

2011

# The Columbia Gardens Amusement Park: Company Sponsored Community in Butte, Montana

Matthew R. Carl  
*The University of Montana*

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd>

---

## Recommended Citation

Carl, Matthew R., "The Columbia Gardens Amusement Park: Company Sponsored Community in Butte, Montana" (2011). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 971.  
<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/971>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@mso.umt.edu](mailto:scholarworks@mso.umt.edu).

THE COLUMBIA GARDENS AMUSEMENT PARK: COMPANY SPONSORED

COMMUNITY IN BUTTE, MONTANA

By

Matthew Ronald Carl

Bachelor of Arts, College of Idaho, Caldwell, Idaho, 2004

Thesis

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Master of Arts  
in History

The University of Montana  
Missoula, MT

Spring 2011

Approved by:

Perry Brown, Associate Provost for Graduate Education  
Graduate School

Dr. Jeffrey Wiltse, Chair  
Department of History

Dr. Harry Fritz  
Department of History

Ray Ekness  
Department of Radio-Television

Carl, Matthew, M.A., Fall 2010

History

The Columbia Gardens Amusement Park: Company Sponsored Community in Butte, Montana

Chairperson: Dr. Jeffrey Wiltse

In 1899, William A. Clark, one of Butte, Montana's famous "Copper Kings," purchased 21 acres of land east of Butte, on which he created the Columbia Gardens amusement park. Clark ran his park at personal expense, refusing to charge admission and regularly offering special deals so that Butte residents, particularly children, could enjoy the park. After Clark's death in 1925, his estate sold most of his Montana holdings, including the Columbia Gardens, to the Anaconda Copper Mining Company in 1928. Without the sentimental attachment to the park that Clark had had, the fact that the Columbia Gardens was not created or operated to turn a profit seemed to argue for the company closing it down. Yet the Anaconda Company continued to operate the park until 1973. Company executives did so not out of a sense of obligation to Clark or the people of Butte, but because they saw in it an opportunity to enact a program of welfare capitalism to promote a community ideal in which Butte workers believed that their interests overlapped with the interests of the company. That welfare capitalist program was largely successful until the Anaconda Company decided to close the park for good in 1973 to expand open pit mining into the area. Letters to the editor published in the Butte daily newspaper after the decision to close the park was announced, and the books and films created after the closing to commemorate the park, illustrate the emotional connection the people of Butte had to the park, their acknowledgement of Anaconda's critical role in sustaining Butte and giving it its identity, and how the closing of the park symbolized the company's steady and inexorable destruction of the community.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1.....	21
CHAPTER 2.....	31
CHAPTER 3.....	54
CONCLUSION.....	73
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	79

## INTRODUCTION

On September 13, 1928, J.R. Hobbins, the Vice President of the Anaconda Copper Mining Company, sent a letter to company President Cornelius F. Kelley detailing the final steps in a deal the company had been working on for several months. William A. Clark, one of Butte's famed copper kings, had died in 1925, and Anaconda had finally arranged to purchase almost all of his Montana holdings for about 8.25 million dollars.<sup>1</sup>

This transaction culminated a decade of tremendous expansion for the Anaconda Company. In 1922 it finalized a merger with the American Brass Company, a metal fabrication company headquartered in Waterbury, Connecticut, and launched its "From Mine to Consumer" campaign, which was an attempt to eliminate intermediate costs of copper production and secure ongoing markets for its copper.<sup>2</sup> The company also consolidated several recently acquired plants in the Midwest and on the Pacific Coast into the Anaconda Wire and Cable Company.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps most significantly, in 1923 it negotiated its first expansion onto foreign soil with the purchase of the Chile Copper Company and the Chuquicamata mine, the holdings that would eventually account for the majority of Anaconda's profits by the 1970s.<sup>4</sup>

The portion of the Clark estate purchased by Anaconda contained a diverse array of holdings. Although the company was chiefly concerned with Clark's mining

---

<sup>1</sup> Montana Historical Society Archives. Anaconda Copper Mining Company Records, 1905-1964. A8: 3-5.

<sup>2</sup> Isaac F. Marcossou, *Anaconda* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1957), 167-68.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 183-86.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 200-01.

properties, it also acquired his daily newspaper, the Butte Miner, his hardware company, his timber millings operations, and the Butte Electric Railway Company, which ran about 60 cars on 38 miles of track in and around Butte. The railway company also included Clark's 55-acre amusement park, the Columbia Gardens, located a few miles east of Butte at the foot of the mountains.<sup>5</sup> Clark had purchased the land for the park back in 1899 and spent hundreds of thousands of dollars developing, expanding, and operating it. He did so without ever seeing a significant monetary return. Clark's own promotional material for the park, including his newspaper and a booklet he commissioned in 1902 highlighting the park's attractions, explicitly noted that the park lost money annually. In his 1928 letter to Kelley, Hobbins noted that for the years 1925, 26, and 27, the Columbia Gardens had cost Clark on average about 25,000 dollars.<sup>6</sup> While the expense of the Gardens had been for Clark a point of pride, a symbol of his largesse to the city of Butte, the company had no obvious reason for continuing to operate it at a loss. As Anaconda worked to streamline its operations in Butte, it seemed logical that the company would shut the park down.

Yet the following Spring, just as had occurred for the previous 30 years, the Columbia Gardens opened, but now under new ownership. Not only did Anaconda decide to keep the Columbia Gardens open, it also spent thousands of dollars over the next several years expanding and updating the park. The roller coaster was completely

---

<sup>5</sup> Montana Historical Society Archives. Anaconda Copper Mining Company Records, 1905-1964. A8: 3-5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* It is the conclusion of this study that Hobbins is describing Clark's losses and rather than his expenses, but the letter is not completely unambiguous on this point.

refurbished, a new carousel was built, and a new biplane ride was installed. In 1937, Anaconda shut down railway service to the park and replaced it with a bus system, then drained the lake at the Gardens and created a parking lot in its place.<sup>7</sup> Even with updated facilities and improved accessibility, Anaconda did not have any better luck turning a profit from the park than Clark. Nonetheless, for 44 years – through the Great Depression and times of war and peace – the Columbia Gardens opened every summer. In 1973, the company announced plans to expand open pit mining near the Columbia Gardens, which meant that the park would close for good at the end of the season. The big question is not why did the Anaconda Company close the park in 1973. Rather, the question is why did Anaconda keep the Gardens open for so long if not to make money?<sup>8</sup>

The company did so as part of a wider effort to promote a community ideal in Butte that emphasized shared interests between workers and the company. Janet Finn examines this community ideal in Tracing the Veins: Of Copper, Culture, and Community from Butte to Chuquicamata, an exploration of the connections between the workers at the Anaconda Copper Company's two most important mining operations: Butte and Chuquicamata, Chile. In both places, Finn explains, community formation occurred simultaneously from the top down and the bottom up. While the Anaconda Company devised strategies to engineer these communities in ways that most benefitted

---

<sup>7</sup> Pat Kearney, *Butte's Pride – The Columbia Gardens* (Butte, MT: Skyhigh Communications, 1994), 77-78.

<sup>8</sup> That the Anaconda Company did not run the Gardens to make money is an assumption based on the claims made in available sources rather than a statement of fact based on specific evidence. The archival economic data necessary to make this claim directly is not available at present.

it, workers organically created a sense of community themselves through everyday activities and interactions.<sup>9</sup> Finn explores the nexus of these modes of community formation, analyzing how company direction and working class creation “coalesced and collided over time.”<sup>10</sup> In Butte, Finn, argues, Anaconda used nationalist and localist imagery and rhetoric, most notably in company-owned newspapers, to create a sense of solidarity between the company and workers, a feeling that corporate and labor interests were united within a “we’re all in the same boat” mentality.<sup>11</sup>

This study seeks to place Anaconda’s ownership of the Columbia Gardens within this broader narrative. The company-owned newspaper Finn refers to did not simply print articles that explicitly argued that company and worker interests should unite. Rather, they recounted stories that illustrated for readers a harmonious community rather than a divided one. Columbia Gardens became an important venue from which the company pulled these stories. Thus, the Anaconda Company did not keep the Columbia Gardens open because its management thought the park could turn a profit, but because it served as an ideal setting where specific community values could be fostered, displayed, and reported on to the rest of the community.

\* \* \*

This study builds on the work of other historians who have also focused on the impact of commercial and mechanized amusements on communities in the late nineteenth

---

<sup>9</sup> Janet Finn, *Tracing the Veins: Of Copper, Culture, and Community from Butte to Chuquicamata* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 72-109.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 72-73.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 75.



and early twentieth centuries. Kathy Peiss, in Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York, uses commercial amusements as a window through which to view general working-class cultural changes, especially ones related to gender. Peiss regards the new commercialized leisure activities for working class women in this era as opportunities to challenge patriarchal Victorian cultural arrangements. Peiss is clear to point out that the women that her study focuses on are young, single women, at work either because of increased opportunities for female laborers or familial necessity. Although these women experienced the sharp dichotomy between working and nonwork hours similarly to men, traditional public venues of leisure were not open to them. Instead, they turned toward “cheap amusements,” the growing commercialized leisure market symbolized by dance halls, amusement parks, and movie theaters. In these places, women “experimented with new cultural forms that articulated gender in terms of sexual expressiveness and social interaction with men.”<sup>12</sup> To use Peiss’ language, new leisure activities fostered a “heterosocial” culture that strained the nineteenth century cultural conception of a separate women’s sphere. Challenging cultural norms that delineated appropriate behavior for men and women was one component, Peiss argues, of a complex shift from a Victorian to Modern society in this era. In the communities of the emerging Modern society, women would no longer be subjected to the same cultural rules as they had been in the past; they would actively

---

<sup>12</sup> Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the Century New York* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1986), 6.

shape what those rules would be. The venues of so-called “cheap amusements” became critical crucibles in which this new dynamic emerged.

In *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century*, John Kasson presents the amusement parks at Coney Island, New York, in the early part of the twentieth century as powerful symbols of America's clamor for new and exciting cultural experiences. Those experiences, Kasson argues, served a dual purpose. On one hand they created ideal environments for people to challenge traditional Victorian values. On the other hand, they ultimately served to legitimate the emerging commercialization of mass culture, which created a new set of societal rules. In other words, one set of values that had long defined community were rapidly being replaced with a new set of values.<sup>13</sup> And, according to Kasson, much of this transition occurred at amusement parks.

Lizabeth Cohen, in *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939*, examines the power of commercialized leisure and mass culture to diminish ethnic divisions within the working class. Using Chicago as her setting, Cohen begins by describing a working class at the end of World War I comprised of distinct ethnic communities, which had been established during massive immigration to the city during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These ethnic divisions, she claims, prevented political involvement on a class-wide scale. Cohen argues that merely participating in mass culture, whether through shopping at chain stores, attending motion pictures, or listening to the radio, did not have the effect of breaking down ethnic

---

<sup>13</sup> John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978).

divisions. “Rather,” she writes, “the impact of mass culture depended on the social and economic contexts in which it developed and the manner in which it was experienced, in other words, how mass culture was produced, distributed, and consumed.”<sup>14</sup>

Cohen's discussion of the popularity of motion pictures in Chicago clearly illustrates this point. In the 1920s, Chicago workers “indulged with gusto in motion pictures,” Cohen writes.<sup>15</sup> However, instead of attending the grand picture palaces in Chicago’s commercial district, workers most often patronized small neighborhood theaters near their homes because “working-class patrons found the neighborhood theater not only more affordable but also more welcoming, as the spirit of the community carried over into the local movie hall.”<sup>16</sup> Therefore, despite the fact that the Irish in one part of the city and Italians in another neighborhood might see the same movie, watching them in familiar ethnic company had a more profound effect on workers’ community orientation than the content of the film. Neighborhood theaters were also often locally owned by people of the same ethnic heritage as their patrons, and consequently adapted the atmosphere, décor, and selection of films in their theaters to a specific ethnic clientele.

This arrangement changed significantly in the late 1920s with the advent of talking pictures. Most locally owned theaters could not afford to install the specialized equipment necessary to show a “talkie,” the format of most new motion pictures by 1930.

---

<sup>14</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (London, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 101.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 120.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 122.

Many were either forced to close or were purchased by movie chains that tried to standardize the movie-going experience. Thus, by the early 1930s, unique neighborhood movie theaters had all but disappeared in Chicago, replaced by theater chains that standardized both the ambiance of theaters and the films shown in them. Although the number of theaters in Chicago declined by half by the mid-1930s, the ratio of people to seats remained steady at about nine to one.<sup>17</sup> Cohen's analysis of chain stores, radio programs, and dance halls shows the same pattern: distinctively ethnic cultural experiences of working-class Chicagoans became mass cultural experiences over time.<sup>18</sup> These changes to community in Chicago occurred in major cities throughout the country, Cohen argues, with important political as well as cultural ramifications. No longer as fragmented by ethnicity, the American working class increasingly identified their common interests, and by the 1930s had coalesced into a cornerstone of the New Deal coalition that would dominate politics in the country for several decades.

In Going Out: the Rise and Fall of Public Amusements, David Nasaw offers a different reason for the integrative impact of mass culture on an ethnically-divided working class in the first decades of the twentieth century. Like Kasson and Cohen, Nasaw identifies the urbanization and industrialization at the end of the 1800s as the primary catalysts for the creation of leisure activities that relied on mechanization and sought to attract large, ethnically and economically diverse crowds. The crowds, however, did not remain heterogeneous upon engaging in these activities. Nasaw writes,

---

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 129.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 157.

For urban Americans in general, and white-collar and ethnic workers in particular, the world of commercial amusements represented a privileged sphere of daily life outside the mundane social world with its confusions and contradictions. Everywhere else – at home, in their neighborhoods, and at work – they straddled the social divisions of class and ethnicity. Only in the playgrounds furnished by the show businessmen could they submerge themselves in a corporate body, an 'American' public, that transcended these divisions.<sup>19</sup>

In other words, new commercial amusements “afforded residents of divided cities the experience of belonging to social groupings that were totalizing rather than divisive...inclusive rather than exclusive.”<sup>20</sup>

Like Cohen, Nasaw argues that mere involvement in commercial amusements did not have a homogenizing effect. But whereas Cohen argues that homogenization only occurred when commercialized amusements lost their distinctly ethnic characteristics, Nasaw asserts that racial exclusion and derision led to the homogenization of the patrons of commercial amusements. The task for the proprietors and promoters of these amusement venues, Nasaw argues, was to “provide commercial amusements and amusement sites that were public in the sense that they belonged to no particular social groups, exciting enough to appeal to the millions, and respectable enough to offend no one.”<sup>21</sup> “Decency” thus became a primary goal for the owners of commercial amusements, who sought to attract men and women of all ages, classes, and ethnicities to

---

<sup>19</sup> David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), 45.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 46.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

their venues. However, according to Nasaw, maintaining decency in the abstract was not enough, it “had to be concretized through reference to an immutably ‘indecent’ other.”<sup>22</sup>

In early-twentieth-century public amusements, proprietors of commercialized leisure assigned that role to blacks. They did so in two ways. First, they systematically excluded African Americans from or segregated them within vaudeville houses, amusement parks, movie theaters, nickelodeons, and penny arcades. They could then extol the virtues of their safe, yet inexpensive public amusements that kept unwanted people out and thus ensured a “decent” crowd. Second, blacks were parodied onstage at vaudeville or musical-comedy shows by white actors in blackface. The most common black characters were “the ‘dandy’ preening and bragging about his thick lips, wooly hair, and smart clothes; the imbecile sputtering nonsense and forever ‘spooked’ by hobgoblins; the lazy fool doing all he could to avoid work; [and] the imposter maladroitly impersonating ‘white’ doctors, lawyers, or politicians.”<sup>23</sup> Attributing these negative qualities to blacks, Nasaw says, “served to unite the audience in a celebration of its own ‘whiteness.’”<sup>24</sup> Therefore, like Cohen, Nasaw recognizes the transition from cultural experiences defined by ethnicity to mass cultural experiences. He further describes how that change occurred: fragmented ethnic communities became a more cohesive “white community” through the exclusion and derision of blacks.

\* \* \*

---

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 47.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 53.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 54.

This study differs from these seminal works in three specific ways. First, Peiss, Kasson, Cohen, and Nasaw all examine the amusements of the two largest metropolitan areas in the country at the time: New York and Chicago. Butte, by contrast, was an average sized town, never rising much above 100,000. A smaller town meant more limited recreational opportunities for residents, which made the ones available particularly important. Butte residents identified with the Columbia Gardens in a way that New Yorkers did not with Coney Island. The closing of the Gardens touched off a powerful emotional response that in some sense still has not faded for many of Butte's older residents, while the vanishing of many of the vibrant attractions that drew crowds during Coney Island's heyday did not, according to Kasson, have that kind of impact. In large cities, new amusements are constantly being created, and thus residents are accustomed to a constantly changing, vibrant commercial amusement market. In Butte, nothing similar to the Columbia Gardens has been built since it closed. Second, Butte was basically a company town throughout most of the twentieth century, defined not just by mining but by the Anaconda Company itself. After 1928, Anaconda both owned the Columbia Gardens and employed thousands of the people that visited the park, which made the relationship between patrons and the park management an issue unlike anything the patrons of big city amusements encountered. Most of Coney Island's visitors, for example, did not know whom the park owners were and were not connected to them in any way other than the straightforward relationship between sellers of entertainment and consumers of it. In Butte, Anaconda's dual role as mine owner/miner employer and amusement provider complicated the relationship between the company and workers.

Anaconda's decision to close the park in 1973 in order to dig a new open pit mine in the area illustrated this complicated dynamic. While the people of Butte opposed the decision of Anaconda as park owner, they took no direct action to save the Gardens, in large part because they recognized the business necessity of the decision. They understood that if the closing of the park meant continued mining operations and thus continued employment for thousands of Butte residents, it was a bitter but unavoidable sacrifice.

Finally, and most importantly, the impacts that these other commercial and mechanized amusements had on community life were largely incidental to the main objective of making money. This study argues, however, that the Anaconda Company kept the Columbia Gardens open precisely to impact its community. In other words, community transformation itself was the primary objective. The owners of the amusements described by Peiss, Kasson, Cohen, and Nasaw maintained an explicit goal of making their attractions as profitable as possible, and their actions are completely understandable in this context. Opening new "cheap amusements" to female patrons dramatically increased the customer base for businessmen competing with more established forms of entertainment. At Coney Island the newest, most exciting rides consistently drew the biggest crowds. In Chicago, ethnically themed movie theaters were replaced by more generic movie palaces because those palaces were the venues able to show the motion pictures in highest demand: those with sound. And in the vaudeville houses Nasaw highlights, excluding and deriding a particular group was done more to increase the size of the audiences than solely because of racial animus. Again, the fact



that these decidedly commercial decisions had dramatic, tangible, and perceptual impacts on the communities in which they were located was secondary to the primary goal of increased profits. For the Anaconda Company on the other hand, the impact of their amusement on perceptions of community was the first priority, more important than whether the park made a profit. It is within this context that company decisions about how to run the Columbia Gardens and the way in which the Montana Standard reported on events at the park must be interpreted. It is therefore more useful to think of the operation of the Gardens after 1928 as an act of welfare capitalism rather than a commercial amusement.

Welfare capitalism emerged as a corporate response to the Progressive reform efforts of the early twentieth century. According to historian Andrea Tone, welfare capitalism reflected growing realizations among employers that “economic and political variables” made “the notion of a perfect market meaningless” and that “wage earners [sold] their potential and not a finished product.”<sup>25</sup> Consequently, despite the inherently “oppositional relationship embedded in capitalism” those employers were “compelled to treat workers as more than disposable commodities.”<sup>26</sup> In practice this mindset resulted in special benefits for workers beyond their wages, which employers believed would serve to increase productivity and provide a bulwark against labor unrest. Those benefits generally took two forms: company-sponsored leisure activities, of which the Columbia Gardens would certainly be an example, and more directly remunerative benefits such as

---

<sup>25</sup> Andrea Tone, *The Business of Benevolence: Industrial Paternalism in Progressive America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 1.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

pension plans or profit sharing arrangements.<sup>27</sup> Tone argues that welfare capitalism was designed to stave off potentially more onerous labor reforms imposed by the state; benefits were thus designed to create “a public culture that lent support” to the “antistatist views” of business.<sup>28</sup>

In the case of the Columbia Gardens, this argument is a useful guidepost but ultimately misleading. The Anaconda Company never had a coherent set of welfare capitalist policies beyond the park. It did not offer the more remunerative benefits Tone describes, and during the years prior to the purchasing of the Gardens, according to Finn, the company did little to interfere with the recreational activities of miners, recognizing that there were no leisure activities it could sponsor to compete with the illicit amusements available in a wide open mining camp like Butte.<sup>29</sup> Also, there is no indication that the Anaconda Company had national political or economic trends in mind when its management decided to keep the park open; their interests were completely local. Rather than attempting to create a public culture to support “antistatist” views, the company used the Gardens to attempt to create a public view of community that assumed that the company and workers were not opposed factions but instead had overlapping interests.

\* \* \*

This study examines how the Anaconda Company attempted to use the Columbia Gardens to promote this specific idea of community in Butte and the extent to which it

---

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>29</sup> Finn, 79-80.

succeeded. Chapter one provides historical background on the park and on William A. Clark, the Butte businessman who created the Columbia Gardens. This context is important because when the Anaconda Company took ownership of the park in 1928, it decided to run the park much as Clark had. Chapter two analyzes three ways in which the Anaconda Company used the park as a welfare capitalist tool to promote its vision of community. Miners Field Day, a company-sponsored event held every summer between 1914 and 1931 was intended to promote safety at work, at school, and in the home, but also included a wide variety of other activities. Second, Children's Day, in which the company allowed everyone 16 and younger to ride the trolley or bus to the park for free and offered rides and concessions at reduced prices, was held every Thursday at Columbia Gardens during the summer. Third, baseball games drew large crowds to the park to root for Butte's professional team or for a team sponsored by their employer that participated in competitive amateur leagues.

Chapter three focuses on Columbia Gardens from the perspectives of the people who patronized the park, particularly working-class families, and attempts to draw some conclusions about the extent to which the company was able to create the community vision it desired. The chapter begins with a general analysis of patrons' experiences with the mechanical amusements of the Gardens. It continues with a close examination of letters to the editor printed in the Montana Standard after the Anaconda Company announced its intention to shut down the Gardens in 1973. These letters reveal Anaconda's success in its community-building project and how closing the park undermined that success. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the commemorative

media created in the decades since the park closed that taken together comprise a collective memory about the Columbia Gardens that further undermined the notion of shared interests between the company and its workers.

The conclusion explores the various attempts made after the closing of the Columbia Gardens to resurrect it elsewhere in the area, why those attempts were ultimately unsuccessful, and what that suggests about the relationship between the company that owned the amusement park and the largely working class people who patronized it for generations.

\* \* \*

Chapters two and three both include evidence from sources that require specific explanation. Chapter two describes how the Anaconda Company promoted its vision of community at the Gardens not only through the specific events held there, but also through the way those events were reported on in Butte's most read daily newspaper, the Montana Standard – a newspaper owned by the Anaconda Company. This study's analysis of these articles is informed by Dennis Swibold's study, Copper Chorus: Mining, Politics, and the Montana Press, 1889-1959, which argues that the Montana Standard expressed company views and supported the company agenda in its pages.

Swibold begins with the launching of the paper that would eventually become the Montana Standard, the Anaconda Standard – a daily newspaper created by Anaconda Mining Company owner Marcus Daly in 1889. The name change came in 1928, when Anaconda bought William A. Clark's daily the Butte Miner as part of the agreement with Clark's estate to acquire all of his holdings in Montana. Accompanying this change in

name, Swibold argues, was a corresponding change in the paper's overall tone, now that it was the only daily paper in Butte. Prior to 1928, the *Standard*, the *Miner*, and the other Butte dailies maintained a militant partisanship to promote policies and politicians that would protect the interests of their particular owners. The business and personal rivalries between the Copper Kings played itself out time and again in their respective newspapers: during the election to decide which city would become Montana's capital, during William A. Clark's run for the US Senate, and during the protracted legal battles between Fritz Heinze and Amalgamated Mining over mineral rights on the Butte hill.

After the consolidation of Butte dailies by Anaconda after Clark's death, however, the overall tenor shifted markedly. The Montana Standard did not become a source of objective journalism, but the methods by which the paper supported the company became less explicit. Swibold describes the transformation this way:

The copper press was clearly changing tactics, and the gradual process stemmed as much from the fading of Anaconda's old warriors as the company's efforts to forge a more formal relationship with the papers in which it held controlling interests. Changes in the political landscape and lessons learned from the campaigns of the 1920s surely played roles as well. With little organized opposition in the state's political parties or its press, the company editors increasingly saw their function not as spear-throwers, but as cogs in a smooth-running public-relations machine.<sup>30</sup>

Swibold goes on to reference Edwin Erlandson, an employee of the Missoulian daily newspaper in Missoula, Montana, (another paper owned by Anaconda), who described how company-controlled newspapers participated in that public relations machine.

According to Erlandson, "Anaconda editors were expected to publish nothing harmful to

---

<sup>30</sup> Dennis L. Swibold, *Copper Chorus: Mining Politics and the Montana Press, 1889-1959* (Helena, MT: Montana Historical Society Press, 2006), 252.

the company's image; news favorable to the company – promotions, annual reports, and new projects – was to be played prominently; and, finally, editorials were to be 'confined to noncontroversial items with the theory that a calm society was a satisfied and happy society.'"<sup>31</sup> Although these directions for editors were unwritten policies, Erlandson describes them as explicit and straightforward.

These unwritten rules also neatly dovetail with Finn's argument concerning the type of community Anaconda sought to create in Butte. By avoiding controversial issues or stories that might cast the company in a bad light, particularly to its workers, and emphasizing stories that reflected favorably on the company, the Montana Standard could create the image of a harmonious community in which company and worker interests were not at odds. Within this context, by analyzing the stories about popular events at the Gardens that appeared in the Montana Standard during Anaconda's ownership of the park, it becomes possible to ascertain Anaconda's intentions for the Columbia Gardens without direct evidence of communication among management concerning the park.

Chapter three analyzes the experiences of Columbia Gardens patrons, and although ideally the sources that document how people experienced the park would be as contemporaneous as possible to those experiences, that unfortunately is not the case in this study. For example, newspaper articles from the period under examination contain descriptions of goings on at the park, but no interviews of individual patrons. Instead, this chapter relies heavily on the memories of visitors recounted in various written or recorded tributes to the park that were created after it closed. This poses a potential issue

---

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 264.

that all historians who employ memory in their analysis face. Do those memories reflect present opinions or agendas that make them less accurate descriptions of the past and thus less reliable historical sources? In *History and Memory*, Geoffrey Cubitt addresses a range of issues associated with current scholarly approaches to memory, including this one. In his discussion of individual memory, the knowledge of the past that falls within one's personal lived experiences, he describes the "reconstructivist" view of memory.<sup>32</sup> According to reconstructivists, memories are influenced by present circumstances but are nonetheless connected to the past. Remembering involves synthesizing and generalizing about the past, pulling out those details that seem particularly relevant, creating what Cubitt calls a "simplified digest of experience."<sup>33</sup> That process results in memories that are serviceable to historians coexisting with memories that are mistaken.

In terms of this study, the potential problem created by the reconstructivist view of individual memory is addressed differently in each part of chapter three. The general analysis of patrons' experiences at the Gardens relies on memories that are repeated in multiple sources and by multiple "rememberers," because the more specific and unique a particular memory is, the more likely it is to fall into the mistaken memory category. The examination of the closing of the Gardens and the subsequent creation of commemorations of the park, on the other hand, embraces the dilemma. Those commemorations are in part a reflection of how people want to remember the park. Even if those memories are mistaken, they are nonetheless creating a narrative that solidifies

---

<sup>32</sup> Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2007), 75-90.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 84.

where the Anaconda Company and the Columbia Gardens fit into broad conceptions of community. In other words, what is important in this case is not the accuracy of those memories, but how those memories result in particular collective views about community.



## CHAPTER 1

Before examining the period of the Anaconda Company's ownership of the Columbia Gardens and how it used the park to promote certain community ideals, it is necessary to examine the park's prior history, and its first owner, William A. Clark, for two important reasons. First, like the Anaconda Company, Clark operated the Gardens for reasons other than profit, which means the park was not created to be a moneymaking venture from the beginning. Second, Clark set several precedents for managing the park that the Anaconda Company would continue. Therefore, the company did not promote community through the Gardens by simply changing how the park was run. Instead, Anaconda either tweaked traditional policies slightly to better create a place to promote the kind of community it had in mind, or attempted to craft public perception of the park's community-building attributes by reporting on it in the newspaper in new ways.

The history of the Columbia Gardens amusement park begins in 1876, when William Adams filed claim on 21 acres of land east of Butte, in a canyon below the ridge of the Continental Divide. In honor of the United States centennial being celebrated that year, he named the claim "Columbia."<sup>34</sup> In 1888, Adams decided to lease the property after determining that no significant mineral wealth existed beneath its surface. The lessees were John Gordon and Frederick Ritchie, the owners of the only vaudeville house

---

<sup>34</sup> Dave Walter, "Butte's Paradise: Columbia Gardens" (*Montana Magazine* Sep./Oct. 1985: 22-27), 22.

operating in Butte at the time.<sup>35</sup> They immediately set to work turning Columbia into a recreation area.

An article that appeared in the Butte Miner on May 25, 1889, introduced the newly-named Columbia Gardens as “a resort worthy of the great metropolis of Montana,” and detailed how Gordon and Ritchie had developed the area in the year following their lease agreement.<sup>36</sup> The article began by identifying for whom this new resort had been built: the workers and their families who could not afford to travel to more distant places for recreation. It also assured readers that the park could be reached by a railcar ride that was “not tiresome” and for a “moderate cost.”<sup>37</sup> After arriving at the Gardens, the article insisted, young and old alike would find a number of recreational activities worth the cost of that ride and a 50 cents admission fee. They might take a row boat out onto Columbia’s lake or visit the museum to see an assortment of exhibits, including

one of the finest collections of wax figures in the country, a set of mechanical moving exhibitions representing the Brooklyn bridge with cars and vehicles in transit, the steamers Bear, Thetis, and Alert of the Polar Expedition, a genuine sea serpent, the sleeping beauty, a miniature representation of slat works, a set of stereoptical pictures of the battles of the rebellion, [and] a moving representation of the sloop Jeanette and its officers.<sup>38</sup>

Other attractions at the Gardens included a stage room in which “light entertainments” were repeated every 15 minutes, a shooting gallery, a carousel, a bar, a dancing pavilion, and a menagerie. Finally, the article announced the intentions of the proprietors to

---

<sup>35</sup> Kearney, *Butte’s Pride*, 6.

<sup>36</sup> “The Columbia Gardens.” *Butte Miner* [Butte, MT] 25 May 1889.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

construct a racetrack and a baseball field. The article concluded that the park was a “deserving [enterprise] that should meet with proper patronage and encouragement.”<sup>39</sup>

Despite this ringing endorsement, Gordon and Ritchie’s park did not garner regular patronage. A few years after opening, the railway system touted in the article had to shut down because of safety reasons, leaving potential visitors to travel to the park on horseback or on foot. As patronage dwindled the park largely became a “beer drinking haven for those willing to travel up the rugged road.”<sup>40</sup> Cock fighting and dog fighting became the sporting events of choice for these visitors. Symbolic of what the park had become was a “bear and bull” contest promoted by Gordon and Ritchie in 1895, in which, quite simply, a bear and bull were pitted against one another in a fight to the death. It was an event that, according to a publication by the Deer Lodge/Anaconda Historical Society, “even enraged many in rough-and-tumble Butte.”<sup>41</sup>

\* \* \*

In 1899, Adams sold Columbia to William A. Clark, a prominent Butte businessman. Clark arrived in Butte in 1872, already a wealthy man. Michael Malone, in his study of the political and economic rivalries that shaped early Butte entitled The Battle for Butte: Mining and Politics on the Northern Frontier, 1861-1906, introduces Clark as a man who had two defining characteristics: a genius for business and

---

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Kearney, *Butte’s Pride*, 7.

<sup>41</sup> Anaconda/Deer Lodge County Historical Society, “Columbia Gardens: Clark’s Gift or Gimmick?” (*Historic Review Quarterly* Summer 1997: 1-12), 2.

incredible ambition.<sup>42</sup> Although he originally traveled to the territory to work a gold claim in Bannack in 1863, his success resulted from the lucrative business of freighting goods to and from remote mining camps. Malone highlights his ability as a smart risk-taker, a man who knew how and when to invest his money to take advantage of new opportunities. Clark's life, Malone writes, "seemed an embodiment of raw, unrestrained frontier capitalism."<sup>43</sup> As the territory continued to develop, particularly the mining camp of Butte, Clark decided to invest his fortune in silver mines. So all-consuming did his passion for mining become that soon after making his investments in Butte, he traveled east to New York City, where he took classes at the Columbia University School of Mines in geology and mineralogy to learn the mining business.<sup>44</sup>

Several sources recount a Butte legend that explains why Clark decided to buy the land and create the Columbia Gardens.<sup>45</sup> According to Dave Walter,

The story is told that Clark and Jesse R. Wharton, the manager of the Butte Electric Railway Company (also owned by Clark), were driving an open carriage through the Butte streets one hot summer day, when they were impressed with the many groups of small children playing in the dust and dirt. Clark turned to his companion and asked, 'Mr. Wharton, is it not possible to provide a public playground, or picnic park, or something of the kind for all of these children we see playing in the filthy street?' (23).<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Michael Malone, *The Battle for Butte: Mining and Politics on the Northern Frontier, 1864-1906* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1981), 12.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>45</sup> Anaconda/Deer Lodge County Historical Society, 2; "Columbia Gardens, Butte's Famous Summer Resort." *Butte Miner* [Butte, MT] 22 Dec. 1901: 57 morning ed.; Adolph H. Heilbronner, *Sights and Scenes and a Brief history of Columbia Gardens* (Butte, MT: Butte Miner Co., 1902), 5; Kearney, *Butte's Pride*, 7; Carolyn J. Mattern, "An Era's End: Columbia Gardens Gone" (*Montana Post* Nov./Dec. 1973); Frank Quinn, *Memories of Columbia Gardens* (Butte, MT: Pioneer Prnting, 1973); Walter, 23.

<sup>46</sup> Walter, 23.

That incident supposedly sent Wharton on a hunt for suitable places in and around Butte to create that public playground. Eventually, Clark settled on the Columbia Gardens, which he purchased in March of 1899 for \$30,000.<sup>47</sup>

That legend, and the altruistic gesture at its heart, however, conflicts with the William A. Clark that the citizens of Butte knew. They knew him as an uncompromising, shrewd businessman, with an eye toward becoming a political power in the newly-formed state. His 1900 senate run confirmed the lengths to which he would go in pursuit of that power. After numerous accusations of bribery, many substantiated, Clark resigned his senate seat shortly after the Montana state legislature had voted him in, convinced that if he did not the US Senate would formally remove him. In 1907, after a brief visit to Montana, Mark Twain wrote that Clark was “as rotten a human being as can be found anywhere under the flag.”<sup>48</sup> In this context, it is plausible to assume that Clark decided to buy the Gardens as much for political reasons, namely to gain public support in the year leading up to his senate bid, than as a purely magnanimous gift to the city. It is also noteworthy that the first mention of the Clark-buys-Gardens-as-selfless-act-for-the-children-of-Butte legend probably appeared in Clark’s own newspaper, the Butte Miner, in December of 1901. The newspaper story, entitled “Columbia Gardens, Butte’s Famous Summer Resort,” described it this way: “Keenly alive to the disadvantages of rearing children in the city of Butte, Senator W. A. Clark, after sadly looking upon the little ones playing in the dirty streets and alleys, conceived the happy idea of providing

---

<sup>47</sup> “Purchased the Gardens.” *Daily Inter Mountain* [Butte, MT] 29 March 1899.

<sup>48</sup> Qtd. in Swibold, 229.

them with a playground where they could freely and without price enjoy the delights of nature; where they could have a better conception of the beautiful by coming in close contact with it and being surrounded with trees, flowers, and grass.”<sup>49</sup> Although there is no direct evidence to support the claim, it is certainly conceivable that the legend was concocted at some point to enhance Clark’s reputation among the citizens of Butte.

Regardless of Clark’s motives for purchasing the Gardens, what is certainly true is that Clark invested a considerable amount of his own money to improve and expand the park and continued to subsidize it long after his political aspirations ended. Clark placed Wharton in charge of the operation and gave him wide latitude to develop the park; he eventually funneled at least \$100,000 dollars into the project the first two years of his ownership. Wharton decided to raze all of the old structures on the grounds and rebuild the park completely. He had new sewage and water systems installed and ordered construction on a three story grand pavilion to serve as the centerpiece of the park, which was completed in 1900. It housed refreshment booths, kitchens, the Garden’s Café, an ice cream parlor, and a large dance floor.<sup>50</sup> Although the original pavilion burned down in 1907, Clark had another one built and opened to the public by the beginning of the 1909 season.<sup>51</sup>

Wharton added several other features to the park in the following years. In 1902, a new trolley track was completed to the Gardens from downtown, along with two new jumbo trolley cars to increase the number of people who could ride to the park each

---

<sup>49</sup> 57.

<sup>50</sup> Kearney, *Butte’s Pride*, 9-11.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 62-64.

day.<sup>52</sup> He also arranged for the building of a ball field that could accommodate both baseball and football games and a herbarium that housed plant species native to Montana.<sup>53</sup> Greenhouses were built to provide flowers for the gardens that covered the grounds by opening day every year.<sup>54</sup> In 1906 “the menagerie” opened at the park, an animal collection containing many species native to the region. A picnic area and a playground were also constructed during these years.<sup>55</sup>

Columbia Gardens included mechanical attractions as well. The first ride built at the park was “The Chutes,” a steep, flume-like wooden slide built from the top of the hillside overlooking the lake down into the water. Water rushing down the flume sent boatloads of passengers swiftly down the hill, splashing as they hit the pond below.<sup>56</sup> Wharton also oversaw the construction of a three-tiered roller coaster, a carousel, and a ferris wheel by the end of the first decade of Clark’s ownership.<sup>57</sup> Finally, an arcade was built alongside the pavilion, featuring a shooting gallery, an electric shock machine, and machines that played short flip-movies.<sup>58</sup>

Despite the expanded facilities and the new mechanical amusements, however, Clark never charged an entrance fee to the Columbia Gardens. Like his decision to create the park, the stated reason for this decision – to ensure that everyone in Butte would have

---

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

<sup>54</sup> Walter, 25.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>57</sup> In 1918, after an accident, the top tier of the roller coaster was removed. Kearney, *Butte’s Pride*, 17.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 47.

access to the park – probably tells only part of the story. More credibly, Clark probably figured he did not need to charge admission because the ride to the Gardens on the trolley – which he owned – was the only easy way to get to the park and acted as a de facto entrance fee. This was another policy that the Anaconda Company continued when it took over in 1928, even when the automobile made access to the park easier.

In addition to creating all of these new attractions, Clark worked to expand the property of the Gardens. Eventually, he purchased enough surrounding land to expand the park from 21 acres in 1899 to 68 acres when he died in 1925.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps Clark's most lasting contribution to the Columbia Gardens inherited by the Anaconda Company in 1928, however, was Children's Day. On Arbor Day, May 12, 1901, Clark directed Wharton to allow children 16 years of age or younger to ride on the trolley to the Columbia Gardens for free.<sup>60</sup> That day, 15,000 people visited the park, the most successful day in the park's history.<sup>61</sup> The following year, also on Arbor Day, free trolley rides were again offered to children, and again a large crowd flocked to the park. So successful were these days that Clark decided to turn every Thursday during the summer into "Children's Day."<sup>62</sup> Like Clark's policy not to charge admission to the park, Children's Day would be an institution in Butte until the Columbia Gardens closed in 1973. Invariably, these were the days each summer that drew the largest crowds.

---

<sup>59</sup> Walter, 25.

<sup>60</sup> Anaconda/Deer Lodge County Historical Society, 4.

<sup>61</sup> Kearney, *Butte's Pride*, 44.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 45.



Besides deep pockets, Clark also had at his disposal the means to advertise the new Gardens to the public. In 1902, Clark commissioned a 37-page booklet compiled by Adolph Heilbronner and printed by the Butte Miner entitled *Sights and Scenes and a Brief History of Columbia Gardens, Butte's Only Pleasure Resort*. The booklet was intended primarily as a marketing device to reframe the Gardens as a respectable, family-friendly venue after its seedy past. Pictures throughout the booklet, for example, depicted well-dressed patrons of all ages, happily enjoying the park's attractions.

Heilbronner described the brief history and new attractions of the park in elaborate, often hyperbolic detail. He began by likening the approach to the Gardens with the Appian Way, the famous military road of ancient Rome, connecting the city to southern parts of the Italian peninsula. "Butte's Appian Way," Heilbronner declared, "is the double street car track leading to Columbia Gardens."<sup>63</sup> His introduction of the park's owner was even more lavishly complimentary: "As St. Paul went to the Eternal City to give the people religious nourishment and Christian blessings, so also came to Butte the man who in the fullness of his heart spread before the citizens the possibilities which they have so gratefully enjoyed at Columbia Gardens; gave them the desired opportunity to breathe Nature's purest air and quaff the crystal nectar of the Rockies at its fountain head."<sup>64</sup> Heilbronner also included an account of the expenses that Butte's St. Paul had given to provide this grand amusement park to the city – \$125,000 by 1902.<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> 4.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

When the Anaconda Company purchased the Columbia Gardens in 1928, they inherited something of a paradox. The Gardens was the most popular recreation destination in the area, but was not operated to make money. Clark spent thousands of dollars a year maintaining all of the facilities he had built without charging an admission fee and allowing children to ride free to the park every Thursday. But perhaps with an admission charge and without Children's Day, the park would not have been nearly as popular as it was. Its low cost and its popularity could not be separated. Clearly, Anaconda had good cause to close the park, but those in charge of the company decided to continue operating it on a seasonal basis. They also decided to maintain Clark's policies of free admission and Children's Day every Thursday during the summer months. Like the story of Clark's initial decision to build an amusement park, these decisions cannot be credited to magnanimity. Anaconda kept the park open so that it could promote a particular vision of community that highlighted the common interests of workers and the company. The next chapter describes how the company used the park to achieve that end.

## CHAPTER 2

This chapter examines three specific ways in which the Anaconda Company used the Columbia Gardens amusement park to promote its vision of community in Butte – one in which residents, particularly working-class residents, believed that their interests coincided with the company’s interests rather than diverged from them. First, the company created Miners’ Field Day at the Gardens, an annual summer event that offered a variety of activities for workers and their families within a broadly conceived intent to promote safety in the community. Miners’ Field Day replaced another yearly celebration at the park, Miner’s Union Day, which was created to honor the founding of the first union in Butte in 1878. Whereas Miners’ Union Day had promoted a class-conscious idea of community in which workers fought together to win concessions from the mining companies, the Field Day allowed the Anaconda Company to illustrate its intent to do positive things for not just its employees but for all Butte residents. Second, Anaconda continued to host Children’s Day at the Gardens every Thursday during the summer season. Articles in the company-owned Butte daily newspaper emphasized how these days encouraged the perception of common interests by focusing on the harmonious environment the company had created for the children despite the large crowds, and the care the company took to ensure that young people would be supervised and cared for during their visits. The paternalistic tone of these articles assured readers that the Anaconda Company was a trustworthy ally of working-class parents who sent their children to the park. Finally, the Anaconda Company maintained an athletic field at the Gardens, which provided a venue for professional and amateur baseball, a sport

particularly well-suited for creating the sense of community, especially among its spectators, that the company desired. Besides providing a playing field, Anaconda also regularly organized a team to play in amateur leagues, causing its employees to root for the company's team and indirectly for the company itself. Taken together, these events and activities that occurred at the Columbia Gardens constituted a program of welfare capitalism. They provided benefits for workers beyond wages intended to tie workers to the company more closely.

#### *Miners' Field Day*

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the most important day of the year in Butte was not a traditional holiday such as Christmas or Easter, nor was it St. Patrick's Day, despite the large Irish population in the city. Rather, Miners' Union Day, a workingman's holiday created to celebrate the establishment of the first union in Butte in 1878, was, according to historian Mary Murphy, "the city's greatest holiday."<sup>66</sup> Celebrated every June 13, Miners' Union Day included a morning parade through uptown Butte followed by an afternoon and evening of activities at the Columbia Gardens. All government offices, banks, stores, and most importantly the mines, were closed on that day so that the entire working class of Butte could participate in the festivities.<sup>67</sup>

At the park, the most popular activities of Miners' Union Day were the mining exercises that took place on the ball field. For the hard rock drilling contest, miners were

---

<sup>66</sup> Mary Murphy, *Mining Cultures: Men, Women, and Leisure in Butte, 1914-1941* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 123.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 124.

classified by weight and competed as either individuals or in teams of two or three; organizers set up several massive blocks of granite on a platform below the grandstand, and participants who drilled the deepest into their block in 15 minutes were named the winners.<sup>68</sup> The mucking competition timed how long it took participants to shovel a set amount of waste rock into a one-ton capacity ore cart identical to the carts used in the mines.<sup>69</sup> Both the drilling and mucking competitions drew large crowds and tremendous interest. They also drew competitors from other communities. Although spectators rooted first for men from the mines they worked in, they all preferred that a Butte man win over competitors from elsewhere. The evening featured a dance in the pavilion, often with the local Boston and Montana Band, later known as the Butte Mines Band, playing the music. Of course, all of the regular Gardens attractions operated on Miners' Union Day as well.

Miners' Union Day was a celebration of union membership, organization, and collective action, and reinforced a class-divided conception of the Butte community – specifically, a community divided into class-defined factions competing to preserve their interests. Unionists understood that the growth of businesses in Butte did not necessarily mean that workers would be provided higher wages, or increased benefits, or improvements in working conditions. They fought for these concessions knowing that they were playing a zero sum game, in which a victory for them came at the expense of their employers' bottom lines. The tone underlying the Miners' Union Day events

---

<sup>68</sup> Kearney, *Butte's Pride*, 54-55.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 55.

emphasized the divergent interests between workers and employers and encouraged workers to continue to fight together in an ongoing struggle.

Between 1914 and 1935, however, Miners' Union Day was not celebrated. In 1914, a rift between the conservative and radical wings of the Miners' Union escalated into rioting on Miners' Union Day. Generally, conservative members of the union favored peaceful relations with the Anaconda Company, in which collective bargaining was ongoing but would not result in a walkout by workers if an agreement could not be reached. More radical members called for direct action against the company to fight for higher pay and safer working conditions. The rustling card system caused the growing rift to rupture in 1914. Anaconda developed the system, which required potential miners to receive a special card from the company in order to apply for work at one of its mines, to keep radical workers, especially those connected to the Industrial Workers of the World, from entering its workforce. Radical union members protested the system, refusing to show cards when they started their shifts at the mines, but union leadership, which consisted of conservatives, refused to support the action. In response, radical unionists decided to form a separate union on June 12, 1914. The next day, Miners' Union Day, these radicals blocked Park Street in an attempt to stop the annual parade and rioting erupted. Ten days later, on June 23, radicals destroyed the Miners' Union Hall, and on August 30 they blew up the rustling card office at the Parrot Mine. The governor of Montana responded by declaring martial law in Butte and sending in National Guard troops to control hostilities. The Anaconda Company responded to these events by blacklisting all of the members of the new radical union and declaring an open shop in

their mines. That open shop lasted until 1935, and in that interval, from 1914 to 1935, no Miners' Union Day celebrations occurred.<sup>70</sup>

Anaconda executives attempted to diffuse the high level of tension between the company and its workers, according to Murphy, by “inaugurat[ing] several new programs aimed at winning the hearts and minds of its employees – and those of its families.”<sup>71</sup>

One of those new programs was Miners' Field Day, which the company sponsored at the Columbia Gardens from 1918 to 1931. Miners' Field Day combined many of the popular activities and competitions from Miners' Union Day, especially the mining exercises, but with a different message. Rather than a celebration of unionization and thus the promotion of a conception of the Butte community being divided into competing classes, Miners' Field Day encouraged safety in the mines, in schools, and in the home. The company anticipated, according to Murphy, that this new celebration day at the Gardens would “promote harmony among workers, their families, and management.”<sup>72</sup> In other words, Miners' Field Day was designed to promote a conception of community in which class distinctions were minimized.

Anaconda's decision to make safety the unifying theme of Miners' Field Day was part of a broader response to the passage of a Workmen's Compensation Bill in the Montana Assembly in 1914. Soon after the bill's passage, Anaconda “initiated a ‘safety first’ program designed to decrease the number of work-related accidents and the amount

---

<sup>70</sup> Pat Kearney, *Butte Voices: Mining, Neighborhoods, People* (Butte, MT: Skyhigh Communications, 1998), 20-25; Michael Punke, *Fire and Brimstone: The North Butte Mining Disaster of 1917* (New York: Hyperion, 2006), 141-144.

<sup>71</sup> 125.

<sup>72</sup> 127.

of compensation the company might be charged.”<sup>73</sup> Part of that program involved publication of the *Anode* magazine. Murphy explains that “the *Anode* was the company’s voice in the safety campaign, and the magazine had a consistent format throughout its life (1915-42). It always ran articles and illustrations on mine safety, the history and uses of copper, and various aspects of copper production. Jokes and anecdotes filled the bottom of pages, some meant to reinforce safety messages, others purely for entertainment.”<sup>74</sup> In the June 1918, issue of the *Anode*, the editor explained what the Anaconda Company hoped to accomplish by sponsoring Miners’ Field Day: “‘In such an industry as mining, where holidays are few and living is very strenuous, people are apt to forget to relax and consider the well-being of their neighbors.’ He hoped that a day of field sports would cement ‘the people together in a happy considerate community feeling.’”<sup>75</sup> This statement illustrates the change in tone between Miners’ Union Day and Miners’ Field Day. A Miners’ Union Day organizer would no doubt have expressed a similar sentiment to the one of the *Anode* editor, with one small but all-important difference. Rather than being urged to consider the well-being of neighbors, an inclusive idea suggesting a fellowship that transcended class and even ethnic distinctions, Miner’s Union Day was designed to encourage workers to consider the well-being of one another and of the union.

The most popular safety-related event introduced by the company for Miners’ Field Day was the first aid contest. Teams of competitors from across the state faced

---

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 125.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 126.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 128.



several first aid challenges, in which actors posed as victims of workplace accidents. Judges awarded points based on the swiftness and care of the responses. In 1929, the team from the Leonard Mine in Butte narrowly defeated the previous year's winners from the Great Falls Zinc Mill.<sup>76</sup> Like the drilling and mucking competitions, spectators rooted first for teams from the mine or mill where they worked, but always preferred teams from Butte to defeat teams from other cities. Having this rooting interest promoted a pride in the community as a whole different from the working-class pride encouraged by Miners' Union Day. For another safety-related competition in 1931, the final year of the Field Day, the company sponsored a safety-first poster contest for children, with prizes for the most creative depictions of safety-first slogans.<sup>77</sup>

Other activities of Miners' Field Day, while not specifically about safety, made the event a more family-oriented occasion than Miners' Union Day had been in the past, and more clearly demonstrates how Miners' Field Day worked as a form of welfare capitalism. A pet show allowed children to bring their animals to the park, where judges awarded prizes based on the "cleanliness and appropriate character of the pets."<sup>78</sup> The company also increased the activities for women at the Field Day. Most popular among these were athletic competitions such as nail driving, wood sawing, and football punting. According to the Montana Standard, "all of these events provided much fun for the men-

---

<sup>76</sup> "Victory Earned by Fraction of a Single Point." *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 30 July 1929.

<sup>77</sup> "Children Offer Clever Designs on Safety First." *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 28 July 1931.

<sup>78</sup> "Pet Show is Big Feature for Youngsters During Busy Day." *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 28 July 1931.

folk, who laughed long and loudly but nevertheless showed considerable astonishment at the talent of their women-folk.”<sup>79</sup> The company also introduced activities that promoted family life. A baby review began in 1919, and a baby clinic appeared five years later. Regarding the clinic Murphy writes, “with the help of public health nurses, mothers received advice on child care and their babies had a checkup. Healthy babies received blue ribbons.”<sup>80</sup> Here, clearly, was a tangible benefit provided by the Anaconda Company for its workers’ families that exemplifies a welfare capitalist approach. Further, because the clinic operated on Miners’ Field Day it conspicuously demonstrated the company’s care for the people of Butte, and advanced the idea that company and worker interests were more similar than different.

The company further encouraged female participation in another way that promoted a feeling of shared community. Women were recruited to prepare picnic lunches to feed the crowds and, in so doing, create a family atmosphere at the Gardens.<sup>81</sup> According to the organizers of the event, providing the food for the day was an “important part of welding the community together,” as lone visitors could expect to be invited by a family to share their meal.<sup>82</sup> In other words, although this was not a formally organized potluck meal at the park, women were expected to bring enough food so that they could invite single men to eat with them and their families. Again, the image of a more inclusive community is highlighted. If those who have a bit extra act charitably

---

<sup>79</sup> “Balloon Boxing and other Sport Events Keep Field Day Celebrants Excited.” *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 28 July 1931.

<sup>80</sup> 129.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 128.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 129.

toward those who do not, there will be plenty of food for everyone. Butte residents were encouraged to consider the well-being only of their neighbors rather than the well-being of their working-class peers. Murphy wonders, however, if making workers feel good about their community had the opposite effect on women:

While Field Day planners delighted in their event, women must have contemplated the holiday with mixed emotions. Catherine Hoy recalled that as a child she looked forward to the day with excitement, but even then she was aware of the work her mother, grandmother, and neighborhood women – all mothers of six or eight children – put into preparing hams, chickens, and mutton, baking bread, pies, and cakes, and packing it all out to the Gardens on the streetcar.<sup>83</sup>

Creating a sense community atmosphere was not as easy as simply showing up at the Columbia Gardens and participating in the day's events. It also required a lot of work, and in this case, that work disproportionately fell on women.

Though not all of the activities and exhibits during Miners' Field Day were about safety, they helped make the event what the Anaconda Company truly intended it to be: a day to bring people together to celebrate the community of Butte, not explicitly the Miners' Union, but the city as a whole. Whereas Miners' Union Day illustrated the inherent divisions between workers and employers, Miners' Field Day was based on the presumption that they might not exist. Surely no one could be opposed to safe schools and streets, healthy babies, and victories for Butte participants in the day's competitions; Miners' Field Day definitely helped introduce the idea that what the Anaconda Company wanted for Butte and what its citizens wanted were not all that different in the end. By sponsoring these days, the company sought to diffuse the tension created by a rocky

---

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 129.

period of company/labor relations and instill a feeling of community in Butte based on a hope that workers would increasingly see their interests and the company's interests as overlapping rather than opposed.

### *Children's Day*

Although William Clark originally conceived of Children's Day in 1901, the Anaconda Company continued the tradition uninterrupted from the year it purchased the park until the year it closed the park. Every Thursday during the summer season, children 16 or younger could ride to the Gardens for free and received reduced prices on the rides and concessions. The larger significance of Children's Day, however, is revealed by how the company-owned newspaper, the Montana Standard, reported about it. The articles emphasized the paternal benevolence of the Anaconda Company, which provided a safe place for Butte children to enjoy themselves at a small expense. In other words, Children's Day represents another part of the company's welfare capitalist agenda centered on the Columbia Gardens and provided another opportunity to showcase to Butte residents, particularly those of the working class, its caring concern for the city and its people. This section analyzes those newspaper articles that collectively created an impression of harmony and safety at the park and identifies four main themes: large crowds of children enjoying a day at the park without incident, the improvements made to the park that would heighten that enjoyment, assertions of the pride the community should have felt about the park, and the care with which children were looked after at the Gardens.

The stories about Children’s Day in the Montana Standard followed a regular formula. None was a feature story and none was very long – usually a column or two on the top or bottom third of an inside page. The headlines consistently touted the number of visitors to the Gardens on Children’s Day: “5,000 Children at Gardens Develop Energy Sufficient to Motivate Ocean Steamer”<sup>84</sup>; “3,000 Children Romp Under Trees at Columbia Gardens on Second Hottest Day Here”<sup>85</sup>; “4,000 Children Enjoy Weekly Outing at Columbia Gardens”<sup>86</sup>; “3,201 Butte Boys and Girls Frolic at Columbia Gardens”;<sup>87</sup> “1,900 Youngsters Enjoy Day at Columbia Gardens.”<sup>88</sup> The newspaper provided no explanation as to how it reached these figures; it is possible that they were inflated. But inflated or not, the emphasis of these numbers was meant to highlight the scale of Anaconda’s public service to the city on these days. The population of Butte was around 40,000 in the late 1920s and early 1930s, so if the figures presented in these articles were close to accurate, the Anaconda Company could boast that as much as 10 percent of the entire population of the city visited the Gardens on Children’s Day.

The stories reinforced these headlines by expressively describing the mass of children on the trains going to the Gardens, waiting in line for the rides and concessions, and swarming the playground. According to one story, young people descended on the Gardens for Children’s Day “like the locusts of Holy Writ, or the grasshoppers in

---

<sup>84</sup> *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 12 July 1929.

<sup>85</sup> *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 26 July 1929.

<sup>86</sup> *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 16 Aug. 1929.

<sup>87</sup> *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 24 June 1932.

<sup>88</sup> *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 21 July 1933.

Kansas.”<sup>89</sup> Another emphasized the crowd at the rides: “The biplanes, the merry-go-round and the roller coaster were kept so busy yesterday – as indeed on every Children’s Day this year – that these devices, if they enjoyed the gift of tongues, might well express the wish that school soon open so that they might have a rest from the continual grind.”<sup>90</sup> Despite the crowds, however, these articles consistently asserted that visitors to the Gardens acted with decorum and maintained a harmonious atmosphere. In the same article in which the crowd was likened to a swarm of locusts, the *Standard* assured its reader that “perfect order prevailed at the Gardens and on the cars.”<sup>91</sup> Another article proclaimed, “The woods yesterday rang with the shouts of happy childhood, frolicking and romping despite the sultry weather.”<sup>92</sup> The verbs used in this passage are telling; romping and frolicking suggest a lightheartedness and serenity about the scene at the Garden, although surely a certain rambunctiousness and noisiness would have been evident as well. The passage also portrays the park as an antidote to the hot weather of summer, again suggesting its importance to the city. Yet another article conveyed the harmony at the park more metaphorically: “The grove is filled with a babel that resembles the hum of a Gargantuan bee-hive – the hum being punctuated now and then by the joyous shout of the little revelers.”<sup>93</sup> Invoking the image of a beehive to describe the activity at the Gardens on Children’s Day is interesting, because readers might imagine beehives as orderly places in which every individual in the community works as

---

<sup>89</sup> *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 12 July 1929.

<sup>90</sup> *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 16 Aug. 1929.

<sup>91</sup> *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 12 July 1929.

<sup>92</sup> *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 26 July 1929.

<sup>93</sup> *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 16 Aug. 1929.

part of a collective effort toward the overall success of the colony. Besides reinforcing the idea of a harmonious Children's Day at the Gardens, this imagery also serves as a parable of Anaconda's vision for the Butte community – a place of common interests instead of competing ones.

Another recurring theme of these articles, particularly those published in the years immediately after Anaconda purchased the Gardens, was showcasing the changes or additions the company had made to the park and how these changes enhanced the experience of young visitors on Children's Day. Again, the focus is on the public service the company was providing, though in these articles the message is much more explicit. A story published in early August of 1929, Anaconda's first summer season in control of the park begins by proclaiming, "The popularity of the Gardens under its present management is regarded as one of the finest evidences of public appreciation of a private contribution to community enjoyment that has been witnessed in this state."<sup>94</sup> Here is essentially an acknowledgement that the decision by the Anaconda Company to buy and continue operating the Columbia Gardens was an act of welfare capitalism. It seems more of an appeal than a statement of fact. There is no evidence provided to support the claim of widespread public appreciation for the company's actions, but wording it this way may have served as a message to the people of Butte that if they were not already appreciative, they should be. The article continued, "the children's playground was removed from a hot, unprotected, sandy area to a grassy plot under the trees. The

---

<sup>94</sup> "Shower Here Fails to Keep Kiddies from Day at Gardens." *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 2 Aug. 1929.

playground equipment, free use of which is permitted, was quadrupled. The dance pavilion was renovated, remodeled and redecorated. The character of the business stands along the boardwalk was improved. The pay equipment was increased and old stuff was renovated or removed. Meanwhile the grass and flowers were kept in the peak of condition.”<sup>95</sup> By listing the many ways in which the Anaconda Company had improved the park, the article indicated that a significant investment had been made in the park and thus in the community. This passage also suggested that the park as newly configured was more comfortable for its visitors. A grassy plot under the trees undoubtedly seemed a much more inviting place to escape the summer heat than an unprotected sandy area. Another article printed a few weeks later again touted their commitment to the community and its citizens by describing the changes made to the Gardens by the new owners, in particular the moving of the playground, a decision described as “a master stroke of kindness toward the young.”<sup>96</sup> The *Standard* also unabashedly declared that 1929 was “the grandest season in the history of Columbia Gardens.”<sup>97</sup> Although it provided no criteria on which it based its assertion, all of the earlier articles that specifically emphasized the improvements at the park would have certainly made it plausible to Butte residents.

In addition to proclaiming the appreciation that young patrons had for the improvements made to the park, these articles often described the Gardens as a place that

---

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> “Youngsters will Swarm Columbia Gardens Today.” *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 15 Aug. 1929.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*



should instill pride in all Butte residents. They implied that despite other points of contention within the community, surely everyone could agree that the joyous celebrations at the Columbia Gardens that marked every Children's Day were a positive thing for the community, a positive thing provided by the company. A 1929 article, for example, described the increase in patronage the park had seen since the Anaconda Company began operating it. "The famous old pleasure resort," the article asserted, "is now as popular as it was in the old days of the last century, when the horse, the street car and the railway were the only transportation agencies and the trees of Columbia Gardens were the only ones that hundreds of half-grown Butte children had ever seen as close range."<sup>98</sup> Now that the Columbia Gardens' former glory had been restored, as this article tacitly suggested, the park was once again a place that the community could be proud of. Readers had already been informed that it was the company that had made the financial sacrifice necessary to achieve that end. In another article printed prior to the first Children's Day of the 1934 season, the *Standard* exclaimed, "No enterprise reflects higher motive or offers more lasting benefit than that which has as its objective the happiness and wholesome entertainment of children. So Butte joins again with the younger generation of this community in joyful anticipation of the official opening of Columbia Gardens for another season of youthful frolic...It is a spot dear to the hearts of the Butte children and an enterprise of which the entire community may be justly proud."<sup>99</sup> This passage is revealing because it began by stipulating that the happiness of

---

<sup>98</sup> *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 2 Aug. 1929.

<sup>99</sup> "Columbia Gardens Opening." *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 28 May 1934.

the children of Butte was a desirable objective, certainly a point that all of the paper's readers could agree with. And who operated the venue that provided such happiness and entertainment to the children of Butte? The article did not even need to mention the company by name. Articles like this suggest that the Anaconda Company used the Gardens to make the case that its interests and the interests of Butte residents overlapped. Instead of the industrial behemoth with the sole purpose of larger profits, the company could portray itself as a responsible community actor willing to invest some of its money for the children of Butte.

These articles also frequently reassured parents that their children would be well looked after by the staff of the Gardens on Children's Day. A story informing readers that the first Children's Day of the 1933 had been set for June 1 told parents that "only the most experienced motormen are in charge of the special cars that operate each Thursday," and that once the children arrive at the park, "trained attendants are on hand to receive them and watch out for their welfare while they are there."<sup>100</sup> These reassurances served a dual purpose. First, they advertised the Gardens not just as a place to have fun but as a safe place as well. Second, they placed Anaconda in role of paternal caretaker that employed qualified individuals to look after the children of parents who could not make it out to the park on Children's Day.

The articles about Children's Day that appeared in the Montana Standard during the first several years of Anaconda ownership of the Columbia Gardens were designed to

---

<sup>100</sup> "First Children's Day is Set for June 1." *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 18 May 1833.

create a particular impression of the park as a place in which large crowds of children played harmoniously under the kind but watchful eyes of park attendants. Also, by touting the positive changes made to the Gardens since Anaconda purchased it on behalf of the children of Butte, these articles presented to readers a company that wanted what they wanted: a beautiful, safe place for children to play.

### *Baseball*

William Clark oversaw completion of a sports complex at the Columbia Gardens in 1902.<sup>101</sup> Although it hosted a variety of special events, including local high school football games and Miners' Union and Field Day drilling and mucking competitions, it was baseball games that drew the largest regular crowds during the summer, especially for professional games. The year the sports complex opened a team from Butte (named the Miners, of course) participated in the Pacific Northwest League. Constant dissolution, creation, and re-alignment of leagues in the West over the next several years made the future of the Butte team uncertain. Only a year after forming a professional team the Pacific Northwest League became the Pacific National League. The Miners played in the Northwestern League from 1906 to 1908 and in the Union Association League from 1911 to 1914. In some years the Butte team belonged to no league. Despite this uncertainty, games at the Gardens regularly drew crowds in the thousands.<sup>102</sup> By the 1920s, a new stadium built in the city, Clark Park, began hosting professional games, bringing an end to professional baseball at the Gardens.

---

<sup>101</sup> Kearney, *Butte's Pride*, 36.

<sup>102</sup> Kearney, *Butte Voices*, 346-347.

The park, however, continued to host amateur league games. The Mines Baseball League was launched in 1920, a city league comprised of teams fielded by mining companies. A team of Anaconda Company employees, called the Powers, competed every year of the league's existence.<sup>103</sup> Providing a venue for these amateur games and sponsoring a team constituted the third element of Anaconda's policy of welfare capitalism based on the Columbia Gardens. Not only did baseball games entertain workers during their off hours, they also created another instance of overlapping employer and employee interests. The company's purpose, in other words, was to minimize class divisions and disputes between workers and management by creating a common desire to field a successful team.

Despite its official designation as an amateur league, the Mines Baseball league was operated for all intents and purposes as a professional league. Impartial commissioners ran the league in order to keep play competitive but fair. They decided to import professional umpires to referee the games rather than risk accusations that local umpires favored one team over the others.<sup>104</sup> Players also wore pro-style uniforms. The mining companies that fielded teams routinely hired men to play baseball, giving them soft jobs to technically comply with league rules, which suggests the seriousness with which participating companies and the people of Butte took these games.<sup>105</sup> These were not friendly contests equivalent to those of modern company softball games as much as

---

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 348.

<sup>104</sup> Richard D. Gibbons, *Joy in Minersville: A Study of the Butte Mines and Independent Leagues*. MA thesis. (University of Montana, 2004), 59.

<sup>105</sup> Kearney, *Butte Voices*, 348.

rivalries that mattered to followers of the teams, and companies were willing to bend the rules to gain an advantage. From his analysis of the Butte Mines League, Richard Gibbons concludes that teams likely went so far as to attempt to reach agreements with professional teams around the country to hire their “cast off or inexperienced” players.<sup>106</sup>

Although the Mines League lasted only until 1927, less competitive amateur baseball continued at the Gardens. During Miners’ Field Day in 1931, for example, a team from Western Fuel beat their “friendly enemies” from Walkerville, a Butte neighborhood.<sup>107</sup> The Butte Copper League, another amateur league, was established in 1944, which included teams from organizations other than mining companies, such as the School of Mines and the Miners Union.<sup>108</sup>

Throughout early twentieth century America, baseball evolved into more than a sporting event; it became a social institution that helped create a sense of community within modern city culture. Historian Gunther Barth, in *City People*, argues that “the magnetism of the ball park pulled together crowds of strangers who succumbed to a startlingly intense sensation of community created by the shared experience of watching a baseball game.”<sup>109</sup> In other words, as applied to Butte and this study, baseball, like Miners’ Field Day and like Children’s Day, helped create and/or reinforce feelings of

---

<sup>106</sup> 63.

<sup>107</sup> “Balloon Boxing and other Sport Events Keep Field Day Celebrants Excited.” *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 28 July 1931.

<sup>108</sup> Kearney, *Butte Voices*, 349.

<sup>109</sup> Gunther Barth, *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 191.

community. Barth's investigation reveals what about baseball, specifically watching baseball, had that effect.

First, Barth interprets watching baseball as a "safety valve" activity, a source of diversion for workers from the grind of the workday in the modern industrial city. Spectators whose work was increasingly defined by the clock enjoyed a game with its own timetable that ended not at a prescribed moment but because of the action of the players.<sup>110</sup> Baseball also represented an escape from workers' physical environment. Barth writes, "The game enriched their dreary existence by providing a few leisure hours in the outdoors. In the warmth of the afternoon sun, the spectators transcended temporarily the physical limitations urban life imposed upon them and experienced relief from the tension of their complex surroundings."<sup>111</sup> This sentiment could certainly be applied to thousands of mine workers in Butte, for whom physical limitations literally meant dangerous working quarters underground.

Barth also claims that baseball was intended to instill certain virtues in those who watched it. By bringing the "countryside into the metropolis," baseball "radiated the wholesome air of a timeless country sport which, each spring, cleansed anew the foul atmosphere of the modern city."<sup>112</sup> Despite news stories about fixed games and unruly behavior at the ballpark, baseball never lost its mystique as a wholesome activity. So

---

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, 183.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 179.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, 182.

powerful was this notion, in fact, Barth explains, that clergymen of the era routinely “used baseball as a testimony of their faith.”<sup>113</sup>

Baseball also encouraged rivalries that promoted loyalty to a community rather than a class or ethnic group. These rivalries helped increase public interest in the game, because spectators, through their communities, became more deeply invested in the outcome. Attendees of professional games in Butte, for example, were not simply rooting for the Miners, they were rooting for their city and against Seattle, Salt Lake City, and Portland. A Miners win thus created a sense of community pride, a feeling that “we” defeated “them.” This could hold true for amateur games as well. An Anaconda employee might root for the Anaconda team against a team from a rival company, creating much the same feelings of connection to the company as a whole that the professional games evoked in the city.

Finally, Barth analyzes the impact of umpires on the spectators at baseball games. The umpire “represented the voice of authority,” for those spectators, “a personification of the rulers of their lives, who in the workaday world remained hidden behind the whirl of urban life, the faceless corporate structures, the anonymity of technocracy, and the mystery of public affairs.”<sup>114</sup> A vital part of the game became the collective, constant ridiculing and challenging of the umpire. It was an act that banded people together. Regardless of other differences that might have existed among the crowd, they could all agree that the umpire had made a terrible call that had cost their team the game.

---

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, 183.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, 173.

Based on Barth's analysis, it is clear why the Anaconda Company either sponsored teams that played at the Columbia Gardens or hosted games there after it had purchased the park. Baseball encouraged loyalty to a community, provided an escape from the time clock at work, and offered an easy target to denounce authority without consequence, all within the confines of a natural setting that retained a mythic wholesomeness

\* \* \*

On Thursday, February 22, 1973, in front of a small audience at the Butte Rotary Club, the president of the Anaconda Company's Primary Metals Division, Robert Weed, announced that the Columbia Gardens would be permanently closed before the beginning of the summer season.<sup>115</sup> Anaconda, Weed said, intended to establish new open pit mining operations in the area of the park. Although he pledged that the company would help provide funds if a local group attempted to create a new park somewhere else in Butte. Weed did not specify how much monetary support the company would offer and made it clear that Anaconda would not take an active role in that endeavor. Based on remarks quoted in the Montana Standard the following day, however, Weed revealed that the proposed mine expansion was not the sole reason for the company's decision to close the park: "We recognize the fondness that most of the people of Butte and many of our own employees have for the Gardens; however, we feel our handling of the facility smacks of old-fashioned paternalism. Furthermore, we feel the money to be spent there

---

<sup>115</sup> "Gardens Era Over, New Pit Expected." *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 23 Feb. 1973.



could be put to a more beneficial use to the community.”<sup>116</sup> Weed’s words are important here. He did not simply claim that the Columbia Gardens was an expense that the company could bear no longer, but rather specifically admitted that the company operated the park for paternalistic reasons that it believed were no longer necessary, or no longer appropriate. It was an explicit acknowledgment that the company had used the Columbia Gardens as a program of welfare capitalism. The question is how successful was this program. Did the people of Butte accept the company’s vision of community based on their use of the Columbia Gardens?

---

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER 3

This chapter seeks to gauge the relative success of the Anaconda Company's welfare capitalism strategy centered on the Columbia Gardens. Did the experiences of park patrons lead to a greater sentiment among the working-class residents of Butte that their interests and the company's interests were linked rather than separate? The limited available evidence makes this a difficult question to answer definitively. While chapter two relies substantially on articles published in the company owned newspaper to glean Anaconda's intentions in terms of the park, those articles do not offer any insight into how Butte residents actually experienced or thought about the park. To assess the impact that the park had on people's understanding of community in Butte, this chapter turns primarily to interviews of Butte residents presented in secondary-source histories of the Columbia Gardens, letters to the editor that appeared in the Butte newspaper soon after the company announced its intention to close the park in 1973, and the various commemorations about the park that have appeared after the park's closing. That evidence suggests that while the Anaconda Company kept the Gardens open, the park did promote a sense of common interests in Butte. By offering mechanical amusements to the people of Butte, the Columbia Gardens, in the context of John Kasson's analysis of Coney Island amusement parks, became a place where workers and their families became accommodated to the emerging industrial order. Memories of Butte residents who patronized the park before it shut down reveal people accepting their role as consumers in this new order. Furthermore, in letters to the editor printed in the months following the announcement of the park's closing, writers often described the importance of the

Anaconda Company to the city and divulged a belief that the future success of Butte and of the company remained inextricably linked, which is precisely the sentiment the company had sought to cultivate with its policy of welfare capitalism. However, Anaconda's purpose for the park ultimately backfired, because residents blamed the company for damaging community life in Butte when it closed the park. Letter writers reflected on the damage done by Anaconda to the community and placed the closing of the Gardens on that side of the ledger and commemorations of the Gardens deny the company any meaningful role in the park's history or its power to impact the community. Finally, those same letters and the various commemorations of the Columbia Gardens taken together constructed a narrative of diverging interests reminiscent of the point made by Miners' Union Day organizers in the early twentieth century – that the Columbia Gardens was, perhaps not technically but at least emotionally, public space that belonged to the people of Butte and that the Anaconda Company should not have taken it away.

\*       \*       \*

Despite its natural setting, every trip to the Columbia Gardens involved experiencing its mechanical amusements. The rides and arcade provided ample opportunities for visitors to forget the problems of their daily lives and have fun. For example, the *Sights and Sounds* booklet written by Adolph Heilbronner for William Clark in 1902 described riding The Chutes, the steep boat slide that emptied into the lake this way:

To shoot the chutes is the height of fun; it is delirium, the cap-piece of delight. Once shot, the chutes will always be shot by the person who has enjoyed the fun. It is exhilarating, fascinating, the acme of tingling, penetrating enjoyment. The chutes were built last year, and it is not stretching the plain truth to say that

everybody in Butte last year rode the skiff into splashing delight. Old and young, sedate and gay, judge and idler, minister and sportsman – all joined in the merry acclaim that to shoot the chutes was the happy moment of their lives.<sup>117</sup>

Heilbronner's word choice in this passage allows one to vicariously experience the liberating feeling of shooting the chutes: the momentary unease as the ride begins, the delirium of the descent, and the exhilaration at the end. He describes the ride as an experience that everyone in the community could enjoy, from the youthful idlers to the staid judges. The chutes ride was an inclusive experience that allowed everyone to let loose and join in the "merry acclaim."

In a documentary produced for Montana PBS in 1999 by Ray Ekness entitled *Remembering the Columbia Gardens*, former visitors to the Columbia Gardens describe a ride on the roller coaster, which was as disorienting and exhilarating as the Chutes ride described by Heilbronner. It was a violent ride because it was a wooden track coaster on which cars clattered and bounced along, giving riders the sensation that they might careen off the track any moment. The cars lacked lap bars or seat belts that would have kept riders firmly in their seats. With only a handle bar to hold on to instead, riders were tossed back and forth in the seats around turns, and up and down as the coaster climbed and dipped.

In Butte's Pride: The Columbia Gardens, Pat Kearney recounts an interview with Butte resident Joyce Mattson, who described at length how she and a friend spent a typical Children's Day at the park.<sup>118</sup> Her memories illustrate how park patrons

---

<sup>117</sup> 17.

<sup>118</sup> 45-50.

experienced the variety of mechanical amusements at the Gardens. The day began, Mattson remembered, with the streetcar ride from downtown Butte out to the Gardens. When they arrived, they ventured up the boardwalk from the entrance to the arcade building. Mattson remembered the fun of the fish pond with its prizes, and the shooting gallery, but “best of all,” she says, “was ‘Penny Land,’ where you could acquire postcards from a machine of your favorite cowboys and movie stars.”<sup>119</sup> Boys, Mattson, said, often crowded around the electric shock machine, that for a nickel or a dime delivered weak shocks through a handle. After the arcade and lunch, Mattson and her friend would visit the playground and the greenhouses where they looked at the flowers that would eventually be placed in new beds throughout the park. They ended the day at the rides. Mattson remembered often having to choose between the carousel, the biplanes, or the roller coaster, as she rarely had enough money for more than one ride. Whichever ride she chose, it was always the climactic moment of her trip to the Gardens.

Simply by offering these kinds of attractions, the Columbia Gardens made a significant social impact on the community it served. John Kasson’s study of the amusement parks at Coney Island, New York, in the early twentieth century reveals the effects that these mechanical attractions had on patrons. He interprets the three parks that comprised Coney Island during its early years, Steeplechase Park, Luna Park, and Dreamland, as iconic symbols of urban-industrial society and critical laboratories for analyzing the shift from Victorian values to a new mass culture.

---

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, 46.

By the turn of the twentieth century, Kasson argues, a new generation immersed in the growing influence of mass culture, increasingly sought commercial entertainment that was more “vigorous, exuberant, daring, sensual, uninhibited, and irreverent.”<sup>120</sup> No venue embodied this clamor for new and exciting cultural experiences better than the amusement parks at Coney Island. At amusement parks, visitors, primarily from middle and working classes, were more than mere spectators; they actively shaped their own experiences. Kasson writes, “At Coney Island and other amusements parks...audience and activity frequently merged. Drawing upon a broad heterogeneous urban public, amusement parks stirred them into activity.”<sup>121</sup>

Kasson is very specific about how the amusements parks at Coney Island and across the country made visitors active participants rather than passive spectators. It was the “new mechanical amusements and exotic settings they provided.”<sup>122</sup> The owners of the amusement parks at Coney Island deliberately conceived of and built their venues as fantastical escapes from reality. Grand, flamboyant architecture encouraged a feeling of being apart from the everyday world, and rides encouraged visitors to let go of traditional social morays, to shout and scream, to have fun with wild abandon. Coney Island became a place, Kasson writes, “where visitors were temporarily freed from normative demands.”<sup>123</sup> It was a place that “encouraged types of behavior and social interaction

---

<sup>120</sup> 6-7.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*, 41.

that in other contexts would have been regarded askance.”<sup>124</sup> It “in effect declared a moral holiday for all who entered its gates. Against the values of thrift, sobriety, industry, and ambition, it encouraged extravagance, gaiety, abandon, revelry.”<sup>125</sup> In short, Coney Island was a place to escape from the structure and strictures of everyday life through this new “powerful kinesthetic experience.”<sup>126</sup>

The operators of the Coney Island amusement parks created that kinesthetic experience through an ever-expanding array of mechanical rides. Several rides, like the human roulette at Steeplechase Park that “set passengers whirling and sprawling out from its center by centrifugal force,” were designed to momentarily confuse and disorient people and bring them into intimate contact with strangers.<sup>127</sup> The object was to “encourage visitors to see themselves as participants in a human comedy” in which the repeated violation of social norms could be exhilarating.<sup>128</sup> “The laughter of participants and spectators,” Kasson concludes, “testified to their sense of release.”<sup>129</sup> Other rides mimicked or served as parodies of familiar urban experiences. Railways were the inspiration for roller coasters. The “Leap-Frog” railway sent two electric cars filled with passengers hurtling toward each other before one car glided over the other on curved rails seconds before a collision. Some rides used tunnels to create the affect of miners going underground. A Shoot-the-Chutes ride at Luna Park propelled people in boats down a

---

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, 41.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*, 49.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, 60.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, 60.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, 61.

steep incline and into a lagoon, causing screams and shouts of delight, much like the Chutes ride at the Columbia Gardens. Kasson explains the purpose and popularity of these rides this way:

In various ways all these rides were designed to throw people off balance, literally and imaginatively, to sweep patrons up in their grasp and momentarily overwhelm them before allowing order to be restored at the end. Such rides served in effect as powerful hallucinogens, altering visitors' perceptions and transforming their consciousness, dispelling everyday concerns in the intense sensations of the present moment. They allowed customers the exhilaration of whirlwind activity without physical exertion, of thrilling drama without imaginative effort. Riders could enjoy their own momentary fright and disorientation because they knew it would turn to comic relief; they could engage in what appeared dangerous adventure because ultimately they believed in its safety.<sup>130</sup>

The question raised by Kasson's analysis in terms of the Columbia Gardens is how the release offered by mechanical amusements might have served the Anaconda Company's goal of promoting community and a unity of interests though the park. At first glance, it might be surmised that Coney Island and the Columbia Gardens had the opposite affect on its visitors. Indeed, as Kasson points out, many observers of the crowds at Coney Island concluded that it unleashed a dangerous primitive impulse, promoted lunacy, and paralyzed reason as people abandoned customary restraints and engaged in bombastic, energetic merry-making.<sup>131</sup> Other observers of the Coney Island crowds, however, concluded that amusement parks benefitted society because together they constituted a "crucible of democratic freedom and equality, a cultural melting pot mingling individuals and races from all segments of society;" the parks therefore

---

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, 81-82.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 95-98.



suggested “alternatives to the prevailing economic and social order.”<sup>132</sup> Neither of these interpretations would have appealed to the Anaconda Company, but Kasson ultimately reaches a different conclusion about mechanical amusement parks. He claims that Coney Island acted as a “safety valve, a mechanism of social release and control that ultimately protected existing society.”<sup>133</sup> Although Coney Island did contribute to the shift away from Victorian cultural values, this shift “was not the subversive development conservative critics feared.”<sup>134</sup> In the end it helped accommodate Americans to “the cycle of production and consumption” that was the core of the new urban industrial society.<sup>135</sup>

Memories of Columbia Gardens’ patrons support the supposition that they were increasingly embracing their roles as contented and savvy consumers. Mattson agonized about which ride to spend her small amount of pocket change on each time she visited the Gardens, hoping for the best possible experience. *Remembering the Columbia Gardens* includes several interviews with current and former Butte residents who visited the park regularly that echo Mattson’s memories of trying to enjoy the rides on a small amount of money. When asked about the rides, interviewees talked about the specific ways in which they liked to ride them to maximize their pleasure, because while the flower gardens, nature trails, and playground areas of the park could all be enjoyed for free, the rides cost money. Many park visitors could therefore only afford to go on a few rides a

---

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, 95; 109.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, 109.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, 106.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, 109.

week, so they wanted to make those experiences as meaningful as possible. Everyone, it seemed, had a favorite horse on the carousel, and would pass up their turn in line again and again until their particular one was available. For many it was also important to be on the horses the furthest away from the center because the horses on the edge seemed to go faster, they offered better views of the surroundings, and they provided opportunities to have fun with the people still in line. For the roller coaster and biplane rides, people would also jockey in line to ensure a seat up front.

The emphasis on consumption revealed in these memories, on valuing the ability to shape amusement experiences to meet prior expectations, gradually diminished the importance of class distinctions. Actual class divisions remained of course, but the new commercial mass culture emerging in early twentieth century America fostered an “egalitarian spirit” based on the perception of inclusive access to the instant gratification that places like amusement parks offered. That spirit, Kasson argues, “paradoxically served to reconcile [park] visitors to the inequalities of society at large.” This is precisely what the welfare capitalist program of the Anaconda Company was designed to create. A community with an egalitarian spirit and perceptions of common interests between the company and workers, in which people were reconciled to general inequality and thus less likely to seek redress through union activity.

\* \* \*

The Anaconda Company’s decision to close the park in 1973 elicited an emotional reaction from Butte residents, which was captured by letters to the editor of the Montana Standard. Those letters are critical pieces of evidence because they were not

simply knee-jerk, negative reactions to the decision to close the park. They contained broader thoughts about the company and the park and the role of each in the Butte community. Some letters, for instance, reminded readers of the importance of the Anaconda Company to the city of Butte, how it had benefitted the community, and how the success of the city and its workers was linked to the success of the company. Mark Miller submitted a letter that expressed regret about the closing of the park but also asked readers to remember that “the ACM [Anaconda Copper Mining Company] has done much for Montana economically.” Miller specifically referred to the company’s investment in emission control at the smelter in the city of Anaconda as evidence of decisions that would “greatly benefit the people and the ecosystem.”<sup>136</sup>

A letter sent by Margie Schenk echoed this general sentiment but was a bit tougher on the company. She stated as common knowledge the supposition that “we all realize that the Anaconda Company is vital to the economy of Butte.”<sup>137</sup> Her choice of words here is interesting because she could have said instead that the mining industry was vital to Butte economy, but she did not. This suggests that some people in Butte did see the company’s interests and the interests of the citizens of Butte as inextricably linked. Earlier in the twentieth century, workers fought the power of the company partly because they believed that the Anaconda Company was detrimental to the city and its people. By 1973, the Anaconda Company and Butte had become synonymous, so much so that

---

<sup>136</sup> “Reader Regrets Gardens’ Fate.” Letter. *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 11 April 1973.

<sup>137</sup> “Gardens Should be Preserved.” Letter. *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 28 Feb. 1973.

people could not conceive of their livelihoods or even the survival of the city without it. Schenk made this point as well: “The majority of our Butte people are miners, working for, and dependent upon the Anaconda Company for their livelihood.”<sup>138</sup> Schenk expresses here the view of the company that its welfare capitalist program sought to instill. She identified the interests of Butte residents and the interests of the company as essentially the same.

\* \* \*

Other letters, however, clearly did not see the interests of the company and those of the city as overlapping. Several writers described the closing of the Columbia Gardens as another decision among many that made sense to the company but damaged the community. Esme Lebreche submitted an open letter to Montana Congressman Dick Shoup asking him to intervene on behalf of the citizens of Butte to keep the Columbia Gardens alive, and pointedly argued that “the one great redeeming feature of Butte is to be taken away to fill the pockets of a few.”<sup>139</sup> A letter sent by several students at West Junior High School expressed this sentiment in a way that perhaps only children can: “The Anaconda Co. must be very money hungry because they don’t seem to care about anybody’s feelings.”<sup>140</sup> Clearly, these letters suggest that closing the Gardens would damage to the community and the people in it, and for what? The increased profitability of the company, which in this case did not serve the interests of Butte workers.

---

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> “How Can We Keep Columbia Gardens?” Letter. *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 28 Feb. 1973.

<sup>140</sup> “Gardens Closure is Protested.” Letter. *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 8 April 1973.

The letters written by Miller and Schenk also identify the damage done to the city by the company, even though they also spent part of their letters defending the company and arguing that despite decisions the company made that Butte residents disagreed with, it was vital to the city that the company maintain operations. Schenk wrote, “it [the Anaconda Company] is tearing the town to pieces; first Meaderville, then McQueen, now the Gardens area; and most likely in a matter of time the uptown Butte area will be taken also. Will the Company have us all live in trailers so we can move on each time a rich vein of ore shows up?”<sup>141</sup> Meaderville and McQueen were old ethnic neighborhoods the Anaconda Company leveled when it began open pit mining in the 1950s. Schenk did not see the destruction of the Columbia Gardens as merely damaging to Butte’s cultural legacy or collective psyche, but rather another way in which Butte residents had been physically displaced or had their lives disrupted or were asked to make sacrifices for the sake of progress and the continued profitability of the company. Although this statement may seem disconnected from the part of Schenk’s letter presented above, they do make sense as one thought. It was because of a dependence on the Anaconda Company that Butte residents made these sacrifices without resisting in any organized or consistent way. However, Schenk’s words suggested a growing realization that at some point that dependence ought to end.

Even Mark Miller, the letter writer who went the furthest in defending the Anaconda Company, expressed some growing concern about the relationship of the company to the city. He wrote, “I have had a difficult time convincing my friends that

---

<sup>141</sup> *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 28 Feb. 1973.

the ACM is not an industrial octopus which is swallowing the city and polluting the environment. After this decision concerning the Gardens, however, I'm beginning to have doubts myself."<sup>142</sup> From Miller's perspective, the Gardens may have symbolized the fine line between a company that sustained the city and a company that swallowed it, a company that seemed to serve interests of Butte residents and a company that ultimately undermined those interests.

\* \* \*

Over time, a variety of commemorative media produced both in the immediate aftermath of the closing of the Columbia Gardens and in the years have solidified a narrative reminiscent of the one promoted by Miners' Union Day that identifies the people of Butte and the Anaconda Company as oppositional forces with divergent interests. The Gardens is time and again depicted as the people's park, a community place that the Anaconda Company should not have been able to take away. The company's contribution to the park's survival is often minimized in these memories. It is generally acknowledged as more of a steward than an owner.

This belief that the Columbia Gardens belonged to the people of Butte rather than the company, was first expressed in the letters to the editor discussed above. Margie Schenk referred to the Gardens in her letter as "our special place," as she wondered rhetorically why it was so unreasonable to expect that the park would be around for "our children to enjoy."<sup>143</sup> Dennis Healy submitted a letter that combined this belief with a

---

<sup>142</sup> *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 11 April 1973.

<sup>143</sup> *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 28 Feb. 1973.

call to action reminiscent of labor activism. He wrote, “I wonder what happened to the spirit that Butte, Montana has been noted for all these years. Isn’t there a man or woman amongst you to stand up and be counted? Cowards all of you! Do any of you remember that some of the happiest days of your lives were spent at the Gardens and majority [sic] of you have seen your children enjoy what rightfully belongs to the people of Butte. Do something! Anaconda cannot destroy the Gardens unless you let them!”<sup>144</sup>

When the Anaconda Company president Robert Weed made the announcement in February of 1973 that the Columbia Gardens would close, he said that events already scheduled to take place at the Gardens, such as the high school prom, would not be moved, but the park would not open for the summer. Eventually however, in the face of the negative reaction to the decision, Anaconda decided to open the park for one final season on a limited basis.<sup>145</sup> The rides, concessions, and pavilion would open, but no special events would be hosted; Children’s Day did continue every Thursday. The flower gardens were not planted because of the lack of lead time needed to grow them in the park greenhouses, and the yearly upkeep usually done every offseason, such as putting a fresh coat of paint on all of the rides and buildings, was also not done.<sup>146</sup> The final day the Columbia Gardens opened to the public was Labor Day, September 3, 1973. According to the Montana Standard, between five and six thousand people, more than half of them 50 years of age or older, visited the park that day to reminisce with friends

---

<sup>144</sup> “Stand Up and Be Counted.” Letter. *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 2 April 1973.

<sup>145</sup> “Gardens to Open in May.” *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 5 April 1973.

<sup>146</sup> “Columbia Gardens Trims Sails.” *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 22 April 1973.

and say goodbye.<sup>147</sup> When asked about the mood of the attendees on the final day, Frank Panisco, who for years operated the concessions at the park, compared it to a wake.<sup>148</sup>

This day also marked the beginning of the creation of a commemorative narrative of the park. Memories of Columbia Gardens, a short book written by Frank Quinn, who had been a long-time employee of the Montana Standard, was published in time to sell to visitors that final day. Quinn's book contained several short blurbs about the Gardens. Several contain historical background information about the park, from the initial purchasing of the land by William Adams, to Clark's decision to buy the park, to Anaconda's assuming control in 1928, to the company's decision to close it in 1973. But many are much more intimate stories that focus on very specific aspects of the park. "Mom' was Casualty" described the bruised fingers that often resulted from the women's nail driving competition of Miners' Field and Miners' Union days at the Gardens. Another described the last dance held at the old pavilion that burned down in 1907.<sup>149</sup> While Memories of Columbia Gardens does not have an overall narrative thrust, conclusions can be reached based on what Quinn chose to cover and what he left out. At the book's core are the stories and memories of average people who visited the park during the summer. Clark's philanthropy created the park, the Anaconda Company accepted the traditions of the park upon purchasing it in 1928, but it was the people who made the Columbia Gardens an integral part of the Butte community. There is no

---

<sup>147</sup> "Butte Sheds Tear as Gardens Close." *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 4 Sep. 1973.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> Quinn.



indication in Quinn's book that the Anaconda Company had any hand in creating a community in Butte centered on the idea that the company, its employees, and every other Butte residents should have common goals rather than fight against one other.

The 1999 Ray Ekness documentary for Montana PBS adds to the narrative Quinn first expressed. Although Ekness recounts the park's history in the film, its centerpiece is the interviews of Butte residents and their memories of visits to the Gardens. As in Quinn's book, the Anaconda Company plays only a minor part in Ekness' story. Even though the company kept the park open and operated it at a loss for decades, and spent money improving the park, and continued to host Children's Days, interviewees maintained that the people of Butte deserved a place like Columbia Gardens and could absolutely call it their own. Interviewees who shared their thoughts about the closing of the park were the most poignant and emotional moments of the film. Many remembered the shock of hearing that the Gardens would be closed and the tears shed by those who visited the park during its final days. Many expressed the sentiment that the park was "taken away" from the city. One man remembered the pointlessness of digging a new pit in that area because there was not enough mineral wealth underneath the Gardens to justify the expansion. Overall, an oppositional narrative again emerges that the Anaconda Company had little to do with what made the park great and was wrong to close it when it did.

Finally, in Butte in Perspective Vol. I: The Columbia Gardens, Scott Brim describes his final visit to the park, a few weeks before it closed, and adds a new

dimension to the narrative that regards the place as more the community's than the company's. His final few paragraphs begin this way:

A few minutes remain before sundown, so there is time to reflect on this evening's visit before I begin climbing the stairs to the upper parking lot.

On my visits to the Gardens as a child, the world outside seemed to disappear altogether. For the time I was here, I was totally absorbed with having as much fun as possible, and with living my life completely in the present. Nothing that might happen in the future, and nothing that had happened in the past, could intrude to spoil those visits. My childhood friends, I suppose, had a similar experience here.<sup>150</sup>

On one level here, Brim presents experiences of an idyllic, innocent youth that might apply anywhere, but it also is a credit to the Anaconda Company, who maintained a place where these memories could be created. This description could have fit right in with those descriptions of Children's Day at the Gardens printed in the Montana Standard, of well-behaved, exuberant young people that the city should be rightly proud of. However, when Brim turns to his current thoughts about the park, the tone changes. He writes, "But on my visit this evening, as an adult, I could find within myself only a part of that carefree feeling. Try as I might, I could not prevent myself from thinking of the future. Try as I might, I could not make myself be a kid again. Had my childhood friends been with me tonight, it would have made no real difference. The reality of the present tempers our memories of the past. We can never re-live those memories completely." The reality of the present Brim refers to was the closing of the park. Although he is never explicit about what the future is that he was contemplating, he may have been lamenting that children would no longer have the opportunity to make the kind of

---

<sup>150</sup> Scott Brim, *Butte in Perspective Volume 1: The Columbia Gardens* (Kennewick, WA: New Geographic Publishing, 2008), 120.

memories that he cherishes. Brim's final words, more positive than accusatory, revealed something about the connection between the people of Butte and the Columbia Gardens: "Yet, a visit to the Columbia Gardens as an adult has an emotional reward that, as carefree children, we could never appreciate or even truly understand. The spirits of the immigrant who built our city live in this place – their imagination and their emotions are alive here in the work of their hands. In seeing the beauty of their work, in hearing the laughter of their grandchildren's children, and in touching this metal rail which their hands made, we are touched by them across the ocean of time between their world and our own."<sup>151</sup> What defined the Columbia Gardens, in Brim's opinion, what gave it vitality, what made it a place that connected people across generations, had nothing to do with William Clark or the Anaconda Company. Immigrant workers built the park; it truly belonged to them.

Although Brim does not mention the Anaconda Company by name, his tone joins the other commemorations of the Gardens as oppositional and even dismissive because he elevates workers as the people to remember when one remembers the Gardens. Workers in Butte early in the twentieth century used Miners' Union Day to promote the importance of worker solidarity against the mining companies based on the presumption that worker and company interests were at odds. When Anaconda purchased the Gardens in 1928, it designed a welfare capitalist program around the park specifically to combat this idea and instead further the premise that worker and company interests were one and the same. The presence of mechanical amusements at the park and

---

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid*, 120.

the letters to the editor printed in the Montana Standard after the Anaconda Company announced its intention to close the park, reveal the partial success of that welfare capitalist program. Memories of Columbia Gardens patrons show their increasing aptitude as consumers, and the elevation of that label above those of distinct classes. The letters display a people who have come to accept that they depended on the Anaconda Company for their livelihoods and for their city's identity. Those letters, however, also identify the damage the company had done to the city over the decades. It seemed as though the closing of the park finally made Butte residents fully aware that their interests and the company's interests did not coincide. The commemorative media concerning the Gardens almost shoves the company completely into the background of the park's story. Rather than pitting the company and workers against one another as opposing forces, or make them both critical to the park's importance to the community, these commemorations all presume that what is worth remembering about the Gardens are the ordinary people who built it, as Brim emphasizes, and were its regular visitors. Although William Clark and the Anaconda Company may have held legal title to the place, the collective memory of the park's regular visitors has acknowledged a different owner.

## CONCLUSION

On November 13, 1973, those still saddened by the closing of the Columbia Gardens in September awoke to another blow: the night before, a fire had ripped through the arcade building at the park, reducing it to ashes. More important than the loss of the building itself was the loss of the horses from the carousel and the biplanes, which were being stored in the arcade.<sup>152</sup> Speculation began immediately concerning the cause of the fire. Although the company initially suspected that the fire might have been set deliberately, an investigation by the deputy state fire marshal concluded that faulty electrical equipment was to blame.<sup>153</sup> Some Butte residents, however, never accepted the official word on the fire. According to Pat Kearney, they believed that the company itself started the fire as it was the simplest way to get rid of the park without being pushed by the community to start a new park elsewhere.<sup>154</sup> Although overly conspiratorial, this ongoing suspicion does reveal what many Butte residents thought the company capable of in the wake of the emotions provoked by closing the park down. Regardless, the loss of the carousel horses and biplanes meant in large measure the permanent loss of the Gardens. According to the *Standard*, “various Butte groups and public officials hoped that a new site and some financial support could be found to relocate the Gardens. The

---

<sup>152</sup> “Priceless Equipment Lost in Columbia Gardens Fire.” *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 13 Nov. 1973.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> Kearney, *Butte’s Pride*, 81.

carousel was the high point of such hopes.”<sup>155</sup> Without the most important pieces of two of the rides, the effort to rebuild the Columbia Gardens faced a much steeper challenge.

Immediately after Anaconda announced that expanded mining operations would mean the end of the Columbia Gardens, various groups in Butte began working to create a new recreation area elsewhere. Several potential sites were proposed, including land outside the city owned by the Butte Ski Club, Thompson Park, and Washoe Park in Butte. The Ski Club eventually donated that land in 1975 to the Columbia Gardens Foundation, which had been created to determine the future of the remaining equipment at the park. Expenses ultimately proved too great to overcome, however. By the Spring of 1978, all of the equipment that could be salvaged from the original park had been moved to the new one, but without adequate funds to finish the park’s infrastructure or maintain it after it would have been completed, it ultimately went unfinished.<sup>156</sup> Eventually, the people of Butte decided by popular vote to move the bulk of the playground equipment to Clark Park, where it remains.<sup>157</sup> In December of 1997, the Montana Standard ran a special edition entitled *Gardens Again?* detailing a new plan to create a Gardens-like amusement park in uptown Butte adjacent to the Berkeley Pit.<sup>158</sup> Project Green, a group originally organized to create a trail system linking Butte and Anaconda, spearheaded the project. Organizers envisioned a park with a grand pavilion, a pond and boathouse, a petting zoo, a picnic grove, a sledding hill, and a carnival area with a carousel, ferris wheel, roller

---

<sup>155</sup> “Charcoal Replaces Carrousel.” *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 19 Nov. 1973.

<sup>156</sup> Kearney, *Butte’s Pride*, 92-102

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid*, 110.

<sup>158</sup> “Gardens Again?” *Montana Standard* [Butte, MT] 24 Dec. 1997.

coaster, and biplane ride. This idea, however, never made it beyond the planning stage; it ran into the same problems Columbia Gardens II had faced.

Ellen Crain, the manager of the Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives, explains that even though there was a desire among many Butte residents to create a place in which they might relive the happy moments of their childhood that took place at the Columbia Gardens, that desire alone could not overcome the significant logistical obstacles of building and maintaining a facility like the Columbia Gardens.<sup>159</sup> It is difficult enough to find the funds to build a new park, but that's really only the first step. How would the park to be maintained from year to year? Where would the funds come from to pay a staff of attendants to run the park on a yearly basis? In the end, the gap between hope and reality when it comes to a new park in Butte is essentially unbridgeable. It might have been easier to build a new park in the years immediately after the first one closed, but, Crain says, the Anaconda Company had no real intent to make that happen. After the nationalization of the copper mines in Chile, Anaconda simply wanted out of the entertainment business altogether.<sup>160</sup> Officials made some comments about a willingness to contribute to a fund to build a new park, but this was in essence merely lip service. The company never had any intention of seeing that a new park was built, so it is not surprising that nothing substantial ended up happening.<sup>161</sup>

The ongoing discussion about a new park in the years after the closing of the Columbia Gardens, and the ultimate failure to create anything even close to the original,

---

<sup>159</sup> Personal Interview. 5 Aug. 2010.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

suggests something critical about the original park that bears directly on this study. The basic reason why subsequent attempts to build a park failed is that organizers could never figure out how to make a park like the Columbia Gardens self-sustaining. Because what was remarkable about the Gardens is not that it closed or the way in which it closed as much as how long it lasted. It was never operated to make money, thus it relied on wealthy benefactors to sustain it from one year to the next, which is precisely what happened for 74 consecutive years. While the parks at Coney Island, New York, can largely be understood as businesses looking to capitalize on the growing free time and discretionary money of urban dwellers at the turn of the twentieth century, Columbia Gardens' function must be explained in other ways.

William Clark originally built the park and maintained it in part to further his own political career but also undeniably as something of a philanthropic gesture to the people of Butte. Whether the legend surrounding his initial decision to build a park is true or a convenient story to make him look magnanimous, Clark did spend hundreds of thousands of dollars of his personal fortune building the park, and he did introduce Children's Day so that even the poorest children in the city could visit the Gardens once a week during the summer for free, whether or not they had money for the rides or concessions.

Anaconda's decision to keep the Columbia Gardens alive after it purchased the park from the Clark estate is – on the surface – more difficult to comprehend, because company officials did not have any emotional or personal connection to it that would argue for continuing it. Yet it did operate the park for 44 years, from 1929 to 1973. For the company, the park was not a symbol of its generosity as much as a tool of welfare



capitalism that could be employed in a broader endeavor. In the wake of several years of tension between the company and its workers, Anaconda sought to promote a sense of harmony and commonality of interests within the community. The Gardens became the primary means to achieve that end. Miners' Field Days encouraged the celebration of community as a whole instead of only those workers in the Miners' Union. The company-owned newspaper reported on Children's Day in a way that emphasized the harmony and joy and decorum with which the children played, partly as a paean to the people of Butte and partly as a call to the community to follow their lead. Baseball brought spectators together to root for the team that represented their entire community.

But were these attempts at creating this particular sense of community in Butte ultimately successful? The fact that the park offered mechanical amusements served, in the context of Kasson's study of Coney Island, to replace the patron as worker with the patron as consumer. Memories of Gardens visitors attest to this transition. The letters to the editor printed in the Montana Standard after the Anaconda Company announced its intention to close the park, however, do reveal that many residents did feel their interests and the company's interests had long overlapped, even as they provide evidence for a lessening of that feeling. The books and films created to commemorate the Gardens cemented the narrative expressed during the initial reaction to the closing: the park rightfully belonged to the people of Butte. The company therefore wronged the community when it closed the park, and for all of the other problems that have plagued Butte in the intervening years, from the steady loss of mining jobs to the struggle to deal with the environmental catastrophe left behind, for many it remains the deepest wound.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

*Archives*

Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives – Butte, MT

Montana Historical Society Archives – Helena, MT

*Interviews*

Crain, Ellen. Manager, Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives. Personal Interview 5 Aug. 2010

*Newspapers*

Montana Standard

Butte Miner

Daily Intermountain

*Secondary Sources*

Anaconda/Deer Lodge County Historical Society. “Columbia Gardens: Clark’s Gift or Gimmick?” *Historic Review Quarterly* Summer 1997: 1-12.

Barth, Gunther. *City People: The Rise of Modern City Culture in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.

Brim, Scott. *Butte in Perspective Volume I: The Columbia Gardens*. Kennewick, WA: New Geographic Publishing, 2008.

Cohen, Lizabeth. *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939*. London, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Cubitt, Geoffrey. *History and Memory*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2007.

Finn, Janet L. *Tracing the Veins: Of Copper, Culture, and Community from Butte to Chuquicamata*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998.

- Gibbons, Richard D. *Joy in Minersville: A Study of the Butte Mines and Independent Leagues*. MA thesis. University of Montana, 2004.
- Heilbronner, Adolph H. *Sights and Scenes and a Brief History of Columbia Gardens*. Butte, MT: Butte Miner Co., 1902.
- Kasson, John F. *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1978.
- Kearney, Pat. *Butte Voices: Mining, Neighborhoods, People*. Butte, MT: Skyhigh Communications, 1998.
- . *Butte's Pride – The Columbia Gardens*. Butte, MT: Skyhigh Communications, 1994.
- Malone, Michael P. *The Battle for Butte: Mining and Politics on the Northern Frontier, 1864-1906*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1981.
- Marcosson, Isaac F. *Anaconda*. New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1957.
- Mattern, Carolyn J. "An Era's End: Columbia Gardens Gone." *Montana Post* Nov./Dec. 1973.
- Murphy, Mary. *Men, Women, and Leisure in Butte, 1914-41*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997.
- Nasaw, David. *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements*. New York: BasicBooks, 1993.
- Punke, Michael. *Fire and Brimstone: The North Butte Mining Disaster of 1917*. New York: Hyperion, 2006.
- Quinn, Frank. *Memories of Columbia Gardens*. Butte, MT: Pioneer Prnting, 1973.
- Peiss, Kathy. *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1986.
- Swibold, Dennis L. *Copper Chorus: Mining Politics and the Montana Press, 1889-1959*. Helena, MT: Montana Historical Society Press, 2006.
- Tone, Andrea. *The Business of Benevolence: Industrial Paternalism in Progressive America*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997.

Walter, Dave. "Butte Paradise: Columbia Gardens." *Montana Magazine* Sep./Oct. 1985: 22-27.