” Remember the Depression? Remember when this happened? Then we laugh about things that weren’t funny, but now they seem real funny.

[End of Interview.]