Montana writer Joseph Kinsey Howard: Crusader for the worker land Indian and community

Jyl Hoyt
The University of Montana

1988

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Montana Writer Joseph Kinsey Howard: Crusader for the Worker, Land, Indian and Community

by

Jyl Hoyt

B.A., Ithaca College 1967

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

1988

Approved by:

[Signatures]

Chairman, Board of Examiners

Dean, Graduate School

Date

August 10, 1988
Montana Writer Joseph Kinsey Howard: Crusader for the Worker, Land, Indian, and Community (181 pp.)

Director: Charles E. Hood, Jr.

Montana writer, Joseph Kinsey Howard, lived all but the first thirteen years of his life in Great Falls, Montana. From his teen years until he died, at the age of 45 in 1951, Howard was a newspaperman and writer whose goal was to better the world. He won national acclaim for his first book, Montana: High, Wide and Handsome, which enjoyed eight printings in its first three years. Howard's approach in this Montana history was that the state had been exploited by the East. Howard wrote two more books: Montana Margins, A State Anthology and Strange Empire: A Narrative of the Northwest. His anthology was produced during the two years he worked on the Montana Study which was a radical approach to adult education and community improvement. Strange Empire examined the Metis rebellion on the Canadian plains and profiled its part-Indian, part-French leader, Louis Riel. Howard also wrote for national magazines and newspapers such as: Harper's, Saturday Evening Post, Survey Graphic, The Progressive, Common Sense, Time, Life, and St. Louis Post Dispatch. Hoyt analyzed Howard's writings, letters and speeches to argue that Howard was a crusader for the worker, land, Indian and community.

To research this thesis Hoyt read the 18 boxes of the Joseph Kinsey Howard collection at the Montana Historical Society Archives, all of Howard's published works and some unpublished, other history books and articles with which to compare Howard's historical interpretations, some of the books which influenced Howard, reviews of his books, tributes and obituaries, and several books on the Christian Science Religion, with which Howard's mother, an influential person in his life, was involved. Hoyt also interviewed people who knew Howard and his mother, plus scholars and resource people.

Hoyt concluded that Howard was a crusader for the worker, land, Indian and community. His courageous muckraking and insightful journalism gave Montanans a new perspective of their history and helped them improve their communities.
PREFACE

Joseph Kinsey Howard was born February 28, 1906, in Oskaloosa, Iowa. When he was five years old his parents took him to Alberta, Canada, where his father, John Howard, worked as a mine manager in the Canada West Coal Mine at Taber.

While in Canada, Howard's mother, Josephine, witnessed the difficult working conditions of the miners and passed this concern on to her son. Howard also learned about the Metis people in Canada. These part-French, part-Indian people would later become the subject of one of his books. While in Canada, Josephine worked briefly at the Lethbridge Herald. Eventually, John Howard deserted his family—an event that strongly affected both mother and son.

In 1918, when Howard was 13 years old, he and his mother moved to Great Falls, Montana. They stayed there, living in the same small apartment together, for the rest of their lives.

Howard went to high school in Great Falls; he never went to college. After high school graduation he was hired as a reporter for the Great Falls Leader—a circulation afternoon daily owned by the O.S. Warden family, which also owned the morning daily, Great Falls Tribune. After three years he was promoted, at the young age of 20, to copy desk editor, a job he held until he left the newspaper business in 1944. In 1936 Howard led the successful effort to establish the Great
Falls Newspaper Guild at both the Leader and the Tribune. This caused controversy with the publisher but the Guild secured higher wages and better benefits for its members.

In the late 1930s, while still at the Leader, Howard began writing articles about Montana for two national magazines, Survey Graphic and the Progressive. He championed liberal causes and soon drew the attention of Yale Press which assigned him to write a history of Montana. It took him five years of "after-hours" work to complete the task. The result, Montana: High, Wide and Handsome, came out in 1943. This book, which harshly criticized the domination of the state by the Anaconda Copper Mining Company, would eventually go into 10 printings. The book was critically acclaimed in leading national magazines and in reviews by newspapers such as the New York Times and New York Herald Tribune.

In 1944-45 Howard worked with well-known sociologist Baker Brownell on the Montana Study. Based at the University of Montana in Missoula, the Study aimed to improve cultural life in Montana's rural towns. Howard said his two years working with Brownell on the Study were the happiest of his life.

Howard's second book, Montana Margins: A State Anthology, resulted from this study. Though he received critical acclaim for this book he received no royalties because of university-imposed regulations.
Howard's articles, both fiction and non-fiction, appeared in Harper's, the Saturday Evening Post, the Progressive, the Nation, Common Sense, Pacific Spectator, Reader's Digest and others. He was invited to speak all over Montana and elsewhere in the Pacific Northwest and at the prestigious Breadloaf Writer's conference as well.

A Guggenheim Fellowship in 1947 gave him the three years needed to write his final book, Strange Empires: A Narrative of the Northwest, about the Metis struggle to build a native nation in what is now central Canada.

During his last years Howard helped form the Montana Institute of the Arts and planned and carried out writing conferences at the University of Montana that brought in authors such as Bernard DeVoto and A.B. Guthrie, Jr.

Several days after the 1951 summer conference, Howard—exhausted and over-worked—died of a heart attack in Choteau, the town near Teton Canyon where Howard and his mother had a summer cabin. He was 45.

There was no burial. Instead, Howard's friends took his ashes and threw them to the wind over Flattop mountain in the Rockies.

To many in Montana, Joseph Kinsey Howard has become a legend. He was a muckraker who took on the Anaconda Copper Mining Company when the Company was extremely powerful and manipulated the state's government and economy. He called himself a "liberal-radical (not a communist)." His
friends called him a socialist. When he died, Howard's good friend, A. B. Guthrie, Jr., said the state had lost its "conscience."

The New York Times called Joseph Kinsey Howard a "crusading editor" in its obituary on him. The description was precise and accurate. Although he followed no established religion, Joe Howard was a crusader who worked for justice. He used writing as a tool in his crusading, although writing was more than a tool, it was his life.

Howard analyzed his world and decided to crusade for justice in four arenas: the worker, the land, the community and the Indian. In Montana: High, Wide and Handsome, he crusaded for the worker and the land. In Montana Margins: A State Anthology, he crusaded for the community. Strange Empire: A Narrative of the Northwest culminated his crusading for the Indian. Howard crusaded in all four arenas in the articles he did for national magazines and newspapers as well as the speeches he gave and writers' conferences he organized and attended.

The following is a literary biography of Joseph Kinsey Howard. My thesis is that Howard, through his writings, was a crusader for the worker, land, community and the Indian. I address these four themes in that order. Generally, I tell the events of Howard's life in the order that they happen, although not always.

To do research for this thesis I read through the 18
boxes of the Joseph Kinsey Howard Papers at the Montana Historical Society Archives in Helena, donated by Josephine Howard and others in 1954. I also consulted the archives at the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library at the University of Montana. I read Howard's three books and his magazine articles. I read other books and articles about Montana history and interviewed a Montana historian about Howard's view. I also examined some of the books which influenced Howard, the reviews of his books and the many tributes written about him after he died.

I interviewed eight people who knew Howard and one who knew his mother. Occasionally these people remembered facts about Howard's life that conflicted with written information. For example, those interviewed said Howard died in the Chateau hospital, while some newspaper reports said he died at his home. Ripley Schemm Hugo remembered that she told Howard's mother about the writer's death, but Hugo's mother, Mildred Walker Schemm said it was her husband, Dr. Ferdinand Schemm, who told Josephine. Not all of these conflicts can be resolved; memories with time, can sometimes fail. These conflicts point out the importance of Joe Howard in the lives of those who knew and respected him.
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Chapter I
Two Against the World

Several days after Joseph Kinsey Howard died unexpectedly of a heart attack, in August 1951, Ben Stein walked up the path to Mildred Walker Schemm's place on the Missouri River. Both were writers who had known Howard well. Schemm came out. The two looked at each other and said nothing. From inside his pocket Stein pulled out a crystal. They stared at it. Then Stein gently put the crystal into Schemm's hand. "That's Joe," he said.

Stein turned and left.

"He was trying to say Joe had such clarity of mind," Schemm explained.¹

Joe Howard's clarity of mind helped make him Montana's conscience, according to his good friend and fellow writer, A.B. Guthrie, Jr. Howard was a journalist, historian, sociologist, free-lance writer, and an advocate for education. He was a crusader—for the worker, the land, the Indian and the community. Revitalized rural communities, Howard believed, held the salvation for problems facing Montana and the West. Care and compassion, combined with a sharp wit, and a critical, analytical mind, were attributes that helped Howard become a nationally known writer.

Circumstances in his personal life helped shape his character: his father's desertion of the family, his mother's reverence for education and her unceasing devotion to her son, her attention to the Christian Science religion, and the difficult economic situation that mother and son experienced their first years in Great Falls. There were global factors, too: the Depression made worse by drought, the renewed strength of the labor movement, and the effect of World War II.

The personal circumstances that helped form Howard began before the turn of the century in Iowa, with Howard's mother, who was the molder of Joe's values.

"Her parents were railroad people; the sound of the train whistle raised their blood," said Schemm, a Great Falls novelist, who spent much time over the years talking with Howard about writing. "They knew the value of learning; they'd do anything to get their children educated." Howard's mother, Josephine, was a voracious reader who didn't stop educating herself, ever. She passed this love of reading to her son.

In 1911, when Joe was five, Josephine, husband, John R., and son left Iowa for the coal fields of Canada: John R. was a mine manager at Canada West Coal Mine at Taber.

Important events there were to influence the course of Joe Howard's life.

Josephine worried about working conditions of Canadian

Ibid.
miners. "She said she always felt sorry for the miners," said Scotty James, a reporter and editor at the Great Falls Tribune who spent much time with Joe and his mother. "She said she wished her husband, as superintendent, could change things." Josephine pointed out the situation to her son, who in later years became an activist for better conditions for workers.

On Feb. 17, 1917, when Joe was eleven, he hand-wrote a two-page newspaper, Pickwick Patrol which he put out in Lethbridge. Joe’s mother, society page editor of the Lethbridge Herald, was no doubt an influence on this project. The paper is remarkable because it demonstrates the young journalist’s potential. Howard’s friend Norman Fox, also a writer, recalled:

[The Pickwick Patrol had] headlines concerning America’s possible break with Austria; a cartoon of international political significance, bearing the editor’s by-line; local news, significant in that it shows an early interest in telling fact; and an editorial commending the United States for breaking off relations with Germany.

Howard learned in school about the Canadians’ treatment of the Metis or mixed bloods. His compassion for this part-French, part-Indian race and his outrage at the government’s unjust behavior towards them, would lead him to write a

3Scotty James, interview by author, Tape recording, Great Falls, Montana, 21 May 1988.


book, four decades later, about this black moment in
Canadian history. Throughout his life he would champion the
Indian cause.

By 1918 Joe Howard's parents had split up. Josephine
told her friends in Great Falls, many years later, that the
break-up involved a younger woman.  

In 1919, when Joe was 13, Josephine moved from
Lethbridge to Great Falls so her son could get an American
education. Joe Howard went to Great Falls High school.
Friends said he was different. He was a reader and did not
go out for sports much. He also helped his mother pay the
bills by selling newspapers on the street.

Josephine (her friends called her "Howdy") worked in a
music store. One of her duties was to play sheet music on
the piano for people who wanted to hear how it sounded
before they bought it. Josephine passed her love for music
on to her son.

During Howard's teens and early twenties, when he was a
reporter at the Great Falls Leader, an even stronger bond
formed between mother and son. It resulted partly from the
two having to fend for themselves, and partly from John
Howard's desertion.

"That experience, of his father leaving," said Schemm,

*Schemm, interview.

* Schemm, interview.
"left a great scar."  

Such an experience "puts you on the side of the underdog, and the underdogs get their underpinnings from the life they've lived," said Charlotte James, friend of Josephine's during the 10 years after her son died. Women weren't paid enough in those days to support a family adequately, she added, and Josephine "had to bring up Joe all by herself."  

The experience of being abandoned "made them realize that you can rise above a bad hurt; maybe you can never forget it, but you can live with it," said Pat Brennan Taylor a Tribune reporter who would become Howard's girlfriend in the early 1940s. "They, mother and son, were two against the world," said Taylor.  

As painful as her marital problems were, "Howdy never said a bad word about her husband," said Scotty James. Howard himself didn't talk much about his father, his friend A.B. Guthrie, Jr., who was one of Howard's closest friends, recalls one instance: "I used to hate him, but you know, he was just a poor mixed-up man and that's why he left," Howard told Guthrie. "He had forgiven him," Guthrie

9Schemm, interview.  
9Charlotte James, interview by author, Tape recording, Great Falls, Montana, 21 May 1988.  
The new life Josephine and her son set up for themselves when they first moved to Great Falls in 1919 centered in the Woodworth Apartments where they lived together for the rest of their lives. Taylor remembered it: "It was a two-room apartment with a tiny bath; there was a pull-down bed in Joe's study and she had a day bed in the other area; her study was the dining room of the apartment; she had her own collection of books." Taylor remembers that Josephine often read the same books her son did.

Howard was hard-working, ambitious and brilliant. This probably led to his somewhat contentious personality. His friend and fellow writer, Dan Cushman, remembers that Howard usually monopolized conversations. But at the same time, Cushman recalls, there was no one he would rather spend an evening with than Joe Howard.12

Taylor remembers Howard as a handsome, charismatic man who quite obviously cared for his appearance.

Joe was what my father called a 'natty dresser,' preferring tweed suits and solid color knitted wool or silk neckties. He wore a fur cap in winter and a broad brimmed Panama in summer. He was about 5 feet 7 inches, I guess, with a slight build and those shoulders rounded from years at a typewriter. His hair was dark brown, thick and wavy and always well-barbered. His thin mustache suited him; his mouth was rather sensuous; his face deeply lined; his nose turned up a bit....He had small hands and feet—for a man—and walked with a light

12 Dan Cushman, interview by author, Pen and paper, 21 May 1988, Great Falls, Montana.
His appearance attracted women. Just down the hall from the Howards' apartment lived Jean McReynolds. She was a secretary for one of the executives at the Great Falls smelter. When Howard was in his early thirties he dated McReynolds. Ripley Schemm Hugo, Mildred Walker Schemm's daughter, was only ten when she first got to know McReynolds:

She was very beautiful and she was an artist. She had long blond hair and her skin was always oiled and her gestures were graceful and her fingernails were long. She was just an exciting person to know. And she would come and sit languidly on the couch. She had a playful way of talking, a kind of elegance in speaking and she smiled at us tolerantly. She always smelled wonderfully of perfume. Because of her I think of Joe's car as a bachelor's haven for handsome women. I don't remember the car, but I remember her face clearly sitting in the passenger seat, always leaning back in the seat and Joe's voice always seemed stronger and deeper as he would speak across or out the window to us. Joe always seemed happy when she was there.14

McReynolds broke off her romance with Howard, but they remained friends. In 1945, Howard wrote to C.W. Moore, general advertising agent of the Great Northern Railway, requesting a position as 'artist-in-residence' for McReynolds at Glacier National Park. He wrote: "Miss McReynolds is a beautiful girl who has been a favorite photographers' model in

13Pat Brennan Taylor, Written Personal Recollections, provided to author during interview.

14Ripley Schemm Hugo, interview by author, Tape recording, Missoula, Montana, 1 June 1988.
Great Falls; she has great personal charm and is extremely intelligent."15

McReynolds continued to be a good friend of both the Howards. In fact, according to Taylor, McReynolds relationship with Josephine was special:

Jean McReynolds was as close to her as any daughter could be. After Jean moved to San Francisco, she came back every year to visit. Joe always escorted her around when she was in town. They were just a very close threesome. She was a beautiful woman, gorgeous, very talented, very chic, I was very jealous of her style.16

Taylor dated Howard after he and McReynolds broke up. They saw each other for about four years. Then Taylor, like McReynolds, broke off the romance. Said Taylor:

I wanted marriage. That was what I thought I needed in my life. Joe wasn't interested, until somebody else proposed to me. Then he felt he should have. But by then I felt he didn't really mean it and that it would not be safe to do it. I had questions by then whether it would have lasted. I always felt his first responsibility was to his mother.17

Howard never married. "Joe was susceptible to the charms of women," said Schemm, "but he did not have many in his life." That's probably because his mother was always number one.

Here's how Scotty James remembers mother and son:


16Taylor, interview.

17Ibid.
He idolised his mother to the best of my knowledge. He was very protective of her. He always spoke proudly of her. She was a remarkably strong person. Everyone thought Joe avoided marriage because he wanted to help his frail mother; well, she was as strong as steel.13

"He felt he owed her a great deal," said Schemmm.

"He was absolutely dedicated to her care," said Taylor.

"I think he got strength of character from her," said Scotty James. "She was a valiant woman, fearless."

Howard dedicated Montana: High, Wide and Handsome to her, and used similar words: "For a valiant western woman, my mother."

The unusual care, respect and love that bonded mother and son are evident in this letter Josephine wrote on February 28, 1927:

My Dear Son, On this your twenty-first birthday, I meet to tell you so that you may always remember it, that for these twenty-one years, you have been a comfort and blessing to me. I have cause to be grateful that you have never caused me any anxiety or trouble and I am proud of the man you have now become. During the years when trouble and unhappiness seemed to prevail, although my hopes for your future were of necessity changed, you never complained and were constantly a comfort and source of inspiration to me to rise out of the ashes of the past and build anew. I trust our love for each other, our working together in mutual helpfulness, will always remain a guarding and guiding principle to you and hold you safe.19

Not only did Josephine nurture the soul and spirit of

13Scotty James, interview.

her son, she nurtured his mind as well. She aimed to set a good example for her son to follow. She respected other people, was dignified, tolerant, kind, gracious, generous and "had that look of wisdom and curiosity," said Scotty James. "She was a fine human being."

Josephine's values and actions, as described by her friends, are in line with the Christian Science religion she practiced most of her life. According to Scotty and Charlotte James, Joe Howard, in later years, denied association with any organized religion. His mother, however, was an avid Christian Science reader who followed that religion's teachings which seek to answer, through much study, the answers to these questions: "Who am I? Why am I here? What is life's purpose? What is truth? What is God?"

The religion has little ceremony and no preacher or minister. The members of the congregation are elected to be readers, usually for three years. Readers, during Sunday services, read portions from both the Bible and a book by the founder of the religion, Mary Baker Eddy, called Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures. One obligation of a reader is to counsel other members of the congregation. "She was the kind of person that people felt very loyal to," said Taylor who attributed that quality to Josephine's

counseling experience.

The Christian Science religion is intellectual, idealizing a "supreme Mind dwelling in infinite harmony." The religion promises that its "benefits are vast, but they must be earned." The teachings are so radical, however, that "one can accept them as true only by thinking deeply." One controversial teaching is the religion's aversion to relying on medical doctors in case of sickness. "The Christian Scientist...traces all disease to mental factors and especially to fear." It's likely that Josephine passed on these Christian Science teachings to her sons:

- "Human nature can actually be improved."
- "Life is a glorious adventure in which the spiritual resources available to man are boundless and his possibilities for good are without end."
- "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

According to Scotty James, both Josephine and her son read the church-owned Christian Science Monitor, which gave balanced news coverage on international and national issues.

21 Ibid., 35.
22 Ibid., 10.
23 Ibid., 20.
24 Ibid., 11.
25 Ibid., 16.
26 Ibid., 56.
and sought to report on "the good" in the world, as well as that which is controversial. "Nobody could read the Monitor regularly without gaining a realistic insight into the present plight of the human race and a renewed sense of unselfish concern for mankind's welfare and also an increased appreciation of the utility of moral and spiritual resources," explained an informational book, *Christian Science Way of Life*.

It seems reasonable to assume that the Christian Science influence helped to develop in the Howards such qualities as: compassion, tolerance, thoughtfulness, a reverence for ideas, and the notion that individuals could both better themselves and better the world. Mother and son read many other books, newspapers and periodicals that contributed to these qualities as well. It helped that the library, Joe Howard's second home of sorts, was right across the street from their apartment.

"He read a lot of biography," said Scotty James. Moreover, both he and Mrs. Howard subscribed to high quality newspapers and magazines, he added. They read: the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, *Harper's*, *Saturday Review*, *the Atlantic*, *the Progressive*, *the Nation*, essays, history and books. "Joe spent a fortune on books," said Taylor. Friends report that Howard spent much time in Great Falls' only bookstore and that he was constantly ordering new books.

27Ibid., 75.
One other event in the Howards’ lives influenced them a great deal. It was their purchase of a cabin, near the Teton River, outside the small town of Choteau. It is only a few miles from where Howard’s friend, Guthrie, still lives. Guthrie says Joe Howard comes to his mind, each time he passes it. The Howards persuaded their friends, the Schemms, to also buy a cabin nearby.

The cabin sits on the edge of the Rocky Mountain Front which rises abruptly from the level plains. Barely a century before the Howards arrived, wild grasses covered the prairie and Indians hunted buffalo. The cabin rests along the Old North Trail, which Howard wrote about in books and articles. This trail was used by Indians for centuries.

According to Taylor, Josephine enjoyed the cabin and its environs:

She really loved the cabin. She was always gracious to any of Joe’s friends that came there to visit. The cabin was one big room with a fireplace and windows across the front and the side. It had a minute kitchen, tiny bath, small bedroom. Joe slept on the day bed and his mother in the bedroom. The cabin was set in the middle of the pasture and looked across the gate to the corral and the tack house. Then there was a steep wooded cliff and trees behind and around the cabin and then big open space with hills all around. It must have been an Indian campground, I’m sure. Mrs. Howard just expanded when she got out to the ranch, and when she walked, she almost ran. She had favorite trails. She really loved that openness and clean air and bright sun.20

Like his mother, Joe Howard was a passionate defender

20Taylor, interview.
of the environment. Hugo remembered that when Howard drove her and her brother out to the cabin he would always stop at the Fairfield bench, just before entering the Teton canyon, and have them get out of the car and drink in the land: "Joe always made us look at the sweep of the country; it wasn't just once, it was each time we drove with him," she said. "Sometimes Freeze-Out Lake would be blue with mist."

Many years after Howard died, Hugo wrote a poem about Howard, "You'd park above Freeze Out to bring us out in the wind, make sure our hearts listen to grass, to mountains roaring west."  

Hugo and her mother, Mildred Walker Schemm, hold differing views about the importance of nature in Joe Howard's world. Said Schemm:

He dressed as though he might be a Jesse James character, with a hat, boots...as though he could get on a horse in a minute, as though he liked to ride. It seemed pathetic. He didn't like to ride. He was acting the role...He went on a pack trip with my son and said he was bored to death. He wasn't an outdoor person. He was the antithesis of an outdoor person.

Hugo said Howard's affection for the cabin and the land stemmed from his realization that the Metis Indians, whom he admired and wrote about, settled in the Teton after they fled from Canada:

Joe had a special belt and riding shirts and jeans that were kind of ceremonial for him....Joe had the

29 Hugo, interview.

30 Schemm, interview.
same dark eyes, dark hair and high cheek bones as the Metis. If it gives a man substance to have an image of himself and his relation to the past, which I think Joe felt with the Metis, then that's very important.31

Hugo said there was another reason for Howard's lack of enthusiasm for outdoor activities:

All his work was indoors at the typewriter, but that didn't mean he didn't take great breadth of mind and soul from being out in the country....He didn't like riding long periods of time, but neither did he have that kind of body; people have to have riding callouses. What happened with Joe was when he got an idea he took it right to his typewriter. He could not sit on a horse and dwell about it for days.32

After Howard died, in August of 1951 at the age of 45, his friends, Guthrie, Dr. Ferdinand Schemm, and Kenneth Gleason, who owned the ranch the Howards had their cabin on, took his ashes up to the mountains. Mrs. Howard, Mrs. Schemm, Mrs. Gleason and Jean McReynolds waited below as the men, on horseback, made their way to Flattop Mountain near Teton Canyon. Once on top, Dr. Schemm opened the carton and gave Howard's ashes to the wind. The men made a fire and burned the carton that contained the ashes. Then, without saying a word, they returned to the women.33

After her son died, Josephine went to stay with McReynolds, who was living and working as an artist in San Francisco. But she was unhappy there and chose to return to

31 Hugo, interview.
32 Ibid.
33 Guthrie and Schemm, interviews.
the Woodworth apartment, to be near the memory and belongings of the son who was the most important person in her life. Charlotte James visited her often, walking up the three flights of stairs to deliver groceries to her. Though her son had died, Josephine's crusading spirit had not. She would chastise Mrs. James for buying Kraft cheese, telling her not to support large corporations, that it was better to buy small local brands. Josephine, like her son, had always been worried that corporate interests would destroy the community spirit, which they believed was America's strength.

In later years, cataracts clouded Josephine's vision. She had them removed. This medical treatment was difficult, according to Mrs. James, for a Christian Scientist to accept. It may have led, said James, to Josephine's growing dissatisfaction with the religion. Until her death in February 1961, at the age of 80, Josephine Howard was a strong-minded, strong-willed crusader, just like her son. Scotty James offered this example:

I'd stop and see her several times a week and she'd save material for me. 'Be sure and read this,' she'd say. She had underlined all these points in these news articles and here she was, almost blind, reading with a magnifying glass. She was a remarkably strong person.34

34Scotty James, interview.
"Page 17 omitted in numbering"
Chapter II

Facts and Ideas

In November 1941, the editor of the Havre Daily News wrote his competitor, the editor of the Great Falls Leader:

Just a note—and brief, since this is not in my line—to compliment you on your front page dummying of the Friday night issue. It was really good, and I can’t resist the impulse to tell you about it. I don’t think there’s a sheet in the nation with the nifty dummying you guys have. I shouldn’t be doing this, for your sheet scoops hell out of us here and it sometimes gets monotonous telling the folks the following morning about things on which you’ve informed the previous p.m. Again, from one newsman to another, an accolade on your Friday sheet and all the rest.¹

The accolades go mostly to Joseph Kinsey Howard, who spent two decades at the Leader—seventeen of those years as copy desk editor. "He was the brains of the Leader," said retired Tribune editor, Scotty James.

The Great Falls Leader was owned by the Great Falls Tribune. The Leader got so much in debt that eventually the Tribune absorbed it. "The saying at the time was ‘to keep any competition out,’” said Scotty James.² The Leader and Tribune were independent to the point of having different political views. According to Dan Cushman, who worked at the Tribune, the Leader was Republican; the Tribune was Democratic. There were other differences. The Tribune was

¹Letter from Howard L. Hagen to Great Falls Leader, November 1941, Joseph Kinsey Howard Papers, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena.

²Scotty James, interview.
a state-wide paper with about 30,000 distribution; the Leader was a city paper with about 3,200 distribution. The most distinguishing factor about these two papers was that they weren’t owned by the Anaconda Copper Mining Company, as almost all Montana’s daily newspapers were during the first half of the 20th century. James said that even though the papers were independent, they established limits about criticizing the Company: "The policy at the Tribune was, we’re not in the Company’s pocket, but we don’t want to step on its toes."*

Howard went to work for the Leader as soon as he graduated from high school. But he had had at least one story by-lined, in the Tribune before he graduated, with this headline: "Senior Dramatics Class in Central High School Makes Excellent Progress." The story, which ran on Sunday, April 29, 1923, gave hints of Howard’s writing potential and demonstrated his knowledge of European history and literature. Nonetheless, the writing was generally stilted and awkward:

The public idea of education since it became a factor in the intellectual development of this country has been the acquiring of a junk storehouse of facts; consequently little attention has been paid to specialized branches of applied psychology. The old world has always led the new world in the development of drama and art, and the growth of dramatics in this country has arisen from the need of that self-expression which has always been so highly developed abroad. Through the ages of development of the drama in Europe—for instance,  

*Cushman, interview.  

*Scotty James, interview.
in England—the promoters of the drama have educated the people to whatever form of drama was best suited to the age. In this way the public was obligated to imbibe the culture of the period, and this led to the establishment of a distinct national culture standard.5

For Joe Howard to be transformed from that kind of writer into one who could ignite the passions of literate readers throughout the United States took guidance. That guidance came from the editor of the Leader, Edward H. Cooney, who hired Howard in 1923. "He trained Joe as a newsman and was almost a father figure to him," said Tribune reporter Pat Brennan Taylor.

Howard worked for Cooney as a reporter for three years. Then Cooney promoted him to copy desk editor. From that desk, in 1930, Howard had to write Cooney's obituary. According to Taylor, Howard ran a poem that Cooney had written, Little Brown Gingerbread Man, every Christmas on page one of the Leader, as a tribute to the man who had taught him so much. The poem also appears in Howard's second book, Montana Margins: A State Anthology. In the acknowledgments to his first book, Montana: High, Wide and Handsome, Howard wrote:

I owe much to one Montanan who is dead. Ed Cooney, newspaper man, was one of 29 Representatives whose vote W. A. Clark couldn't buy, though the price went to $30,000 and Cooney,

5Kinsey Howard, "Indian Religions Similar to Those of Other Primitive Tribes," Great Falls Leader, 19 September 1929, 1.

6Taylor, interview.
like any newspaper man, needed the money. Riding
with him along obscure old trails in his top-heavy
Franklin, I shared with Ed Cooney the knowledge of
Montana and the love of it usually possible only for
those who entered the state as he did in a covered
wagon.\(^7\)

In an article dated Aug. 27, 1951, in the Montana
Historical Society archives, the New York Times reported
that Howard
got into the newspaper field when the city rooms of
the Montana newspapers were crowded with sport
writers who were covering the Dempsey-Gibbons
fight in Shelby. He was among the amateur fight
reporters and when the confusion died down he
found himself the society page editor of the
Leader.\(^6\)

Both the Tribune and Leader offices, which were in the
same building, were a short distance from Howard's apartment.
Occasionally, Lucy Lathrop, wife of Leader reporter Robert
Lathrop, saw Howard walking down the street between home
and office. "Joe's head was often down and his shoulders
were stooped in deep thought," Mrs. Lathrop recalled.
"Sometimes he didn't notice you to say hello."\(^4\)

Howard's colleague, Pat Taylor recalls that Joe used the
"hunt and peck" system on the typewriter. His handwriting
was graceful and almost feminine and he always used black
ink, she wrote in her recollections of Howard.

\(^7\)Joseph Kinsey Howard, Montana: High, Wide and
Handsome (New haven: Yale University Press, 1943; Lincoln:
University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 331.


\(^4\)Lucy Lathrop, interview by author, Pen and paper, Great
"The Leader was thin, not much of a news hole," said James. When Howard was on the copy desk, he made up the paper, chose the stories and wrote the headlines. "He wanted as much national and international news as possible," said James. "He would measure things to half-inch, quarter-inch."  

The Leader took both Associated Press and the United Press, and Howard edited this wire service copy well, according to reporter Robert Lathrop. Howard did not write the editorials though, Frank Tenny did. Tenny took Cooney's place after he died. James characterized Tenny as a "sweet man, but weak." When Howard left the Leader, in 1944, he wrote to Tenny: "I am grateful for the opportunity you gave me many years ago to enter what was for a long time, virtually ideal employment."  

The Leader staff was small—five people, according to Lathrop. "The loyalty of the Leader staff was terrific--there was a really strong bond among us; I think it was a melding more than a fundamental formation," said Lathrop. The staff deadline was 2 p.m. Reporters would turn their stories in to Howard, who all agreed was a meticulous copy editor. Howard

10Scotty James, interview.


allowed reporters their own freedom. "He had the ability to let a person develop along his own fundamental lines," said Lathrop. "Most people tell you exactly what to do; Joe wasn't like that. Get things right, that was the main thing," he added.

Joe Howard was an idealist. In a 1944 speech in Great Falls he said: "Newspapermen are preachers at heart, though they'll deny it. They are possessed of a burning sense of moral indignation and almost unbounded confidence in their ability to set things right."13 Paul Grieder wrote soon after Howard's death in 1951 that Howard was an "experienced and incorruptible newspaper man. He had an alert reporter's sense of the news behind the headlines. He knew Montana politics as few men did and used his knowledge consistently in the public interest."14 A.B. Guthrie, Jr., characterized his friend as having a naturally curious mind. "Questions interested him, reasons why. Joe valued ideas and facts. His works were factual but inspired by a poetic sense too,"15 Guthrie said.

"The only thing that interested him was writing," said Cushman. "He was a lightning writer, a hell of a good


15Guthrie, interview.
writer, and had a remarkable vocabulary."\textsuperscript{16} After Montana: High, Wide and Handsome came out Howard was a stringer for Time, Life, and the New York Times.\textsuperscript{17}

Howard's accomplishments are all the more remarkable because he did not have a college education. Wrote Edmund Freeman in \textit{The People's Voice} in Aug. 19, 1966:

He had almost all the things it takes to become a finely educated man and didn't go to college. He had a fine mind, a love of reading and writing from early boyhood, a very stimulating mother and a job that allowed him to do a good deal as he pleased. His mind went everywhere, with courage and care.\textsuperscript{18}

The courage and care were combined with a sharp critical sense. That was demonstrated during a 1944 exchange of letters among Howard, Harper's, and Kent Cooper of the Associated Press:

I am shocked to read [in Harper's] the following statement in an article by Joseph Kinsey Howard....The A.P., boasting nationwide coverage by virtue of its franchise requirement that local members supply local news exclusively to it, does not acknowledge the accompanying danger of censorship by small-town advertisers, industry or Chamber of Commerce boosters....The A.P. not only recognizes the danger of censorship and news distortion, ...its entire staff is dedicated to prevent it.\textsuperscript{19}

The editor at Harper's asked Howard to respond. He did, but

\textsuperscript{16}Cushman, interview.

\textsuperscript{17}Scotty James, interview.

\textsuperscript{18}Edmund Freeman, \textit{People's Voice}, 19 August 1966.

\textsuperscript{19}Letter from Kent Cooper to Fred Allen, 30 August 1944, Joseph Kinsey Howard Papers, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena.
Howard did not take the criticism well; he did not acknowledge that Cooper knew about and tried to prevent censorship. Howard wrote:

Don't let Mr. Cooper convince you that this sort of thing never happens elsewhere; I think if you'll quiz newspapermen of your acquaintance...outside the metropolitan area, they'll back me up....How can Mr. Cooper's watchdogs detect local censorship when the censoring occurs at the source and they are scores of miles away and have no other source of information? Would he contend that this sort of thing occurs only in benighted Montana?²⁰

"Joe was the smartest man I ever had on my newspaper," Leader publisher Warden told Guthrie.²¹ That may be why Warden kept Howard on as editor despite differing political views. Howard, who was socialist in spirit, may have, on occasion, allowed his philosophy to be reflected in the newspaper. He certainly was a union activist both inside and outside his work place. He started the Great Falls Newspaper Guild with several other Great Falls reporters and editors in 1936. The Guild led to better benefits and higher salaries, but the Tribune and Leader publisher fought the Guild all the way. (See next chapter) Howard referred to these battles in a letter he wrote to friend and colleague, Baker Brownell, in January 1945: "In my Newspaper Guild days, I always flung the 'model contract' at the publisher without any idea of getting it and always fought bitterly over some obscure point


²¹Guthrie, interview.
until I could wear him down on something important."\(^{22}\)

These battles—publishers vs. editors and reporters—must have shown up in devious ways according to the letter of resignation Howard wrote to Mr. Tenny, the Leader editor, in 1944:

> It has been evident for some time that the present Leader business management will not be too reluctant to see me leave. My resentment of a management attitude which I felt to be unfair has caused me to show increasingly irascible temper in the last few months.\(^{23}\)

Despite the temper flare-ups, there was respect between Warden, the publisher, and Howard. In his letter of resignation to Warden, Howard thanked the publisher for not interfering in his activism:

> The management of the Great Falls newspapers never interfered in any way with my writing, and never made any attempt to discourage or influence it, one way or another.....There never was any attempt while I was employed there to curb the off-the-job freedom of opinion of any member of the staff.\(^{24}\)

Howard left the Leader not only because he was dissatisfied with the publisher but also because he had been offered a job at the University of Montana that would allow him to participate whole-heartedly in community improvement.


\(^{23}\)Howard to Tenny, Archives.

\(^{24}\)Letter from Joseph Kinsey Howard to Alexander Warden, 1 August 1944, Joseph Kinsey Howard Papers, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena.
Howard felt he had an obligation to participate in such activities. He got that belief from his mother. She thought, according to James, that reporters should not hide behind the notion of objectivity in order to avoid the appearance of bias.25

Howard felt obligated to stay in Montana and make it better. People who saw his potential were advising him to go east, get a job and climb the ladder of success. Colin G. Geoff was editor of the Lethbridge Herald and probably became friends with Howard when Josephine had worked there. In a June 1927 letter, Geoff advised Howard to leave Montana.

Very few of your age have filled the kind of a job you have and done it successfully. But for the love of Mike, QUIT IT. Quit if before it ruins you and destroys all your illusions about newspaper writing. Get a job even if you have to take less money, to get back into the writing game, for there your future is, and there the big money is eventually. There are big jobs afloat for the man who can do clever newspaper writing. Get east, into bigger fields and work up.26

Howard did work up, but he did it not by going east, but by staying home. His three books and numerous articles which appeared in national publications brought credit to Howard and his profession. His colleagues in the press corps found a way to thank him for that, posthumously. In 1966,

25Scotty James, interview.

fifteen years after Howard died, Scotty James and 19 members of the Great Falls Press Club nominated Howard for membership in the Montana Newspaper Hall of Fame. Said James two decades later, "If only he had lived, he would have helped to shape Montana in a better way."
Chapter III

Crusader for the Union

Retired Great Falls Tribune editor Scotty James looked out his window to the trees that bordered the Missouri River. He pushed his glasses back, closed his eyes, and remembered Joe Howard. "Joe was highly respected in Great Falls. When he was young, he was a socialist. It meant a different thing back then than it does now. I don't see why you have to be ashamed of it now even. Joe saw a lot of injustices and economic wrongs."  

The injustices and economic wrongs, according to Howard, stemmed mostly from eastern corporations which exploited western lands and workers. Howard spent the second half of his life unraveling this exploitation and its affects on the people of his state. Here is a brief summary of Howard's interpretation of Montana history from the late 1800s when the vast copper deposits in Butte were first discovered, until 1947 when Howard published his last article about labor injustices in Butte.

The Anaconda Copper Mining Company (previously the Amalgamated Copper Company) was the cause of most problems, according to Howard. "The Company," as Montanans called it, owned most Butte copper mines, the Anaconda smelter, the Great Falls refinery as well as many of the

1Scotty James, interview.
timberlands, coal and gold mines, and company stores in west and central Montana. It owned most of the newspapers, too. The company dominated the state economically and culturally and manipulated its government. As a result, according to Howard, the resources and profits from the state did not stay in Montana to improve it, but instead went back east to large corporations. Montana, Howard said, was a colony of the East.

Despite corporate control, unions held some power. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Butte unions secured higher wages for their miners than most other Montana workers could earn. But that changed, according to Montana: A History of Two Centuries.

The turmoil surrounding World War I broke the power of the Butte Miner's Union. From 1914 until 1934 the open shop prevailed at Butte and the unions stagnated, as they did throughout much of the country during those years.²

Besides the loss of union power, which contributed to poor working conditions and a loss of morale, there were other circumstances that made life difficult for Montana workers. The state suffered two severe droughts in the early 1900s. This affected state coffers since a significant portion of the tax burden rested on those involved in agriculture. Then in 1929 came the stock market crash. A global depression followed. From the news desk at the Great Falls

Leader, Howard observed the suffering of the people as a result of this combination of forces and decided they needed his help. His colleague at the time, Pat Brennan Taylor, said during a May 1988 interview: "When human frailties go past your desk day in and day out, you either turn into a complete skeptic or you feel perhaps you can help the situation." 3

Howard thought he could help the situation by being involved in the union struggle, giving speeches and publishing articles that outlined his interpretation of history and the potential role of unions to help solve problems.

He wasn’t alone in his struggle, of course. President Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal administration helped in the 1930s by returning potential power to the unions with laws such as the National Labor Relations Act. Such legislation encouraged Howard to get actively involved in union struggles, not so much in Butte, but in his adopted home town of Great Falls. He began in his own work place.

Howard worked as an editor for the Great Falls Leader, a 3,200-circulation afternoon daily with a staff of five. The publishers were Q.S. Warden and his son Alex. Because newspapers are businesses, the publisher and the workers often have different views on wages. Such was the case in Great Falls. Howard and his reporters wanted higher wages and better benefits than the publishers were willing to give.

3 Taylor, interview.
So did some of the editors and reporters on the Great Falls Tribune, a sister paper with a state-wide distribution of between 25,000—32,000.

On the evening of March 22, 1936, without the publishers' knowledge, reporters and editors from both the Leader and the Tribune had their first meeting and organized the Great Falls Newspaper Guild, just three years after the national organization had begun. In the Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers in the University of Montana Archives, Ralph Bidwell, looking back on the creation of the Guild wrote, "in 1935, depression conditions prevailed. The pay was low, the security was nil and the hours were long."\(^4\)

At the first meeting Howard was chosen secretary-treasurer. He was elected president in May 1937. "Once they secured a charter, the Guild in Great Falls negotiated a contract with O.S. Warden and his son, Alex Warden,"\(^5\) Guild member Bidwell wrote. The Wardens were the publishers of both the Tribune and the Leader. The next year, when it came time to negotiate, the Wardens fought back and dismissed two reporters, saying they had to for economic reasons. Wrote Howard in a newsletter: "The Guild took the position that management was intimidating the Guild due to contract negotiations and exacted pressure from all sources so

\(^4\)Ralph Bidwell, [1969], Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers, University of Montana Archives, Missoula.

\(^5\)Ibid.
that eventually Lathrop and Westood [the two reporters who had been fired] retained their jobs." Not only did they retain their jobs, they got bigger salaries, in part because a national Guild representative came to Great Falls to help negotiate a new contract. "As a result, the Great Falls Guild pay scale was among the tops in the nation for newspapers," according to Bidwell. In a letter Howard wrote in November 1940, he said his annual salary was $2,860. Howard said that because of its association with the national, the local chapter had "quadrupled its membership, won a Guild shop contract with high wage standards and firmly established itself in a corporate ridden state." 

"It was courageous for Howard and his colleagues to create the Guild," said James, himself a member of the Guild in later years. Their courage paid off. Said Howard during a 1939 Great Falls speech advocating unions, "I figure it this way: My union has won me just about six times as much money in wages as it costs me in dues; and in addition it has won me improved working conditions and security none of us

*Joseph Kinsey Howard, Newsletter, 23 November 1937, Great Falls Newspaper Guild Papers, University of Montana Archives, Missoula.

*Bidwell.


*Letter from Joseph Kinsey Howard to all Newspaper Guilds, 7 June 1940, Great Falls Newspaper Guild papers, University of Montana Archives, Missoula.
ever even dreamed of until we had a union."\textsuperscript{10}

While the Great Falls Newspaper Guild was struggling for higher pay, more security and improved working conditions, there were larger struggles going on nationally. The American Federation of Labor, made up strictly of skilled craftsmen, was battling a new group of laborers, the industrial workers. Originally they were organized under the Committee of Industrial Organizations within the AFL. But after bitter infighting among leaders the Committee broke off from the AFL and formed its own national group, the Congress of Industrial Organizations. Howard participated in this battle, but mostly through correspondence. He urged the American Newspaper Guild to stay within the CIO. This involvement is an example of Howard's constant concern with affairs outside his state.

The national power struggle between the two big umbrella organizations did not affect union harmony in Cascade County and in its major city, Great Falls. Forty unions, from both the AFL and the CIO, were co-operating members of the Cascade Trades and Labor Assembly. The assembly invited the Great Falls Newspaper Guild to join. It did, and in 1937, Howard was elected to its executive board. In that position he helped form policies that would, in his view, improve life in Great Falls. He became a vocal

\textsuperscript{10}Joseph Kinsey Howard, Speech before Mr. Parker's freshman class, Great Falls High School, probably 1939, Joseph Kinsey Howard Papers, Montana Historical Society, Helena.
crusader for the worker and was asked to give speeches; he used such occasions to lay out his socialist-leaning philosophy.

In 1939, Howard addressed a high school freshman class in Great Falls. Howard began his talk telling students that in contemporary history, labor unions began as a reaction to the industrial revolutions of Europe and America. He explained how a capitalist provided the money to start a business, hired workers, then took for his own the money earned from the labor of the workers. He explained his philosophy this way:

Everything in the world comes from the land, water, sun or air. These are the natural elements, owned in common by all mankind and so they are not "worth" anything, in terms of money. Nothing you have is worth anything in money if nobody else wants it because everyone else has it too. Now if everything in the world is made of land, water, sun or air, where does it get its value? From LABOUR...that's the labor theory of value. The only value anything really has is in the labor which went into it. Abraham Lincoln subscribed to that theory. He said labor comes before capital.\(^\text{11}\)

The worker, Howard said, has a vested interest in the business and believes he has a right to his job even if he does not own the business. "That's why sit-down strikes were called, to illustrate the point that the man who works in the factory has a right there which is just as important as the boss's right."\(^\text{12}\) Howard acknowledged that strikes hurt both bosses and workers, but in a capitalistic society, he said, the workers have no choice.

\(^{11}\)Ibid.

\(^{12}\)Ibid.
Howard's activism took him not only to school classrooms and union meetings but to the airwaves as well. On May 26, 1938 he gave a radio address over KFBB as spokesperson and crusader for the union cause.

About 5,000 workers were members of the Cascade Trades and Labor Assembly, but only 60 members went to the meetings, where all the work was done. In this speech Howard's aim was to tell listeners of the accomplishments of the assembly and inspire them to volunteer some of their time to further the union cause. Howard's writing was lofty, his style dramatic. Labor disputes, said Howard, constituted a small part of the assembly's business.

By far the major portion of the assembly's time is spent in activities which virtually affect hundreds or thousands of citizens of this county and state. To the secretary's desk come letters, telegrams from all over the United States, from countless officials, from unions, from Washington representatives and senators. Reading one week's communications may take two hours; debate upon some single communication may last until midnight. These communications must be answered; hundreds of others must be sent out by the assembly in the conduct of its widespread activities.13

Unions, said Howard, lobbied for private and public works projects that improved the community and provided jobs. He gave a list of activities the assembly had successfully worked toward: the Great Falls civic center, Roger's pass highway (200 from Great Falls to Missoula), a

housing authority, relief standards, town meetings and Labor Day celebrations.

By education and lobbying, Howard went on, the assembly was able to change national policy. For example, the rural electrification project had specified that contractors use aluminum instead of copper. Copper was mined, smelted and refined in Montana; a larger demand for copper meant more jobs. Howard said in his speech:

By the use of the assembly's efficient publicity machinery—call it propaganda, if you will—this information about aluminum vs. copper was broadcast to unions throughout the West and protests were promptly carried to the project's sponsors and to the Montana congressional delegation. The union assembled data to support its plea for copper wire; plus evidence to prove that its greater cost was equalized by its greater conductivity and durability.\(^1\)

The union's propaganda machine succeeded. Specifications were changed as a result of union lobbying and contractors could use copper wire or aluminum in the rural electrification project. Because electricians relied on copper in those days, Montana jobs were enhanced.

Howard concluded his speech with a calling—that members participate more actively in their unions and the assembly and that non-union members be sympathetic to the union cause. "If disputes do arise, we ask at least your impartial judgment, abandonment of prejudice....In striving to maintain decent standards for himself, the union worker is

\(^1\)Ibid.
also striving to maintain them for you....Unless you live in a vacuum, you are dependent on him, he upon you."\textsuperscript{15}

Howard also urged union members to support each other and buy union-made goods. "The union label is your guarantee of goods made under decent conditions by self-respecting, upright American workmen proud of their craft, employed by men who have acknowledged American democracy, acknowledged the worker's right to a good life in a good town."\textsuperscript{16}

Howard did recognize that unions were not perfect. In one speech for example, he chastised corrupt union bosses: "There are crooks in the labor movement....There are [also] crooks in the churches. There are crooks every place."\textsuperscript{17} Howard encouraged people not to conspire with these crooked union bosses.

But for the most part, Joe Howard saw crusading for the union crucial for quality living in any town. He demonstrated this belief in articles he wrote for a national magazine.

In October 1937, \textit{Survey Graphic} published one of Howard's articles titled, "Shutdown on the Hill." It told how a drought that blew "black blizzards" of Montana soil to other states had brought a "power drought" to Montana industry--there was insufficient water behind the dams to produce power. The unions were working together, said Howard, to right a

\textsuperscript{15}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{16}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{17}Howard, speech to freshman class.
wrong done by industry. In the process, Great Falls workers were making their town a better place to live in.

Power from dams along the Missouri ran the smelter in Great Falls. The ore was actually refined in Great Falls and smelted in Anaconda, but workers in Great Falls, according to Howard's article, referred to themselves as smeltermen. The smelter, said Howard, had been shut down five times between 1936 and 1937, not because of labor trouble or low market prices, but because there was not enough power to run the smelter. The lack of water, in combination with silt behind the dams meant the Missouri dams could not turn their turbines. This hurt the workers, Howard said, put a strain on the unions and the business people who depended on smelter workers for much of their income (1400 out of a population of 33,000 worked at the smelter). What angered Howard and his fellow union members was that the Anaconda Copper Mining Company and the Montana Power Company (created by the Anaconda to serve its needs) had prevented other power development sources from coming into the state. The Company feared the competition; they also wanted to maintain control of the state, according to Howard, who cited two examples: In 1933 the president of the Montana Power Company, F. M. Kerr, convinced the Federal Power Commission to allow a delay in building its dam on the Flathead River. Kerr said that during Depression years supply had exceeded demand. But when the Federal Power Commission investigated
Montana power shortages in August 1937, it advised Montana Senator Burton K. Wheeler "that the serious shortage of power in Montana was due to water deficiency and to failure of the private utilities 'to provide additional dependable power facilities in anticipation of such a water deficiency,'” according to Howard’s article.10

Of more concern to the unions in Great Falls at this time was the Montana Power Company’s influence to prevent the creation of public-owned power from U.S. government dams occurring at Fort Peck, a government dam that was built for flood control in down river states. Kerr testified at an Army engineering hearing that as soon as Fort Peck were built there would be sufficient power (MPC was supplying the electricity for construction of the dam). Meanwhile, the workers at the company’s smelter would just have to wait out the numerous shutdowns made worse by droughts, Howard wrote.

The workers did not sit idle, however. They launched a campaign to get Congress to legislate public power at Fort Peck, according to Howard. They got Senator Wheeler to hold an Army engineer’s hearing in Great Falls. Howard wrote in Survey Graphic:

Prodded by its most powerful union, the assembly defied community tradition... to carry the power issue to the people, awaken the community and the government to the potential seriousness of Great

Falls' plight. Union volunteers and unemployed delivered door-to-door, the assembly's own newspaper, in which the private utility was accused of 'lack of social responsibility' and its rates were compared unfavorably with TVA's 'yardstick' schedules. The assembly then drafted speakers to present its case to the army engineers and drew a capacity audience for the hearing, where labor's spokesmen and the city engineer pleaded for power.19

The union's efforts didn't really succeed but advancing the idea of working together to control townspeople's own lives was a constant theme in Howard's work.

In his Survey Graphic article Howard paraded Great Falls as a town that was relatively peaceful and content, under union control:

One...employer, desiring to buy a building, discovered that it had been erected by a contractor against whom the building trades had lodged frequent complaints. Although his business was handicapped by temporary, unsatisfactory quarters, this executive held up the deal until he could be assured of labor's acquiescence.20

Howard acknowledged that some businesses were secretly bitter about the power of the unions in Great Falls, but 65 to 70 percent of the city's population were industrial workers and their families, so businesses had to comply with union rule. Shutdowns, whether caused by labor negotiations, low market prices or lack of power had repercussions in the city. Howard wrote: "One merchant estimates 10 to 15 percent wage loss to clerks through layoffs or part-time work as a

19 Ibid., 526.
20 Ibid., 527.
result of each major curtailment of operations 'on the hill.'"\(^{21}\)

But business people did acknowledge, according to Howard, the benefits of unions:

Great Falls employers report the result of unionism to have been better, but fewer, employees. Higher wage standards have forced an increase in individual efficiency, and have encouraged strong competitive bidding by merchants for expert sales people; but they have resulted in dropping the less efficient from payrolls altogether. One industrialist...admits that he has 'the best employees in the Northwest.'\(^{22}\)

Joe Howard was an active crusader for the Montana worker and unions in his own town. In later years he recognized that his activist actions, especially his leadership in the Great Falls Newspaper Guild, could have hindered his colleagues more than he had realized. In a letter dated Sept. 18, 1942, to his friend Ernest, Howard wrote:

Probably none of you has realized what your own steadfast friendship and militant support did for me—not just as a Guild president, but personally...the knowledge that a dozen people, some of them older than I and most of them with more at stake, would put their trust in me when I could well have cost them their homes and their jobs—I think that changed my life. Certainly it gave me a greater appreciation of human relationships and a maturity I otherwise might never have had.\(^{23}\)

\(^{21}\)Ibid., 529.

\(^{22}\)Ibid., 546.

Critic of Butte

Howard was pro-union across the board, and admired the activism and co-operation of the unions in his home town. But he was very critical of the labor movement in Butte. He demonstrated this in the following publications: a 1939 article which appeared in Survey Graphic, his 1943 book, Montana: High, Wide and Handsome, and a chapter he wrote in Our Fair City—this collection of profiles of American cities came out in 1947. Because it appeared that the Company had improved its policies, Howard curbed his sharp criticism of Butte's labor situation for his last article on Butte, which appeared in the national publication, Harper's, in 1948.

The change for the better that the newly empowered unions had made in Great Falls did not happen in Butte, according to Howard, partly because of Butte's history. "This is a city born in violence, bred in violence and living violently," Howard wrote in Survey Graphic. "Back in the boom days, the mines killed or injured a man a day. There were sales on crutches in drug stores." Howard gave a litany of the horrors miners had endured: silicosis, which is miner's consumption caused by rock dust, made up one-quarter of Butte's deaths. "Butte...barely 73 years old, has nearly as

many dead as alive." In 1895 a hardware house exploded. Fifty-three men, many fighting the blaze, were blown to pieces that night. In the 1917 Speculator Fire, 163 men suffocated to death in the mine. Butte spirit suffocated as well: "Few if any American communities are so enslaved by their own tradition," Howard wrote:

And it is, among all the 'colonial' cities of the American West, the outstanding example of exploitation by that peculiarly American imperialist capitalism which has outstripped the resources of its own frontier in half a century.

The resources were outstripped at the expense of the land and the workers, he wrote. In Butte's early days the "copper kings"—Marcus Daly, William Andrews Clark and Frederick Augustus Heinze—fought each other as they battled for profits and control of the vast and rich copper deposits. Howard was angered by their selfishness toward the working man and wrote about it, in Survey Graphic, with enraged elegance:

Under the city twist 2700 miles of tunnels and in these dim hot depths thousands of men have labored and fought and died. Thousands of feet in the earth at the bidding of their masters, they have thrown up barricades, fashioned crude grenades of mine powder, and blown each other to bits while the masters, above ground, fought in the courts for a disputed vein.

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Ibid.

Ibid., 317.

Ibid.

Ibid., 316.
Here is Howard’s view of the war of the three copper kings: Marcus Daly, in tandem with the powerful Standard Oil Co., fought William Clark who used his copper-gained wealth to buy the Montana legislature in his bid to get elected to the Senate. Heinze used his knowledge of engineering and the legal system to battle, alone, the Standard Oil Company’s Amalgamated Copper Co., later known as the Anaconda Copper Mining Company, which wanted control of all the copper mines. Eventually the Company got it. According to Howard, the company’s single-minded concern for profit was matched by its single-minded lack of concern for the working man. Not only Montana workers felt its greed, explained Howard in *Montana: High, Wide and Handsome*, the eastern public who bought its watered down stock did too:

Amalgamated "plundered the public to the extent of over $160 million." Its maneuvers in Wall Street...its battle for life in Montana against an equally cunning and unscrupulous adversary, and the vengeance it subsequently wreaked upon...New York were largely responsible for the financial panic of 1907...Because of it [Amalgamated] the people have sustained incalculable losses and have suffered untold miseries.²

Such miseries were often insidious, in Howard’s view. For example, after the Company gained control of Montana, it bought up copper mines and deposits in Chile. Whenever the Butte miners went on strike in the process of negotiating for a decent wage and safe working conditions, the Company would expand production in its Chilean properties. In one of

²*Howard, High, Wide and Handsome*, 56-7.
Standard Oil's final acts against Heinze, it closed overnight, in 1903, all of its Montana operations: Butte's mines, Anaconda's smelter, Great Falls refineries, gold mines and company stores. Twenty thousand men were without work, Howard wrote. By bullying Montana government, Amalgamated (soon to be organized as the Anaconda Copper Mining Co.) won the battle against Heinze and eventually bought out all his Montana interests. Clark used his money to buy himself a seat in the U.S. Senate—which didn't last long. Eventually he took his money and left the state.

The legacy of the copper king battles, according to Howard, was a weakened, unconfident state--people afraid of their own shadows and workers concerned only about their individual selves, not their community or its future. Howard wrote in Montana: High, Wide and Handsome:

[The company] thrust its finger into every man's pie to make brutally manifest its absolute economic domination of the state, its power of life and death over the common man...His [Heinze's] cynical manipulation of the courts struck at the basis of the social community, respect for law and forced his opponent [Amalgamated Copper Co.] finally, to humble the public state as no other had ever been degraded; a corporation forced the governor to summon the legislature, at state expense, for the sole purpose of doing that corporation's bidding on a single bill.7

In Howard's view, the Company openly manipulated the state, and owned the city of Butte: its public officials, chamber of commerce, school boards, taxpayer association,

7Howard, High, Wide and Handsome, 83.
bank directories and real estate companies. Through these agencies, Howard said in Montana: High, Wide, and Handsome, the Company "discouraged the entry of new industry into resource-rich Montana." One measure of the Company's control was the meandering line that formed Butte's city limits. It carefully excluded most mines, so the Company paid few taxes. With meager revenue, Howard argued, a city can't support its schools, build good roads, a civic center, parks, or even sewers. The physical city crumbled and its condition was reflected in its inhabitants.

"Within the city limits...Butte has 122 bars or one for every 327 people," Howard wrote in Survey Graphic. "The law could be enforced. Gambling could be stopped....prostitutes could be expelled, drinking could even be curbed," Howard wrote in Our Fair City.10 Being tolerant of gambling and prostitution is not a virtue, Howard suggested in two books and several articles, it's merely foolish--"for tolerance can become apathy."11 Butte's perverse pride in tolerance led to a lack of community; just ask any visitor to Butte, Howard suggested. "I couldn't stand to live there...Not

8Ibid., 84.


11Ibid., 301.
a thing to do but gamble and drink."\(^{12}\) The Company, according to Howard, chose to keep Butte in a demoralized state on the assumption that, "miners who are broke can't pack up and drift out of town."\(^{13}\) But at the dawn of World War II, Howard wrote in *Our Fair City*, they did:

Butte is one of the few urban centers which lost population before and during the war, even though its product was of vital military necessity and there were jobs for all who came at the highest wage scale in history. Between 1930 and 1940, Butte's population declined six per cent, and thousands more left after that....What happened was that men finally refused to go down into the hot and sulphurous inferno underlying Butte as long as there was work to be had at a living wage somewhere else.\(^{14}\)

According to Howard, even though there were high-paying jobs to be had in Butte, people chose not to live there because the work was hard and dangerous and there was no sense of community or vital local culture. But that was beginning to change. Howard talked about the new change at the conclusion of his chapter on Butte in *Our Fair City*.

The leader of Butte's revitalization was a young, second-generation Butte citizen named Tim Sullivan, who formed the Butte Development Association. He managed to inspire the unions, the local government and business to take action, seek some diversity for the economy and improve the town physically and culturally. Butte was aided in its inner-

\(^{12}\)Ibid.
\(^{13}\)Ibid., 306.
\(^{14}\)Ibid., 302.
exploration by a report from a San Francisco firm that laid out the cold hard truth about the tree-less, mining town with the violent history. Howard wrote in Our Fair City:

Lack of confidence between management and labor, public defeatism, lack of aggressiveness in business, and an outmoded governmental structure were basic problems of the community, the report said, it would be futile to go on until the various factions and the public were united with a common purpose.  

Howard was hopeful that Butte workers had begun to seek a common purpose. The Butte Development Association had the support of labor, the general public and the Chamber of Commerce. And when the Anaconda Company "changed its spots" barely a year later, Joe Howard was as hopeful as he was surprised. He wrote about it in 1948, in an article for Harper's called, "What Happened in Butte." "Economic maturity and community social consciousness have come to Montana's beat-up metropolis." The Company, he explained, had decided to do a good turn, build a half-million dollar luxury club, for use by both miners and company management. Plus, the Company gave Tim Sullivan's Butte Development Association a new two-million-dollar hospital and a guarantee to erect 500 homes. "Finally, the awestruck taxpayers are being importuned to accept a company gift of lots for a civic recreation center and please to put the bite on Anaconda for $400,000 in new taxes which will represent nearly half the

15 Ibid. 322.
The news had everyone, including Howard, so surprised that most doubted the sincerity of the project. Howard looked into the matter and discovered that the Company was initiating the Greater Butte Project for its own benefit as well for the community. The Company had decided that a revitalized community would lead to improved their profits. "The Company is investing vast sums in a mining operation of a type never attempted before, one which promises to enhance its competitive position in world metal markets,"^17 Howard wrote in Harper's. The idea was to utilize new technology and fewer men to recover harder to get copper, much of it in tailings piles and at lower depths. This would go on at the same time as conventional mining to secure high grade ore so there would be no jobs lost. The new project would reduce costs without curtailing operations so the mines would remain open even during weak markets, Howard wrote in his article.

The key to the new operation running smoothly was a constant and stable labor supply. "The Company now acknowledges, perhaps tardily, that an industry which dominates a city and a State cannot live by and for itself alone," Howard wrote. He quoted C.F. Kelley, chairman of the Anaconda Company Mining Board who came from New York in


^17 Ibid., 90.
September 1947 to address a Butte Chamber of Commerce banquet about the Greater Butte Project:

We must have and maintain a community of which we and our wives and children can be proud, a community that will be attractive to family men and women as a desirable place for the raising of their sons and daughters.18

Howard, who died in 1951, never lived to see if his hoped for revitalized Butte community ever happened. The Greater Butte Project failed because of high-cost capital investment: "In the words of Forbes Magazine, the project turned out to be a 'costly bust.'"19

There is an interesting postscript to the Greater Butte Project. It concerns a check for $500 sent to Howard by R.H. Glover, chief counsel for the Anaconda Copper Mining Co. For several months Joe Howard had corresponded with Glover, while researching his story for Harper's. The Anaconda Mining Company sent Howard money for "expenses." Five hundred dollars was a lot of money in those days, but Howard wrote Mr. Glover:

With utmost appreciation of the generosity of your gesture...I am returning the check, which I really can't accept. I'd hate to sound like the chaste maiden nobly spurning a mink coat; my inability to accept is certainly not born of suspicion or hostility. It is just that this would be a subsidy and I could not retain any respect for myself as a writer if I accepted it from anyone save, of course, a Foundation like the Guggenheim, whose

18Ibid., 91.

19Malone and Roeder, 249.
Fellow I am at this time.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{20}Joseph Kinsey Howard to Mr. Glover, 3 January 1948, Joseph Kinsey Howard Papers, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena.
Chapter V
Wrong Side Up

I wear your Stetson Bud gave me
Set tilted forward to catch the wind.
It's black and gathers the shadows
Climbing your mountain.
It's black and meant to be bad
The brim still clings to the rage in your words.

by Ripley Hugo
For Bud Guthrie
To Joseph Kinsey Howard

Joseph Kinsey Howard employed his most enraged words
to chastise people for abusing the land. He realized that
mining had destroyed mountains and streams, especially around
Butte, but he saw an even greater tragedy resulting from
agricultural practices on the Great Plains.

Howard wrote about this abuse and crusaded for plains
recovery in Montana: High, Wide and Handsome. His
interpretation of Montana history between 1880 and 1940 was
briefly this: Bad weather on the Great Plains was made worse
by poor governmental policy and America's obsessive belief
that individualism could cure all economic ills. Only after the
people had tragically abused the land (and themselves) did
they realize the importance of living co-operatively with each
other and the land.

Howard's interpretation of history was influenced by a
number of people and events. The nation was barely
recovering from drought, Depression and the Dust Bowl years.
Funds that could have been spent helping the land recover were used instead for the war effort in Europe and the Orient. Two men strongly influenced Howard’s view of the environment: Stuart Chase, who authored the 1936 book, Rich Land, Poor Land—A Study of Waste in the Natural Resources of America, and John Wesley Powell. Howard considered Powell to be a great prophet whom Americans failed to listen to. According to Howard, it would have been a lot cheaper to listen to Powell than to overgraze and plow up the plains and then suffer the consequences.

Powell, who had been director of the United States Geological Survey, was the “first preacher of western water conservation,”¹ Howard wrote. After surveying the West in 1878, Powell wrote a report for Congress that laid out a plan for appropriate development of the Great Plains. “That report,” wrote Howard in Montana: High, Wide and Handsome, “is one of the most remarkable studies of social and economic forces ever written in America.”² Howard saw and appreciated a socialist spirit in Powell’s report. “It set forth,” he wrote, “a draft constitution for a new society in the arid west, a cooperative, free society made up of individuals who recognized their responsibility to each other in a hard land, and acknowledged their debt to the soil itself.”³

¹Howard, High, Wide and Handsome, 31.
²Ibid.
³Ibid.
Powell chemically analyzed the soil and the grasses, compared them with climatological data and concluded that the Great Plains should not be homesteaded nor overgrazed. In *Montana: High, Wide and Handsome*, Howard wrote that Powell "warned against 'crude and careless' methods [of agriculture] which would result in gullying, erosion, and especially alkalinization of the soil." Instead Powell advocated cooperatives or colonies, where families would live in communities, share the scarce water supply, share grazing land and have their own small gardens and hay pastures. And instead of the 160 or 320 acres that the individuals ended up with under the Homestead Acts, Powell recommended 2,560 acres per family. But the U.S. government, which wanted to settle the plains quickly, ignored Powell and his lengthy planning process and created policies that hurt the land as much as the people who settled it, according to Howard.

The destruction began, said Howard, with the killing off of the bison herds (that also resulted in starving out the Indians who depended on them for food). The hooves of foraging bison had trammeled the land, then the huge herds moved on and let the grasses recover. It was a healthy synergistic relationship between animal and land, explained Howard. But white hunters killed all the bison for their hides and fur, then industry used their bones for fertilizer. Once the plains were "free" of bison and Indians, the ranching era

began.

When the cattlemen and women invaded Montana, the weather was friendly, Howard wrote. It rained more than usual (between 5 and 12 inches is normal) and the temperature didn't get excessively cold as can sometimes happen. There was a large market for beef. Montana gold miners as well as mid-westerners and easterners wanted steak on the tables. Economy and weather combined to promise rich profits and change happened remarkably fast. Pioneer Montana cattlemen Granville Stuart wrote: "In 1880 the country [central Montana] was practically uninhabited....Thousands of buffalo darkened the rolling plains....In the fall of 1883 there was not one buffalo remaining on the range; [instead] there were 600,000 head of cattle."9

To survive, the cattle needed grass. Howard believed grass was the substance of life on the Great Plains. So did Chase in his book, Rich Land, Poor Land. Both this book and Montana: High, Wide and Handsome, have chapters titled "Grass." Chase's chapter quoted a sheepherder in Texas who said, "Grass is what holds the earth together."6 Howard's chapter quoted naturalist Donald Culross Peattie, who wrote: "Of all the things that live and grow upon this earth, grass is

9Ibid., 104.

But there was an irony about use of grass. According to Howard, the cattlemen who flooded Montana's Great Plains in the 1880s realized the importance of caring for it and not overgrazing. But the government did not. Central Montana was public land; as it had not been surveyed, it could not be bought. To use the land, cattlemen merely commandeered it, according to Howard. "The stockmen in possession of the range, unable to fence, lease, buy or homestead, had only one way left to hold it: stock it to the limit. And so cattlemen and sheepmen themselves destroyed the industry," wrote Howard in Montana: High, Wide and Handsome. In other words, to keep newcomers off the land, ranchers crowded it with as much livestock as possible.

People imagined the Great Plains to be an endless resource. Chase quoted General Bradley, who said in 1868: "It seemed that all the flocks and herds in the world could find ample pasturage on these unoccupied plains and the mountain slopes beyond." Howard quoted Gen. James S. Brisbin who wrote in his promotional literature in 1881 "that all the flocks and herds in the world could find ample pasturage on these unoccupied plains [of Montana] and the

7Howard, High, Wide and Handsome, 8.
8Ibid. 111.
9Chase, 103.
mountain slopes beyond."\(^{10}\)

But what the promoters and livestock owners failed to realize was the power of the weather. Drought and cold winters are cyclical on the plains. A few good years are usually followed by bad years. The winter of 1886-87 humbled Montana's livestock industry. In one of Howard's most beautifully written chapters, "Kissineyooway'o," Cree for, "it blows cold," he described this winter:

It began November 16, though Montana seldom has severe cold or heavy snow until after Christmas. The gale was icy and it had substance: it was filled with glassy particles of snow, like flakes of mica; it roared and rumbled. After the first day, the tonal pitch rose: from a roar it became a moan, then a scream. The snow rode the wind, it thrust forward fiercely and slashed like a knife; no garment or hide could withstand it. The gale piled it into glacial drifts; when cow or horse stumbled into them the flesh on its legs was sheared to the bone.\(^{11}\)

The cold weather went on all winter. It was forty below for two weeks straight. Hundreds of Indians, stranded on reservations without buffalo or cattle, starved to death. Five thousand head of hungry cattle invaded the outskirts of Great Falls bawling for food. Cowboys who tried to rescue the cattle sometimes died trying. Cowboy artist Charley Russell sketched a water color of a gaunt cow standing in a drift, with a hungry coyote maintaining a death watch, and wrote

\(^{10}\)Howard, High, Wide and Handsome, 138.

\(^{11}\)Ibid., 157.
When the chinook, or warm winter wind, finally came in March, severe damage had been done. State officials estimated ranchers had lost 50 percent of their livestock. Ranchers realized they needed a new type of industry. They began to grow hay and build fences. Their philosophy was "fewer cattle, more limited but better range, supplemental feeding," wrote Howard in *Montana: High, Wide and Handsome*. The industry started to recover but in less than a decade another cold winter brought it to its knees again. At the turn of the century a development worse than weather plagued the livestock industry, and it brought worse degradation to the land than did overgrazing. That development was homesteading.

Both the Indians and the cattlemen were right, and the homesteaders were wrong, but numerous. They won—then; but the sun and wind and hail beat them financially.

Letter from Howard to Helen

Joe Howard criticized the early cattle industry for grazing too many cattle and thus damaging the land, but he also had a soft spot in his heart for the romance of the cattlemen's era. In writing about the bitter winter of 1886-87, Howard used words such as "heroic" to describe cowboys' attempts to save the steers. Howard insisted that most

\[\text{underneath: "Waiting for a Chinook."}^{12}\]

\[\text{Ibid., 158-9.}\]

\[\text{Ibid., 164.}\]
cattlemen understood the needs of the land but were victims of poor governmental policy. He did admit, however, that some cattlemen were greedy capitalists who didn't care about the land.

The 1909 Homestead Act brought a rush of farmers to Montana who plowed up land that never should have been, according to Howard. In Montana: High, Wide and Handsome, Howard used his most severe language to criticize these homesteaders. For Howard, there was no romance attached to this group of people who invaded the land at the urging of the U.S. government and railroad men. He disagreed with those who placed the blame for their state's ruin upon Jim Hill and his tremendous campaign to encourage homesteading on the northern plains.  

The Homestead Acts of 1909 and 1912 and the Dry Farming Congress of 1909 encouraged trainloads of homesteaders to come to Montana. Locators met the families at train stops and found them land on the dry plains—"for a

\[14\] Ibid., 169.

\[15\] Ibid., 170.
fee, which was $20 to $50. Homesteaders followed farming practices outlined by Hill: "deeper plowing, repeated cultivation of the soil, rotation of crops and raising of livestock," Howard explained.

Howard, a great storyteller who used anecdotes whenever possible, wrote in Montana: High, Wide and Handsome about an Indian who watched a homesteader plowing his field. The "Indian knelt, thrust his fingers into the plow furrow, measured its depth, fingered the sod and the buried grass. Then the old Indian straightened up, looked at the farmer. 'Wrong side up,' he said, and went away." In 1912 there were 12,597 homesteads in Montana, just two years later there were 20,662—"nearly seven times the annual average of the first decade of the century," Howard wrote. The homesteaders were often called honyockers—probably from the term "'hunyaks' a racial slur referring to Slav immigrants. The homesteaders built towns. Howard didn't think much of them compared to the cowboy towns:

The log cabin, tent, and tepee town of the open range, with its Indians, dogs, horses and saloons was displaced by the hideous "shack town of the honyocker: a one-street, one-side-of-the-street 'business section,' stores with dirty showcases and

16 Ibid., 182.
17 Ibid., 176.
18 Ibid., 14.
19 Ibid., 177.
20 Malone and Roeder, 186.
third-rate goods with unfamiliar brands, soda fountain without charged water, firetrap movie theater. By day the angry sun blazed upon the treeless, dusty street; by night the town lay dead and cold and insignificant under the great sky while howling coyotes circled it and sometimes slunk into its alleys to fight the dogs nosing its garbage....The sterility of their community life was the most serious shortcoming of these homestead towns, the one which was most damaging in the long run to the whole social structure of the state.\textsuperscript{21}

Despite the ugliness of their towns, the homesteaders, in the beginning, prospered. Just as the cattlemen enjoyed a rainy period, so did the homesteaders. Moreover, World War I sent the price of wheat up to $2 a bushel. The price doubled between 1914 and 1918.\textsuperscript{22} As things changed for the cattlemen, so did they change for the honyocker when the weather turned. Wrote Howard in *High, Wide and Handsome*:

\begin{quote}
Drought brought crop failure that fall, and the next, and the next; but in the meantime the honyocker, egged on by virtually every public and private influence, had bought more land, more machinery....But there was nothing to harvest.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

With no crops year after year, the homesteaders starved. Many men went to find work and left the women and children alone in the shacks, waiting for money. Life was dreary. "In the absence of a cultural community there was nothing to hold even successful homesteaders in the state except continued profit. When the cash returns began to dwindle, they sold out

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21}Howard, *High, Wide and Handsome*, 193.
\item \textsuperscript{22}Ibid., 183.
\item \textsuperscript{23}Ibid., 183-4.
\end{itemize}
and moved on."24

The figures tell the story, Howard wrote. June 1919 was the driest month on record (as of 1943). Montanans lost $50 million because of the drought. Forest and grass fires swept across the state.25 "At Rocky Point, which had dreamed of becoming a Missouri River port for steamers, you could walk across the stream without wetting your knees."26 The governor called a special session of the legislature to cope with the problem. But the government blamed the victim. Said one state agriculture official: "It must be remembered that in settlement of non-irrigated sections there were men induced to enter farming who had no previous experience, such as clerks, bankers, factory hands and others."27 Then in the spring of 1920, the wind came. Howard vividly described the winds and their effects:

Those winds were the first "dusters" the northern plains farmer had ever seen. Day after day he watched, first incredulous, then despairing, as the gale whipped his fields into the sky. He saw his $1,000 worth of seed blown out of the ground in forty-eight hours, and still the relentless wind tore at his land....There was no day or night for nearly a week; and then after a few days' respite, the wind began again.28

The wind almost always blows on the Great Plains.

24Ibid., 193.
25Ibid., 197.
26Ibid., 199.
27Ibid., 200.
28Ibid., 202.
Sometimes it blows harder than at other times. Before the homesteaders turned the grass "wrong side up," the grass held the soil in place. But once the land was plowed, and plowed deeply and repeatedly, according to the prescription laid out by railroad entrepreneur Jim Hill, there were no roots to hold it down. When the wind blew, it took the soil with it. Using annual reports of the Montana Department of Agriculture, Labor and Industry, and State Superintendent of Banks, Howard laid out the disaster: One out of every two Montana farmers lost his or her place by mortgage foreclosure between 1921 and 1925. Eleven thousand farms, a fifth of the total in Montana, disappeared. The state's bankruptcy rate was the highest in the country. Sixty thousand people left the state. Soil scientists reported that wind erosion was either severe or moderate in two-thirds of Montana's counties.29

"The derelict privy, the boarded-up schoolhouse, the dust-drifted, weed-grown road, and the rotting, rusted fence were left to tell the story of the '20s, Montana's disastrous decade," wrote Howard. If only people had listened to John Wesley Powell, when he had warned in 1878 that Montana "must not be homesteaded."30

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Those farmers who stayed on the land had to change their practices. They did three things: strip farming--

29Ibid., 207-8.

30Ibid., 208.
plowing which follows the contour of the land, summer fallow—allowing land to lie idle, and increased mechanization. Howard quoted one farmer who said, "Montana farmers were paying eastern manufacturers for labor they formerly had provided themselves; most of Montana farm work was now done back east in Detroit."31

All three of these new practices improved the damaged land somewhat, but led to larger farms. Howard foresaw the trend toward corporate farming evident today all over the West, when he noted in Montana: High, Wide and Handsome that less than 18 percent of the Montana land was owned by the individuals who actually farmed it.32

Sixty years after Powell suggested cooperation as a way to live on the plains, the people themselves chose to live that way. Grass-roots planning, which Howard said was "the only kind that can ever succeed,"33 was born at this time in three locations in Montana. From Teton County, where Howard and his mother had their summer cabin, came the Teton project "which embraces not only soil conservation but also tax revision, water utilization, erosion control, curtailment of weeds and pest damage, range management, financing, tenancy, [and] standards of living."34 Teton County lands were

31 Ibid.
32 Ibid., 284.
33 Ibid., 275.
34 Ibid., 288.
studied, then reclassified on the basis of the land's potential. The survey wasn't forced on the farmers; procedures were voluntary and nothing was imposed without approval of a majority, wrote Howard.35

In the Powder River country of Montana and Wyoming, ranchers created the nation's first grazing cooperative. In 1933 Montana adopted the grazing district law to encourage the formation of other cooperatives. Then in 1934 the United States Congress adopted the Taylor Grazing Act, based on the Montana law, which allowed ranchers to lease public lands cooperatively.36

In Phillips County, in north central Montana, soil conservationist Henry Lantz "pounded at the stockmen to adopt deferred or rotated grazing; to divide their range into seasonal pastures and rotate these to allow reseeding and stronger root growth of the grass."37 Howard described it as a farm resettlement program. Some people, he wrote, thought Lantz was crazy:

They have read his credo. It might even be socialism: Every soil type, every water resource adjusted to its best use; every farm family land every community assisted to provide for themselves the best security the resources of the area can furnish for their social and economic betterment.38

35 Ibid., 292.
36 Malone and Roeder, 203.
37 Howard, High, Wide and Handsome, 302.
38 Ibid., 304.
Howard noted that Lantz said "nothing about making money as an end to itself."39

Plans like these (for there were others in other states), along with President Roosevelt's New Deal programs, were righting the wrongs done to the land by the federal government, said Howard. But there was danger that the aid would come to a halt. "The money with which America had begun to indemnify the western frontier for decades of careless looting has been diverted to help support a more expensive project of killing Germans and Japanese."40

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Joe Howard was an environmentalist, although his sympathy for the cattlemen modified his thinking. Like the cattlemen, he thought wolves and prairie dogs should be exterminated with poison. Howard, like most people of his time, failed to understand the interrelationship between predator and prey. He also failed to understand the importance of fire both on range lands and in forests.

Howard had great faith that the Taylor Grazing Act would improve the nation's range lands. But many environmentalists today say it hasn't, although the act certainly has been a boon to ranchers.

If Howard would have lived through the 1970s to see what the federal government gave in the form of tax relief to

39Ibid.

40Ibid., 315.
sod-busters, (those who plow fragile land for tax benefits) he would no doubt have chastised farmer and government alike.

If Howard had lived to experience the nation-wide 1988 drought he probably would have become discouraged when he learned that one of the first responses of the U.S. Agriculture Department was to allow farmers to plow up lands set aside for conservation and recovery from abuse.

In January 1949, Howard gave a speech to a rotary club that both the Great Falls Tribune and Leader covered. Summarizing his own philosophy of the land, he told his listeners about a theory of Darwin's often overlooked: "The skill with which a nation or race adapts itself to its physical and social environment determines its chances for survival," the Leader reported that afternoon. The next morning the Tribune added that Howard said: "Survival of America depends as much on proper use of its natural resources as on training for atomic warfare."}

\footnote{Great Falls Tribune, 27 January 1949.}

\footnote{Leader, 26 January 1949.
Chapter VI

High Wide and Handsome

Howard's article about water issues in the October 1937, Survey Graphic captured the attention of the editors at Yale University Press. They asked him to do a book about Montana. Even though he was still copy desk editor at the Leader, he agreed, and worked on the book evenings and weekends for several years. In 1940 he tried unsuccessfully to get a Guggenheim Fellowship¹ to fund the writing. Howard worked on the book three years without a contract, then Yale signed one with him in 1940. "The book was actually five years in the writing, with only 'time off' and vacations available for the work," Howard wrote in his notes.² When Montana: High, Wide and Handsome came out in 1943 it brought Howard instant recognition from the literary world. The book went into eight printings in three years. It earned critical acclaim from reviewers all over the country. Almost without exception they praised the book for its poetic writing and vividness. The book did not make Howard popular with the Anaconda Copper Mining Company or the state's chambers of commerce, but many Montanans were often deeply touched. Some wrote thank-you letters to the author, sharing revealing


moments of their lives.

The book showed Eastern editors Howard's writing skills. As a result, Howard was able to get articles published in many national magazines. Montana: High, Wide and Handsome, remains Montana's most popular history book according to a questionnaire listed in a Montana history magazine.

In the archives at the Montana Historical Society is a fat folder of the journalist's correspondence and research on Montana; it begins with notes from Howard to himself, in which he lays out what he's going to do in this book:

The writer's position is that Montana has been looted... and its distress affected the rest of the nation....The book charges the federal reserve system and eastern financial policies with at least partial responsibility for the West's disastrous economic collapse in the twenties....It reviews the problem of water rights...and concludes with a discussion of the war's effect on the planning program (bad) and of the new frontier of the north and Montana's probable role as a jumping off place for that new frontier....The writer has endeavored to bring into the story throughout the color and romance of Montana, illustrating with anecdotes and significant historical incidents, few of which have ever appeared before in any work of public interest. Material has been obtained from literally thousands of newspaper stories, official reports, pamphlets, historical society records, some books and from hundreds of personal interviews.

Economic and social discussions are interwoven throughout the book but there are also descriptions of cowboy and homestead life, epic fires and blizzards, gun fights, rustler roundups, Indian raids, underground copper battles and the 'war of the copper kings'....It tells the story of resource exploitation....It is not (or at least I so hope) a propaganda tract and is written without—or mostly
without—bitterness or recrimination.³

The title for the book comes from Donald Culross Peattie—American botanist and writer of natural history—who wrote, "Colorado is high...Wyoming is wide...California is handsome...[but] it takes all three adjectives to describe Montana."⁴ John K. Hutchens, a Montanan who had moved East, wrote in the New York Times Book Review on Dec. 26, 1943:

...the anger that steadily flashes through his book is that of a man bitter about the betrayal of a place he loves...Mr. Howard can take some credit as the author of a brave, clear-sighted book that open-minded Montanans will read with satisfaction and strangers with appreciative interest. It is the first in its field about a state which, born in violence and raised in the spirit of the quick clean-up is still suffering from its beginning.⁵

Stanley Walker wrote in the New York Herald Tribune that: "The history of Montana, according to Mr. Howard, furnishes an admirable example of how not to develop a great region. The builders did almost everything wrong."⁶ A reviewer in Common Sense wrote:

The theme of his story is waste....In scarcely more than half a century it [Montana] has become a bedraggled, over-exploited colony. He has a

³Ibid.

⁴Howard, High, Wide and Handsome, epigraph.


The journalist's sense of news and the telling anecdote but he never descends to mere journalism. Like a fine novelist, he introduces no incident that does not bear somehow on the central theme.\footnote{Review of *Montana: High, Wide and Handsome*, by Joseph Kinsey Howard, in *Common Sense*, April 1944.}

The *Progressive* called *High, Wide and Handsome*: "A powerful tale of imperialism at home....Montana is a 'subject colony' to eastern exploiters and its story is that of the national social crisis in miniature."\footnote{Review of *Montana: High, Wide and Handsome*, by Joseph Kinsey Howard, in *The Progressive*, 19 June 1944.}

In the February 1944 issue of *Harper's*, Bernard DeVoto praised Howard's book and gave him an imaginary award in his Easy Chair column. A friend wrote Howard, "Congratulations on winning the Easy Chair's Occasional Award for American History. My enthusiasm which was obviously prejudiced, has been verified by a real authority."\footnote{Letter from Hollis to Joseph Kinsey Howard, 12 February 1944, Joseph Kinsey Howard Papers, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena.}

John Angus Burrell, who taught English at Columbia University, wrote Howard that his book is really magnificent. The facts, the vision, the tone are all right."\footnote{Letter from John Angus Burrell to Joseph Kinsey Howard, 31 December 1943, Joseph Kinsey Howard Papers, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena.}

John Gunther wrote in *Inside U.S.A.* that *High, Wide and Handsome* was "one of the best books about an
American state ever written."  

Not all comments were positive. Edward O. Sisson, who was president of the University of Montana in 1918, wrote Howard to criticize him for his chapter titled "A Russian Jew Named Levine." Professor Louis Levine had written a report on taxation in Montana that showed how few taxes the Company paid. Levine, wrote Sisson,

...was a Russian Jew. But you are too skilled in the use of language not to know that the fact can be put into words which blur or even deny the truth....This fact of his birth and ancestry had nothing to do with his work and should not have had the slightest bearing on the case....[His work] shed scientific light upon the vexed issue of taxation.12

Howard responded to Sisson explaining that he intended to make no derogatory comments about Levine, but that in fact he admired him a great deal.

Some reviewers wondered if Howard had experienced any retribution as a result of his book. The New York Herald Tribune wrote that Howard's High, Wide and Handsome, "didn't make him popular with extreme conservatives and traditionalists."13 Wrote another reviewer, "They are apt to be speaking unkindly of Joseph Kinsey Howard at luncheon


clubs and chamber of commerce dinners in Montana, where criticism of certain aspects of the Treasure State is so unwelcome as to constitute a sort of treason." According to Minneapolis Star reporter Jay Edgerton:

There was once a time after publication of Montana: High, Wide and Handsome, when it was all but impossible to buy Howard's work in some places in Montana. In other cities one had to deal with a bookseller almost as if he were a bootlegger. Joe Howard hit hard; he had many enemies and some were powerful.12

Howard's friend, Mildred Walker Schemm, said, "Joe was on the Company's black list. He wasn't worried; he was proud." Schemm remembered having tea with Mrs. Glover, the wife of an Anaconda Co. lawyer. "You're hurting your husband's reputation by being friends with Joe," Mrs. Glover told Schemm. But Schemm responded, "Joe's interesting and interested in writing; I'm not worried." Howard may have felt blacklisted by the Company. He complained to his agent in later years that the Anaconda Copper Mining Company had tried in insidious ways to get him off the university campus where he was working on the Montana Study.17 (See chapter 8)

Jean C. Herrick, the West Coast manager of Look, a

14Hutchens.

15Minneapolis Star, 4-9 October 1951.

16Schemm, interview.

picture magazine, wrote Howard: "I am extremely curious to
know if you have felt any personal repercussion from the
A.C.M. or the Montana Power Company." Unfortunately, the
archives contain no reply, from Howard, of Herrick's request.

John K. Hutchens of the New York Times wrote to
Howard: "I was proud of this paper, which is not exactly
anti-corporation, for running the stuff about the Company."
Hutchens had reviewed Howard's book and included negative
comments on the Company. "If and when you have time, I'll
be interested to hear what the lunch club boys did say about
your book."19

Despite accolades from the national press Howard was
worried about the anecdotal structure he had used in his
story-telling. He mentioned his concern to Stewart Holbrook
of Seattle, Washington, who had reviewed Howard's book.

Wrote Holbrook:

No, your mention of those unknown people is not
provincial. It's just what the goddamned stuffed-
shirt historians of this country need thrown in their
faces at every opportunity. Years ago these
historians decided on certain standard characters,
and their heirs have simply been rewriting the
story, adding little or nothing. Find me a college
graduate who ever heard of John Wesley Powell.
Indicative of the New Yorker's ignorance of his own
country, I wrote in my review of your book that
'362,000 cattle left their bodies along 3,000 miles of

18Letter from Jean C. Herrick to Joseph Kinsey Howard,
29 June 1944, Joseph Kinsey Howard papers, Montana
Historical Society Archives, Helena.

19Letter from John K. Hutchens to Joseph Kinsey
Howard, 8 January 1944, Joseph Kinsey Howard Papers,
Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena.
fence.' It came out 300. That is because those folks in New York cannot conceive of 3,000 miles of fence, hence there isn't any such thing.\textsuperscript{20}

Howard's anecdotes about the state's "small people" struck a chord within the hearts and minds of Montana's "common folk." Many sent him letters and shared moments of their lives. For example, Shorty Wallin wrote from Old Thistle Ranch and dated his letter Rose Moon, '46:

I have just read your book called \textit{Montana: High, Wide and Handsome}. I want to say she is a good message. She deals with everything in Montana. I've been here since '12. That spring I slept in the sage brush about the first of grass moon. I've drove ox teams for them sod peiteres around medicine lake and bonetrail and lived in sod shantys galore. I also rode with a covered wagon train through North Dakota the summer before '12. I could furnish you with a heap of good material.\textsuperscript{21}

And from Brooklyn, New York, Earl Sutherland wrote:

I am a son of a honyocker, born in Great Falls, Dec. 7, 1913 where my folks had drifted after leaving 200 acres seven miles east of Cascade. At the age of ten, a machinist took a keen interest in me and taught me the fundamental principles of auto mechanics.\textsuperscript{22}

The fact that Joseph Kinsey Howard kept practically no correspondence before \textit{High, Wide and Handsome} came out, but kept almost everything after it came out, indicates that he


\textsuperscript{22}Letter from Earl Sutherland to Joseph Kinsey Howard, (undated), Joseph Kinsey Howard Papers, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena.
understood the importance of the book and of himself as a historical figure in Montana. The book’s success also made him realize he needed a new agent to market his work to eastern based national magazines. He wrote to Miss Bernice Baumgarten of Brandt and Brandt, in New York. After introducing himself, Howard explained:

I don’t think I could do well with fiction so my stuff won’t bring very big prices, as a rule. My [old] agent told me sadly, however, that my book (first) would do well to earn its advance—$500—whereas it is in its seventh printing and has earned me so far more than $2,500.23

Howard depended on royalties from High, Wide and Handsome for the rest of his short life. Carl Kraenzel, a professor at Montana State College wrote: "I think you have done a job that college people should have done had they had the courage to be high, wide and handsome."24

In a 1981 article in Montana the Magazine of Western History, University of Montana history professor Harry Fritz asked readers to identify the five best books about Montana. Montana: High, Wide and Handsome, was chosen as the best. Four years later, however, in an article published in Montana the Magazine of Western History, historian Michael Malone advised Montanans not to idolize Howard’s interpretation of history.

23Letter from Howard to Baumgarten.

Early journalist-historians of Montana...wrote of the financial-political wars of the mining barons as dramatic duels in which evil capitalists attacked and vanquished the defenders of public virtue. In modern times, the two most popular historians of the state, Joseph Kinsey Howard and K. Ross Toole essentially continued this dramatized approach, writing of Montana as a beautiful and ‘uncommon’ land that has been cruelly exploited by predatory capitalists in a highly unique fashion. This general view of Montana’s past...underlies the contemporary Montana mindset and goes far to explain why a state that is in so many ways conservative is also environmentalist and anti-corporate in its sympathies.22

Malone argued that this interpretation of history is self-defeating in contemporary Montana. The state’s refusal to levy a sales tax or to create tax structures that welcome new business, said Malone, are examples of a reaction to the polemic view of exploitation favored by Howard and Toole. The state’s high coal severance tax, Malone argued, is another encumbrance that limits development instead of securing revenue for the state and expanding Montana’s coffers.

Malone did not deny that Montana was exploited by the Anaconda Copper Mining Company. But so were many other western states exploited by distant corporations:

In Arizona it used to be said that the ‘Three C’s’ ruled the roost: copper, cotton and cattle...Other examples would include the dominance of the Southern Pacific Railroad over California a hundred years ago, the long-standing exploitation of rural North Dakota by a melange of railroads, grain merchants and millers out of Minneapolis-St. Paul, the powerful alliances of railroad and lumber men in western Washington and Oregon, and of course, the

lovable oilmen of post-Spindletop Texas and Oklahoma.  

The key to appropriate development in Montana, Malone suggested, was to acknowledge the state's history of exploitation but also to realize that the state was not alone in being a victim of exploitation.

Howard did understand that Montana was not the only state that was a victim of exploitation. He wrote the chapter, "The Coeur D'Alene: Vulnerable Valley" in the book, *Rocky Mountain Cities* which came out in 1949. In this story of mining in an Idaho valley, Howard talks about the exploitation of the land, the people and the government by out-of-state interests. Plus, Howard often talked about the West in general as being exploited by and a colony of the East.

In their book *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, Malone and Richard Roeder wrote: "For all its naked power and all its heavy-handed manipulation of state politics, Anaconda never literally ran Montana. It shared and contested power with other interest groups, and like any other corporation, it changed with the changing times."  

In the Autumn 1970 issue of *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* Roeder argued that Montana was not a

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26 Ibid.


28 Malone and Roeder, 248.
victim of the Anaconda Company. That is proven, he suggested, by looking at the significant progressive legislation passed within the first two decades of the century. In the area of political machinery, he wrote, the legislature allowed:

...direct primaries, the commission form of city government, extension of the initiative and referendum to cities and towns, non-partisan nomination of judges, woman suffrage, a preferential vote for U.S. Senators and repeated memorials to Congress for direct election of Senators....For industrial workers the legislature passed hours laws for men and women, and laws to protect the health and safety of employees, define liability for industrial accidents and supply workmen's compensation....For the public the legislature passed pure food and drug laws, instituted milk and meat inspection, and established a State Board of Health. For children there were compulsory school attendance, child labor, and juvenile courts laws; and for adult offenders there were penal reforms...the electorate amended the constitution to exclude children under sixteen from working in underground mines, to provide the eight-hour day for employees on public works and in mines, mills and smelters, and to provide for initiative and referendum. The electorate also adopted a referendum for prohibition and initiated a direct primary law, corrupt practices act, presidential primary law, and a workmen's compensation bill.

In the same magazine, the late K. Ross Toole, University of Montana historian, retorted that these reforms were meaningless because they lacked substance. "Is a reform a reform when it doesn't work?" he asked. "Non-partisan nomination," he suggested, "made no difference to them at all. They [the Company] still elected and controlled judges and

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officials. Toole, like Howard believed the Company controlled the state.

One indication of the influence of Joe Howard's book is that more than 40 years later historians are still arguing about his interpretation of Montana history. Howard's book may be considered a polemic in some circles, but society needs people like Howard to implement change. Howard was a crusader; that is the defense for his writings.

In the thirties, when Howard was researching and writing his book, life was tough, dreary, and unfair. There were abuses to the workers; the unions had real grievances. By today's standards, Howard's views may seem strident and doctrinaire, but back in the late thirties and early forties, his perception of western history told easterners, and others, something most of them did not realize. Montana: High, Wide and Handsome was a book of its time.

30K. Ross Toole, "Rebuttal: When is a Reform a Reform?," Montana the Magazine of Western History, Autumn 1970, 27.
Chapter VII

Missouri Valley Authority

Forever in rebellion against exterior exploitation...[the West] has nevertheless always co‐operated against itself when the chips were down.

Bernard DeVoto

A.B. Guthrie, Jr. remembered talking with his good friend, Joseph Kinsey Howard, about many things:

Booze, dames, the environment, ideas, Montana, what happened to Montana. He loved Montana because he had space to move his elbows and mind, but he was dichotomized there. He wanted to move people in and make more jobs. You can't have both, and we used to argue about that.¹

Guthrie and Howard were both conservationists but the two friends disagreed on development. Guthrie disliked more development in the state. Howard was an advocate for development—appropriate development that included support and co-operation from governments. Through speeches and articles, Howard worked diligently to advance a federal proposal for a Missouri Valley Authority. His work, between 1944 and 1948, on the MVA was a demonstration of his socialist leanings and his belief that Montana was continuing to be exploited by large corporate interests.

Montana's economic and social condition worried Howard. The homesteader farming methods and the resultant dust storms had damaged Montana's prairie lands. The Depression and dust bowl years forced many people to leave the state.

¹Guthrie, interview.
Quoting government documents, Howard said that 90,000 people, 16 percent of the population, had left Montana since 1940. Plus, both World Wars had left Montana with an aging population: "The proportion who are 70 or older is more than twice as great today as it was twenty years ago," said Howard in a speech to a Senate Subcommittee. Howard said the economy was declining. There were fewer jobs, and rural communities offered little cultural reason for Montanans to stay home. Howard viewed the proposed Missouri Valley Authority as one solution to those problems.

He wrote about the MVA in three magazine articles: the May 1945 issue of Harper's, the August 1945 issue of Common Sense, and the November 1948 issue of the Progressive. He also wrote an editorial in November 1948 for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. He was avidly in favor of the MVA in all articles. Howard also testified, by invitation, before the Subcommittee of Senate Irrigation and Reclamation Committee. There, he spoke in favor of MVA.

Howard explained the controversy in his Harper's article, "The Golden River." The Missouri River Basin is 2,460 miles long. It makes up 17.4 percent of the nation's continental area. The Missouri River Basin states include: Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, North and South Dakota, Missouri, Iowa, and

Kansas and Nebraska. "Each," said Howard, "has always looked upon the Missouri as its own river."³ Howard compared the Missouri to America; both are big, impatient and wasteful, he said. In down-river states, Howard wrote in his Harper's article, the Missouri had caused devastating floods:

In 1943 the Missouri...roared out of the west, ripped away $2,000,000 worth of Army flood control installations, cost the Engineers' Corps another $800,000 for rescue work and caused $35,000,000 damage between Sioux City and St. Louis. It repeated the performance in 1944; total loss for the two years was $112,000,000 and four and a half million acres were flooded.⁴

Howard quoted Brigadier General R.C. Crawford, a Missouri River division engineer as saying: "It is just not good sense to let such a river wander around at will in a civilized country."⁵ The people in the down-river states were interested in controlling floods. They also wanted the development of the river to help increase their population. In his Harper's article, Howard wrote that ten percent of the Missouri River Basin's population had moved away since World War II began. In 1945, he wrote, six million people lived in the basin. The question before Congress, beginning in 1944 with Montana Senator James Murray's MVA bill, was whether the basin should be regulated by a proposed federally funded, regionally based Missouri Valley Authority or by existing

⁴Ibid., 512.
⁵Ibid., 511.
Both federal agencies submitted plans. Army Colonel Lewis A. Pick drafted a flood control program with subordinate provisions for irrigation, navigation and hydroelectric power. Spokesmen for the lower valley states hailed the so called Pick Plan with delight. But the governors from Montana, Wyoming and North Dakota "descended upon Congress when the Pick Plan reached the hearing stage in the spring of 1944 to demand its rejection," Howard wrote in Harper's. These upper Missouri valley leaders wanted something different. They were not interested in flood control or navigation; they wanted the Missouri to be used for irrigation and power plants. The power could run irrigation pumps for the dry plains states; it would also encourage manufacturing, that would in turn stabilize the economy and bring back the population. These upper valley governors wanted Congress to approve a plan submitted by W. G. Sloan of the Reclamation Bureau.

The major opponents of the plan were the utilities. That's because, according to Howard, a successful Missouri Valley Authority could lead to liquidation of private utilities. Howard based his assumption on the success of the Tennessee Valley Authority, established in 1933. "Public power and planning brought more than 400 private industries employing

*ibid., 514.*
100,000 people into the Tennessee Valley," wrote Howard in *Common Sense* after he had toured the valley and researched the project. TVA, he said, had reversed the valley's declining economy.7 Howard wanted the same success for the Missouri, but there was opposition from power companies, farmers, politicians, unions newspapers and others in all states, including Montana. But their opposition, reasoned Howard, was unfounded.

These people, he said, offered nothing but "counterfeit issues." The first and "phoniest of all," said Howard, was the issue of states' rights which, according to Howard, wasn't an issue at all because the Missouri—as a navigable stream—can be controlled by federal authorities. "Federal jurisdiction, repeatedly upheld by the courts, has been written into the law since 1812, when Congress specifically declared this river a 'common highway, forever free,'" Howard wrote in *Common Sense.*8 Still, people argued the MVA was a states' rights issue. Charles S. Baldwin, a Montana attorney, wrote Howard Dec. 26, 1945: "The MVA as you know, is an exceptionally hot potato....Personally I have always been for state rights and I do not believe that we should be governed by any MVA set

8Ibid.
up in Montana."9

Besides states' rights, opponents were also worried about "government domination." But Howard did not consider that to be a problem. He wrote in Common Sense:

It is difficult to see how an Authority, with its main offices in the region served, and required by law to co-operate with state and local agencies, can "dominate" the people of its area more than can the Army, which is a law unto itself, or the Bureau of Reclamation, whose decisions are made in Washington.10

Taxes were another concern; opponents feared a federal authority would not pay them. "But in lieu of taxes," wrote Howard, "MVA would pay 5 percent of its gross receipts from power sales."11 The Army, reported Howard, would pay nothing. He based this assumption on his experience with the Army-built Fort Peck Dam in northeastern Montana. He wrote in Common Sense:

Montana doesn't get a penny of tax revenue from it, nor a penny 'in lieu of taxes.'...Nor does Montana get much of anything else from the hundred-million-dollar heap of dirt. A power potential of 105,000 kilowatts at Fort Peck is acknowledged by the Army, but only 35,000 kilowatts are produced; and since the dam was built to stabilize the river flow for navigation far downstream, none of its impounded water is used to irrigate the frequently thirsty lands of eastern Montana.12


10Howard, Common Sense.

11Ibid., 16.

12Ibid.
Howard once again touted the benefits of the TVA which he said provided for a dramatic increase in state and local government income.\textsuperscript{13}

Congress had ordered the feuding federal agencies, the Army and the Bureau of Reclamation, to come up with a compromise plan. They did--of sorts--but the plan was severely criticized. "It's a shameless, loveless shotgun wedding," said James G. Patton, president of the National Farmers Union. Howard took the analogy one step further: "And it did appear that although the wedding might legitimize the child, it could offer no assurance that the baby would not be born blind or witless."\textsuperscript{14} The problem with the compromise plan called the Pick-Sloan plan was that it postponed all decisions about development on the Missouri and merely sketched in places where dams might be placed.

That was not appropriate development, to Joe Howard's way of thinking.

On Sept. 12, 1945, Howard spoke before the Subcommittee of Senate Irrigation and Reclamation Committee. According to the text of the speech in the Montana Historical Society archives, Howard told the committee that he was a "lone innocent out of the West," and that he was representing no organization.\textsuperscript{15} Howard's goal, in Washington D.C., was to

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{14}Howard, Harper's, 518.

\textsuperscript{15}Howard, Senate Subcommittee.
persuade the committee to vote for the creation of an MVA.

Howard said all the basin states would benefit from an MVA because it would work toward an:

...orderly physical, economic and social development of the region, further, it directs the Authority to undertake economic research and demonstrations which will promote good farming practice and also encourage establishment of small or locally owned industry. In those words, gentlemen, lies the greatest opportunity, the most valid hope, for the Western Plains in my lifetime.\(^\text{16}\)

Howard outlined for the committee, his view of problems facing Montana: a smaller and aging population, fewer but larger farms, little or no manufacturing, control and exploitation by outside interests.

Unless these trends are arrested, unless we are able to establish a more diversified economic base for Montana, we are going to become a state of vast agricultural plantations and a couple of extractive industries living on declining natural resources, metals and timber. We cannot hope to re-employ even our war veterans unless new business and industrial fields are opened, because our great agricultural, mineral and timber production grew out of war's demands and was achieved despite drastic reduction of civilian manpower. The Murray MVA Bill specifically directs any Authority established to guide Missouri Basin development to plan, to conduct research, to work with local and state agencies toward solution of these problems...[The plan also states] there must be the fullest cooperation of all interested in soil and water conservation, both public and private agencies, as well as individual owners and operators.\(^\text{17}\)

Howard admitted to the Senate subcommittee that many people in his own state were opposed to an MVA. The

\(^{16}\text{Ibid.}\)

\(^{17}\text{Ibid.}\)
Montana legislature had gone so far as to pass a "memorial" against an MVA bill. That's because, Howard said, the people were not given the opportunity to learn about the bill. As half the state's newspapers were owned by the Anaconda Copper Company and influenced by the Montana Power Company, little pro-MVA information got out to the people, he said. Other newspapers, such as the conservative Miles City Star were also opposed. The Star called the MVA "a scheme with socialist trappings."  

But Howard said if the people could be educated about the positive aspects of an MVA they would see that the small industry the authority could provide could bring stability to communities and allow workers to return to Montana. A regionally based manager, such as the MVA could provide this, not the army, he explained. "It should be pointed out," said Howard in opposing the Pick-Sloan plan, "that any extension of Army planning into social or community fields would be strongly resisted as entailing dangers of militarism, of authoritarian control." The MVA must have a community point of view, rather than an engineering point of view, he said. Howard ended his presentation to the Senate subcommittee, with a call to remember history. "A Missouri Valley Authority born of this great concept can renew in all America the enthusiasm, the pride—and the prosperity—which

10Miles City Star, 22 September 1946.

19Howard, Senate Subcommittee.
rewarded its first venture two thousand five hundred miles up
the Missouri River a century ago."20

Despite Howard's impassioned pleas, the subcommittee
did not pass the bill out of committee. The MVA plan had
had the support of President Roosevelt (who died unexpectedly
April 12, 1945). His successor, President Truman, was cool
toward the concept. Plus, the bill's sponsor was weak. In a
letter to his editor at Harper's, Howard wrote, "...just between
us, its sponsorship by Senator Murray doesn't help, since
Murray has rarely delivered and had considerable difficulty
last time getting himself re-elected."21

The MVA was not yet completely dead. In 1948, Senator
Murray, who was chairman of the Interior and Insular Affairs
Committee, was re-elected. Once again, he proposed an MVA
bill. Once again, Howard wrote about it both in a guest
editorial for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch as well as in the
Progressive. "Make Way for MVA," Howard announced, giving
the same arguments he had in his 1945 writings. But the idea
suffered the same fate in 1948 as it did in 1945 because of
lack of sufficient support from states.

Today, Montanans and the other Missouri River Basin
states live under the federal Fick-Sloan Plan. Montana,
according to attorney John Thorson, who works on contract

20 Ibid.

21 Letter from Joseph Kinsey Howard to Fred Allen, 4
October 1944, Joseph Kinsey Howard Papers, Montana
Historical Society Archives, Helena.
for the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, does not benefit from development on the Missouri River. For example, Montana dams produce 18.3 percent of the power, but most of that power is used in downstream states. All revenue produced by Montana-based Pick-Sloan dams, Thorson says, goes to the federal treasury.22

Joe Howard's fears of the Pick-Sloan plan for Missouri Basin development came true. Today, regional, grass roots organizations, such as the Northern Lights Institute, struggle to bring basin states together to do what Howard tried to do four decades ago—develop a comprehensive plan that will help lead to appropriate development of the Missouri River.

Chapter VIII

The Montana Study

Democracy is not something which is in Washington—it is in our own hearts, minds, homes, communities. If it lives there it will live in the big lights, and if it dies in our communities it will die in the world.

University of Montana
President
Ernest Melby

On April 28th, 1944 Ernest Melby, then chancellor of the six-member Montana University system, along with David Stevens of the Rockefeller Foundation, and sociologist and philosopher Baker Brownell of Northwestern University had lunch together at the Drake Hotel, in Chicago. As the three ate, they "laid the foundation for a new program to be known as the Montana Study—an experiment in human relations destined to become a significant achievement in modern education." That assessment comes from Richard Poston, a free-lance writer who grew up in Missoula. He wrote a book about the Montana Study, Small Town Renaissance, then spent the next 30 years traveling the world promoting its concepts.

The Montana Study was a radical approach to reviving small towns. Some called it socialistic because it asked people to work together to learn about their own communities then come up with plans, if they chose, to improve their towns. The Study was idealistic and visionary but poorly administered.

Its promoters failed ultimately because they didn't get the co-operation on the state level that they succeeded to get on the local level. Nor did they get the support of the Anaconda Company, which at the time was a powerful entity in the state. The Study also failed because it hired out-of-state people, some of whom were involved in highly controversial proposals such as the federal Missouri Valley Authority.

The idea for the Montana Study was conceived by President Melby and Professor Brownell. David Stevens funded it with a $25,000 grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. They hired Joseph Kinsey Howard, whose knowledge about Montana was legendary, to help carry out the Study. Howard resigned from the Great Falls Leader to take the position. He wrote Brownell that the Montana Study gave him the chance to "renew my faith in the possible improvement of conditions in a state I love very much."²

The Montana Study was funded for three years, from 1944 to 1946. Howard stayed with the Study for the first two years then left because of his sometimes contentious personality, which led to political difficulties. He also had financial difficulties that resulted from the Study. During the two years Howard was with the Montana Study, he wrote a study guide that helped communities learn about themselves and he edited Montana Margins: A State Anthology, his

second book. The Montana Study was well-received in some towns, but in much of the state it was the victim of politics, poor planning, and circumstance. As Poston wrote, it was an educational idea whose time had not yet come.3

Melby was a progressive thinker and an uncommon educator: "His was a vision that saw in the University a great program for humanity through which common men could gain the spirit, the knowledge and the willingness to work for a more perfect society," wrote Poston.4 Melby believed that technology and the industrial revolution threatened democracy and that the solution to the problem lie in revitalized and stable rural communities. The University must help, he said, by bringing education off the campus and into the country.

Baker Brownell, co-author with Frank Lloyd Wright of Architecture and Modern Life, believed the same thing. He and Wright feared that democracy was being weakened by the rush of rural people to urban areas. "The entire concentrative movement of population into the great urban regions has reached a point of over-balance. It has gone too far," Brownell wrote in a chapter titled "A Balanced Society."5 A project such as the Montana Study could improve life in small communities which in turn would mean that people would stay

3Poston, 20-25.

4Ibid., 15.

in small towns instead of leaving. "Traditional American democracy finds its richest environment in small communities and rural areas where people meet each other as neighbors, where they have a sense of belonging and a feeling of personal responsibility toward each other," Brownell said.

By the fall of 1944 Melby had hired Brownell, Howard and Paul Meadows, a Northwestern University sociologist from Chicago, and Bert Hansen, an English professor from Montana State College who had experience in community drama. Melby provided them with an office on the University of Montana campus in Missoula. All funding for the project came from the Rockefeller Foundation; the state of Montana offered little support, except for a small amount of part-time help and some travel and office expenses.

The goal of the Montana Study was three fold: to get the University off the campus and into the rural areas, to stabilize community life and to raise the "appreciative and spiritual" standard of living in rural towns. The principle for achieving this was cooperation among opposing sides. Their process was for the staff to be asked into small towns to explain the Study. (Their policy was never to go uninvited). The group would bring with them the 50,000-word study guide, written by Howard, with Brownell's help, called Life in Montana.

The study guide showed community members how to

"Poston, 22.

Ibid., 23-4."
study themselves, their community, and the relationship of both to the state, the nation and the world. Participating members would meet weekly for 10 weeks. They would discuss things in a friendly and objective manner. During the first meetings they would ask themselves: "Why do I live in this community, is it from choice? How would I like to see this community changed within reason?" Their search was meant to give them facts about their town. Next they would study the families that lived in the town. "That feeling of belonging to a group of people who know each other, understand each other, and are interested in each other, seems to be a necessary part of human happiness and security," the guide explained. Then the members of the study group were to look at work in their community, how people earned a living. An important theme of the Montana Study—local control—came through here. Here's how Howard's study guide advised its readers:

Mass production and modern agricultural machinery have changed our work a great deal in recent years. This productive power means that unless we find new occupations, new markets, and new ways of using what we produce, there will not always be enough employment to go around. This is a serious threat to our small communities and our democracy. In solving this problem people in our small communities are faced by two alternatives. They can move to the cities and let our small towns gradually die. Or they can develop new small industries and occupations, and produce more for

*Ibid. 194.

*Ibid. 197.
Diversification and local control, the Montana Study framers said, freed communities from the bidding of large outside corporations which often cared little for community needs. Plus, when people participated in something, whether it was production of a product for local consumption or something as intangible as recreation, they had more fun. The idea of having fun while participating was important for framers of the Montana Study. That's why the Montana Study dramatist helped communities write plays about the history of their towns, then helped them put on the plays. One successful example was in Lonepine, along the Flathead River. The "Lonepine Historical Drama" brought in $500 revenue which the community used to improve its recreation hall, according to Poston's *Small Town Renaissance*.  

After studying how their town compared with others, then where it stood in relation to the state, the nation and the world, the community would then look back at itself and see what needed to be done to improve the town. After the 10-week study period, for example, the community of Conrad decided to build a new swimming pool. The town of Darby created favorable economic conditions that brought in dozens of small businesses. Stevensville put on a play that told the history of the Flathead Indians who had once lived in the

10 Ibid. 198.

11 Ibid. 48.
Bitter Root valley but had been forced to move to a new reservation in the Flathead valley, according to Small Town Renaissance.

Howard travelled around much of the state promoting the Montana Study. He gave many speeches. On October 27, 1944 he spoke to a teachers' conference in Havre. He told them that his job was the Study, and their job was implementation of the information that resulted from the Study:

The function of the Montana Study is to find out, so far as possible, how the lives of people in Montana and of their families and communities may be stabilized and enriched. We are to survey the resources of our communities and our educational system to determine how those resources can help to make life fuller and happier for everyone. Ours then, is the preliminary job—the study. It will be up to the communities and to you as educators and citizens to bring about that which we find is possible and feasible.¹²

In order that all this be done, said Howard, education must be made available to everyone, of all ages. School buildings were too valuable to be used just for six hours a day teaching children. They must also be used to teach adults. Adult education that stressed the humanities, Howard told a Great Falls audience in December 1944, was desperately needed:

This new and more liberal concept of education has a function in the communities of making them better places in which to live....By making the

communities more interesting, it can help to check the drain... of our youth....Living in a group of fewer than 200 persons can be satisfying—if your neighbors are intelligent, interesting and friendly. Or it can be insupportable—if they are stupid and hostile. Stupidity and hostility destroy the community, the state and our democracy. It is with this community disintegration with which we are basically and most earnestly concerned....I want Montana to become one vast university in which all of you are teachers or research students.¹³

These were lofty ideals and they didn’t always set well with Montana’s traditional ideas of education. Academics said Montana Study techniques did not conform to established convention. Also, the rugged individualism that characterized Montana contrasted sharply with the idea of community welfare projects.

There were other problems with the Montana Study. The Rockefeller grant Melby won was for the entire university system; but it was based in Missoula. Montana is so geographically large, and the Montana Study staff was so small, that most work was done in the towns near Missoula. Some educational units in far-flung Montana felt neglected and withheld their full support. According to Dan Kemmis, a community development specialist who works with the Northern Lights Institute, the Montana Study failed because it did not get the support of the other members of the university system. The Montana Study succeeded in achieving

cooperation among dissenting groups at the local level but failed at the state level, Kemmis said. As a result, the other units felt no "ownership" in the Study, Kemmis added.14

"Howard was one of the greatest assets the Montana Study had," wrote Poston, "but with him came a whole new array of enemies."15 Howard's Montana High, Wide and Handsome made him popular with the common people, but "in Montana's top political and financial circles, he was as popular as a rattlesnake at a lawn party," Poston wrote.16 Howard wrote the truth as he saw it regardless of whose wrath he incurred. In September 1944, the same month the Montana Study opened its doors, Howard's scathing article about the Anaconda Copper Mining Company and the Montana Power Company came out in Harper's. Howard wrote:

For almost a generation a pair of fat boys like Tweedledum and Tweedledee, an arm of each flung chummily across the other's shoulders, have been running the show in Montana....The twins--Anaconda Copper and Montana Power....In the dialect of the Treasure State...are 'the Company.'...The first question asked about a political candidate, whether he seeks a seat on a county school board or a seat in the United States Senate, is always, 'Is he a Company man?' And if someone suggests a major community venture in any of the principal cities--sometimes even in farm villages--everyone else wants to know, 'How does the Company stand on it?' Because if the twins dislike candidate or project, the chances of either usually have been very slim indeed. Have been, up to now; but

15Poston, 29.
16Ibid.
something is happening in Montana.\textsuperscript{17}

The article went on to point out how the Federal Power Commission's investigators had exposed in March 1944 approximately $50,000,000 excess capitalization in Montana Power books and suggested that "political control may yet be wrested from the dominant twins."\textsuperscript{18} As a result of this article, the Montana Study received no active co-operation from the Montana Twins.\textsuperscript{19} Here's how Poston described the chain of events:

In October, the next month after Howard's "The Montana Twins in Trouble?" was released to the public, Baker Brownell made a tour of the six units of the University. While in Butte to visit the School of Mines, he decided also to explain the purpose of his program to officials of the Anaconda Copper Mining Company, and to then invite a company official to serve on the Montana Study's state-wide advisory committee. He thereupon went to the company's offices and during the course of the conversation was asked if Joseph Kinsey Howard was not also helping to organize the Study. Brownell unhesitatingly replied that he was. Then came considerable apology concerning the pressure of company business, and Brownell's invitation to serve on the Montana committee was politely rejected. This was the first and last official contact between the Montana Study and the company.\textsuperscript{20}

According to Kemmis, the failure of the Study to secure the support of the Company was another factor that led to its

\textsuperscript{17}Joseph Kinsey Howard, "The Montana Twins in Trouble?" Harper's, May 1945, 334.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19}Poston, 32.

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid.
failure. The "right and the left," he said must feel "ownership" of something as broad as the Montana Study or it is doomed to failure.

Howard was aware of his tenuous position. He wrote to his agent in New York, Bernice Baumgarten: "I'm under constant fire due to my unpopularity with certain influential elements in Montana—the Anaconda Copper Mining Co. and Montana Power. They have sought ever since I got the grant to get me off the University staff."\(^{21}\) It is difficult to document any conspiracy on the part of the Company against Howard; but the controversy surrounding the publishing of his "Twins" article would lead Howard to believe there was one; it would also lead one to believe that Howard was perhaps more of a debit than an asset to the Montana Study.

Howard wrote another article for Harper's that made his association with Montana Study controversial. In May 1945, "Golden River," which detailed the controversy over the proposed Missouri Valley Authority, went on the newsstands. Not long after, Howard, at his own expense, went to Washington D.C. to testify before a U.S. Senate subcommittee in favor of the MVA. At the same time, Paul Meadows, the Study’s sociologist, was traveling around the state talking up the benefits of the MVA. The result was that many Montanans assumed the Study was a mouthpiece for the MVA. "Like all other organizations labeled MVA," wrote Poston, "the

\(^{21}\)Letter from Howard to Baumgarten.
Montana Study automatically assumed a reddish hue and the less people knew about it, the more extreme became their epithets—not barring the most malicious of all: 'communist front.' An editorial in the Miles City Star proclaimed: "One of the major projects of 'The Montana Study' would seem to have been to sell the Missouri Valley Authority scheme, with all of its socialistic trappings, to the unsuspecting people of this state." Republican Governor Sam Ford wrote Brownell a letter on Dec. 28, 1945 accusing the Study staff of being socialists:

There is some criticism of the study or perhaps I should say of some of the personnel who are going about the state trying to sell state socialism. I am convinced our people do not want socialism in any form and if the members of your group continue this practice your work will suffer....It is mighty hard for the average citizen to draw a fine line of distinction and determine where Montana Study ends and the individual's views begin.

Outraged by the continuing diatribes, Ruth Robinson of the successful Conrad Study group wrote an open letter to Governor Ford:

I was shocked and dismayed by your statement, in the Great Falls Tribune for Dec. 19, of 'previous prejudice' against the work of the Montana Study. The explanation, that you did not believe in turning a lot of foreigners loose with wild ideas betrays such incredible ignorance of the Montana Study's work in encouraging the development of community

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22 Poston, 69.

23 Miles City Star, 22 September 1946.

life in Montana that I write not only to protest your attitude but to inform you of the work done by the Montana Study Group in Conrad.25

The letters and controversy swirled for months. Brownell wrote to Judge Lew L. Callaway: "The Montana Study certainly is not a political organization and should not get into political controversies."26 But obviously Brownell failed to see how the outside activities of Howard and Meadows were affecting the Study, for he concluded his letter by saying that staff members "are full grown men and citizens and I doubt if it is my function to tell them what they can or cannot say as citizens of Montana."27

On top of the MVA and "Twins" controversies, there arose yet another problem. "All hell has broken loose in Libby," Brownell wrote Howard on Jan. 23, 1946.28 The Spokesman Review had printed an article that gave inaccurate information on a speech that Brownell had given about the Montana Study and its role in helping Libby decide if it wanted to endorse the sustained-yield management plan proposed by the U.S. Forest Service. The battle went on for


27Ibid.

several years. The Montana Study ultimately helped the community to make its own decision about sustained-yield, but at the same time, the Study’s association with yet another controversy did not endure it to the state at large.

After the Rockefeller money ran out in three years Montana law makers chose not to fund the project again. Poston said one reason for this was the increasing power of the large agricultural interests in the state. Such corporations were not friendly to the idea of small communities practicing self-determination. Many of these out-of-state corporations controlled "hundreds of thousands of acres of Montana farm land," wrote Poston, "and wield[ed] great influence in state political circles which [had] an important voice in determining the College budget."

According to Dan Kemmis, the failure of the Montana Study demonstrates an important history lesson: that this state is as divisive as it is neighborly. The neighborliness was demonstrated in the towns with successful projects: Lonepine, Conrad, Darby, Arlee, even Libby. The divisiveness was demonstrated by this letter of June 9, 1948, that Poston wrote to Howard:

The opposition to the Study mounted to a degree of bitterness I have never dreamed existed. It only goes to prove how desperately Montana really needs a Montana Study. In Lewistown it was said to be nothing but an insidious force infiltrating the state for the sole purpose of spreading class hatred and strife among the people. It got so bad in

Lewistown that several members of the study group actually quit because of what it was doing to their reputation. And in Stevensville the American Legion was all set to stop the Montana Study and run Bert Hansen [the dramatist] out of town as a subversive character.30

Howard had his own interpretation of why the Montana Study failed. He explained it to James McCain, who had taken over as university president when Melby left to be dean of education at a university in New York:

I feel that it need not have died had there been a little more vigorous effort in Montana on its behalf. We avoided even the use of the words 'adult education' so as to get away from the academic rigidity associated with that phrase; and also I think because our project was not a part of the adult education division of the Foundation but of the Humanities division. My personal appraisal of our experience leads me to the conclusion that we bit off a good deal more than we could chew. This was partially due to lack of staff, inability to get more help from the overburdened University units and failure to explain adequately your objects. This latter was made even more difficult in a state which had had no experience whatever of community wide organization for education or anything else.31

President McCain found other reasons for the lack of success of the Montana Study. He wrote to Howard Oct. 15, 1947: "I am personally convinced that more than anything else, administrative ineptness was responsible for the failure


of the Montana Study." Poston agreed with McCain; he wrote in Small Town Renaissance: "Here was being repeated the age-old story of the idealists, impatient with administrative details, absorbed in the ultimate objectives of a great philosophy for the advancement of mankind."

Poor administration was surely at fault, but so was Howard's reputation. His muckraking discouraged the powerful Company from participating in the Study. His contentious personality, one suspects, was not always conciliatory—and reconciliation and cooperation were the guiding principles of the Study. One indication of Howard's abrasiveness comes from this anecdote written under Howard's picture in the University of Montana's School of Journalism Hall of Fame: "...it is said [Howard] was hurled from a school window by classmates for defending the British posture in the War of 1812." Howard may have believed in conciliation but he did not always follow such a path.

Howard looked upon his two years working with Brownell as a positive experience. On Feb. 24, 1946 Howard wrote Brownell:

The last two years have been the happiest of my life, without any question. Most of this I owe to you, partly as a generous and understanding employer...and partly for the stimulation I have had from working, for the first time, with a man of


Poston, 118.
really outstanding intelligence. I will never forget this experience, which has added immeasurably not only to my enjoyment of life, but also to my development as an individual.34

Interviews with Howard's friends confirm Howard's enthusiasm about working with Brownell. Said Mildred Walker Schemm: "The Montana Study was a great boon to him. He liked the university atmosphere."35 Said Pat Brennen Taylor: "Joe was happy to be associated with Brownell. I think the Montana Study justified his feelings about small town life in Montana which he had built up doing research for Montana: High, Wide and Handsome."36

According the Dan Kemmis, the Montana Study focuses attention on the different choices political activists have today. They can choose to be muckrakers and advocates, or they can choose to work towards community building and trust. Kemmis prefers the latter. In fact, the organization he works with, Northern Lights Institute, has chosen to take "opposition leaders" onto its board. Northern Lights is a liberal group; but its latest board members include: a vice president of ASARCO, a big mining corporation with holdings in Montana; a conservative businessman who advocates severe tax cuts; and the conservative lieutenant governor candidate


35Schemm, interview.

36Taylor, interview
on the Republican ticket. Such people have a stake in policy-making in Montana, says Kemmis, and therefore must be involved in the policy-making process. That, says the community development specialist, was the mistake of the Montana Study. It didn't include all sides.\textsuperscript{37}

The book that resulted from Howard's work with the Montana Study had as contentious a history as did the Study itself. \textit{Montana Margins: A State Anthology}, gave Howard as much distress as it did joy.

\textsuperscript{37}Kemmis, interview.
Chapter IX
Montana Margins

Howard's second book, Montana Margins: A State Anthology, was an outgrowth of the Montana Study. The book was published by Yale University Press in 1946, after Howard had already left the Study. This 515-page collection of writings by and about Montanans includes Howard's initial introduction plus information about each author and piece in the anthology.

In the introduction--"People, Surrounded by Space"--Howard explained that the book was inspired by the knowledge that "the resources of the Montana scene were culturally rich."¹ Howard wrote that another reason for compiling the book was that teachers complained they needed such an anthology "if the school and community, as the Montana Study asserted, were to be brought into closer relation."²

According to a humorous anecdote in Howard's introduction, he had a difficult time finding an appropriate arrangement for the works: "The toss-up method was tried. In this process, the anthologist throws his manuscript at the ceiling, or out the window and picks it up blindfolded."³ Ultimately, Howard decided to divide the book into the

²Ibid., vii.
³Ibid., xi.
following sections: "Introduction, War, The River, The Land, Beyond Law, Men, ...and Women, Industry, Social Life, Animals, Travel and Transport, and the Appendix."4

I will focus on sections of Montana Margins that relate to my thesis, i.e., Howard's interest in the worker, the Indian, the community, and the land.

Stories that exclaim both the beauty and the savagery of the Montana landscape were included in his section "The Land." It begins with a lilting poem by Elliott C. Lincoln. Howard included a number of Lincoln's works in his anthology, probably because Lincoln loved Montana as romantically as Howard did: "Waking up on a fall morning in our country is just as near going to heaven as any earthly experience can be," Lincoln wrote.5 The poem that begins the Land section evokes a feeling of history and romance; it's called "Montana Night," from Lincoln's book, Rhymes of a Homesteader.

......Soft breezes blow,
Cool with the dampness of a stream hard by.
Dim, ghostly shapes of cattle grazing near
Drift steadily across the ray of light
From a lone cabin; and I think I hear
The barking of a dog. All things unite
To lull the senses of the eye and ear
In one sweet sense of rest; Montana night.6

From the softness of this poem Howard moved on to the

4Ibid., xv-xviii.
5Ibid., 83.
6Ibid.
hardness of a Montana hail storm. "The elemental savagery of a hailstorm has frightened many Montanans, defeated some, killed others," Howard wrote in the introduction to Dale Eunson's story, "Hail." The narrator is an unnamed woman who lives with her husband and children on a homestead in central Montana:

And then came the full fury of the storm. Like a million guns exploding at once and constantly the hail shelled the roof. In all the world there was nothing but sound, stifling, pressing in, beating, pounding, shattering sound. They were all inside a drum and the devil was beating a tattoo....John came to her, and she saw that tears were running down his face, that his mouth was open and round and trembling and that he was crying like a child. He screamed at her, and it was almost funny, because she could not hear him, but his lips formed the words, "The wheat! The wheat!" She could not think of the wheat now. She could not think at all. She had only one sense, and that was hearing, for her whole being was filled with that blatant, ear-splitting cacophony. No, she could not think about the wheat now. If they lived through it, if the roof did not fall in, that would be enough.³

From balls of ice to fiery holocausts, Montana land and weather form part of the margins that make life here such a dichotomy. In the introduction to H.T. Gisborne's "A Forest Fire Explosion," Howard wrote: This story "describes the natural counterpart of the man-made atomic bomb."⁴ The author was a veteran Forest Service official who described the 90,000-acre Half-Moon fire that ran along Glacier National

³Ibid., 90.
⁴Ibid., 94.
⁵Ibid., 99.
Park in the summer of August 1929:

Such a spectacle, even as it enlarged one's heart enough to interfere with normal breathing, made us wish for the presence of others to enjoy the thrill...[of] the soft and apparently slowly boiling smoke column....For half a minute the flames leaped hundreds of feet above the rocky ridge top, followed by billows of dull, funeral smoke as a mountaineer's paradise became a Hell's Half Section.\(^1\)

The tragedy of the fire, for the writer, was what it did to the people who lived in its path:

...Homesteads, ranches, and small sawmills were reduced, not to heaps of ashes, but to mere traces of light and dark ashes, small patches of fused china and glassware, twisted metal bedsteads, bent drive shafts, and cracked engines and saws. Several families lost all that they had struggled throughout life to acquire. The region lost the soft green forest that made it beautiful, and that supplied the materials and the chance for labor which made life possible.\(^1\)

Howard ended his section on land, not with violence, but with reverence. "My Country," by Arapooish, Chief of the Crows, talks about the peace, gentleness and sustenance the land provides:

The Crow country is a good country. The Great Spirit has put it exactly in the right place....It has snowy mountains and sunny plains, all kinds of climates and good things for every season. When the summer heats scorch the prairies, you can draw up under the mountains, where the air is sweet and cool, the grass fresh, and the bright streams come tumbling out of the snowbanks. There you can hunt the elk, the deer and the antelope when their skins are fit for dressing; there you will find plenty

\(^1\)Ibid., 102.

\(^1\)Ibid., 99.
of white bears [grizzlies] and mountain sheep.\textsuperscript{12}

The reverence the Indian held for the land is comparable to the reverence Howard held for the Indian. He includes, throughout the anthology, a number of beautiful passages that describe Indians as a people with dignity, pride, strength and virtue. One of the most moving is in the "Spirit" section of \textit{Montana Margins} where Howard limelighted part of Frank B. Linderman's life of Plenty-Coups, taken from \textit{American: The Life Story of a Great Indian}. The selection explained a vigil Plenty-Coups endured, and what he learned. Wrote Howard about the Indian's lesson: "The revelation was ethical and philosophical rather than purely religious."\textsuperscript{13} Plenty-Coups explained to Linderman about his sorrow at the death of his brother, and how that sorrow led to the vigil and self-knowledge:

"When I wakened, I was perspiring. Looking into the early morning sky that was growing light in the north, I went over it all in my mind. I saw and understood that whatever I accomplished must be by my own efforts, that I must myself do the things I wished to do. And I knew I could accomplish them if I used the powers that Ah-badt-dadt-deah had given me. I had a will and I would use it, make it work for me, as the Dwarf-chief had advised. I became very happy, lying there looking up into the sky. My heart began to sing like a bird, and I went back to the village, needing no man to tell me the meaning of my dream. I took a sweat-bath and rested in my father's lodge. I knew myself now."\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., 109.

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., 489.

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., 495.
One of Howard's favorite pieces of literature was the speech by Chief Joseph, of the Nez Perce, "I Will Fight No More." Howard quoted it in all three of his books: Montana High, Wide and Handsome, Strange Empire and Montana Margins. "This is one of the great speeches in the history of the West," Howard wrote in the Montana Margins section on War. Joseph, leading his people on a circuitous path of flight from the U.S. army, stopped just short of the Canadian border—and freedom. In the introduction to the piece Howard wrote:

Probably no surrender was ever given in terms more simple and more moving: note the tangibility of the images of speech—blankets, heart, children, sun; note the reiteration of the elemental factors of defeat—fatigue, cold, hunger, death. Joseph does not say, 'I am discouraged'; he says, 'My heart is sick.' He does not say, 'We yield to superior force and guarantee to keep the peace'; he says 'From where the sun now stands, I will fight no more, forever.'

Howard's admiration and concern for the Indian is shown in his "Industry" section with "The Last Piskan" by James Willard Schultz and Jessie Louise Donaldson. The selection comes from their collaboration on The Sun God's Children. Although the authenticity of work has since come into question, Howard wrote:

An extract from the book is given here, describing the change—spurred by white greed—of the Blackfeet economy from communal industry as

15Ibid., 48.
16Ibid., 48.
Howard's admiration for the traditional ways of the Indians stemmed in large part from the communal nature of their lifestyle. *Montana Margins* is sprinkled with pieces that celebrate the joy and duties of community life. "The Dance" by D'Arcy McNickle, is one example. The dance, or pow wow as Indians of today would call it, is on the Flathead Indian Reservation. There was sadness because it was mostly the old people of the tribe who were dancing, yet their dancing brought them great joy and sustained tradition:

As Archilde sat in his mother's tepee he wondered at the expression of peace which had settled over her. From the depths of his own turmoil he looked upon her with searching eyes. At first he had an impulse to tell her what had happened, but when he studied her calm, half-smiling face, he realized that it would not do. Her hands had taken her far back into the past that day and he would not drag her forth again.16

There is more literature on Indians, the land and community in Howard's anthology than there is on industrial workers. J.F.R. Havard's "Night Shift" is one of the few selections about mining. Wrote Howard in its introduction:

*This is a straightforward account of an ordinary night in a mine—'not unusual in any respect.' Yet there is a sense of immanent drama and imminent peril. Note the caution with which the blasts are counted, lest the next shift drill into an unexploded shot—'one of the most frequent causes of mine*

17Ibid., 239.

16Ibid., 391.
disasters; that is the peril. For the drama, see the hope based upon the 'lifter' which 'drilled black,' the dream of a bonanza.19

In explaining to the reader what he included in the anthology, Howard took his cue from the land. He compared this collection to the different grasses that cover Montana's prairies. Some are beautiful, useful and endearing, others are unsightly weeds but still useful. But all together they form the grasslands that are the state. So it was with the anthology. "Much of this book is grass. Some of it is the low, untidy but sturdy stuff which isn't showy, which isn't easily visible from the road—but which makes meat. Some is true buffalo bunch: it is thick and graceful and good."

Some of the writing in the anthology is delicious, some isn't, but was still included simply because it is part of Montana's heritage.

"There is some terrible writing in this book," Howard wrote in the first paragraph of his introduction. Not everyone agreed with Howard's decision to include terrible writing. English professor H.G. Merriam did: "You have been utterly right in not setting up a literary standard for admission of materials into the book....The arrangement which you finally arrived at is satisfactory. Anyone reading the book senses Montana atmosphere and much of Montana's performance," wrote Merriam in a letter dated Dec. 30,

19Ibid., 243.

20Ibid., vii.
A Pennsylvania reviewer, however, did not like Howard’s inclusion of terrible writing: “Such a statement is possibly unfortunate in that it gives the impression that the editor is a bit ashamed of some of his own authors and is walking out on them,” he wrote in January 1947. “Possibly the technique will spread and we shall have the blurbs reading ‘This is an extremely dull novel, but as such it deserves to be read as an excellent picture of Author X’s mental process during the time of writing it.’” Obviously this arrogant reviewer failed to see the historical importance of including “terrible writing” in an anthology.

For the most part, reviewers admired the anthology and Howard’s editing of it, especially his friend, Bernard DeVoto, who wrote in a New York Herald Tribune review in Dec. 22, 1946:

Literature is where you find it and it is also as you find it and good writing in a classroom sense may not have anything to do with it......Howard reprints an account by the first of the white casualties incidental to Chief Joseph’s retreat across Yellowstone Park and a short account of a day on a stage coach, and if these are not the stuff of literature, I do not know what litmus paper to use.23


Howard's celebration of regionalism was applauded by many reviewers including John T. Frederick of the Chicago Sun Book Week.

The production of regional books goes on steadily, attaining new standards. To my mind Montana Margins...is the best of the many regional anthologies recently published....It rests on a firmer and clearer understanding of the full meaning of regionalism than any of its predecessors.24

A reviewer in the New York Sun called the work an "authentic piece of Americana."25 The reviewer was astounded to learn that it "was a labor of love for the author who has renounced royalties."26 The Sun did not know of the behind-the-scenes battle that went on regarding royalties.

The Executive Council of [university] Presidents, which oversaw the Montana Study and thus the publishing of Montana Margins, did not permit any proceeds from Howard's book to go to him because the book was promoted as a non-profit endeavor. Howard said he did not mind if the proceeds went to the Study, but not the university system. That's because Howard felt the university system, by not fully backing the ideas behind the Study nor contributing financially to it, had wronged him. Howard explained his views in a letter to Brownell:


26Ibid.
I am most emphatically unwilling to have the profits of work I have done continue long after I am out of the project, to accrue to individuals or institutions which are hostile to the project objectives and to me personally. [The university] never paid me a nickel, they did contribute, very very slightly, to the cost of typing the manuscript and to my expenses on research trips to Helena....As it is, I have all the legal responsibility and all of the work with none of the success if it should be a success. On the contrary, such rewards will go to the educational or quasi-educational undertakings of which I don’t know or don’t approve, administered by people I don’t like or who don’t like me.27

Howard had financial problems which led to his leaving the Study after two years. Howard explained his case in a letter to Brownell:

It was clearly understood when I joined the project, of course, that I should pay my own expenses from and to Great Falls and my living expenses in Missoula. I assented to this because of my eagerness to get into this work, nor do I regret it at all. However, rightly or wrongly, I did feel somewhat abused and probably began to scan my own economic set-up more skeptically when the project paid Bert’s [Hansen, the dramatist] expenses to and from his home, his living expenses in the Bitter Root and at least a part of his expenses on a couple out-of-state trips, though I was being paid only $1,800 a year for project work, I had never had such assistance, and in fact, went in the hole considerably on the out-of-state trip I made when the project was set up.....This undoubtedly sounds like juvenile jealousy, but I hope it isn’t....it is purely a matter of economics.28

In a March 1946 letter to Brownell, Howard wrote, I


"have lived almost entirely upon my other income, most of which came from royalties" from Montana; High, Wide and Handsome. In a July 1946 letter to UM Chancellor, Howard wrote, "I do want to make it clear that I have consistently lost money on my project travel at the official rate allowed me." 30

Nevertheless, the State Board of Education ultimately decided to publish the anthology on a non-royalty basis; any proceeds would go to the Montana University system. Yale University Press, sat quietly on the sidelines during the battle between Howard and the university, then followed the university's instructions in publishing the book. To the end, though, Howard disagreed with the board's decision, as he explained in a letter to Brownell:

I do not feel that it is necessary or equitable, that I should relinquish all legal and moral rights to the book and turn its proceeds over to the state of Montana unconditionally. Others in the educational institutions whose positions as employees of the State is much more clear-cut than mine have published books into which have gone time or research materials acquired 'on-the-job'; I think it would establish a dangerous precedent if the state were to assert an unqualified right to all proceeds of such work. 31


Despite the contentiousness between Howard and the state, this book meant a great deal to him. It proved his belief that the cultural resources of his state were substantial. Perhaps the proof of how important this book was to Howard was the frequency with which he quoted its title, which was inspired from a line by Thoreau who wrote, "I love a broad margin to my life."32 In speeches, writings and conversation, Howard said he loved Montana because it gave him room to "swing his arms."

In Montana Margins, Howard wrote that his state allowed its people to appreciate "space and freedom, sun and clean air, the cold majesty of the mountains and the loneliness of the plains, the gaiety of a country dance, [and] the easy friendliness of the people. These are the margins around the sometimes fretful business of earning a living."33

32 Howard, Montana Margins, ix.

33 Ibid.
Chapter X

Crusader for the Indian

Howard's views about the Indians of North America were best articulated in *Strange Empire*, but his views developed for years leading up to that final book. Howard was outraged by the way whites treated Indians. He admired the way Indians lived in harmony with the natural world—although some critics say Howard romanticized the Indian in this regard. The common thread that runs through all his writings on Indians is his admiration for their reverence toward community.

Howard's writings on Indians include: a 1929 feature in the *Great Falls Tribune* about Indian religions, a 1935 article destined for the *Nation* about Indian self-determination, a 1941 article in the *Leader* on the landless Indians of Great Falls, a chapter in *Montana: High, Wide and Handsome*, a 1944 newspaper article and pamphlet on Indian education and two remarkable short stories that appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Collier's* in 1945 and 1948 respectively.

At the age of 23, Howard, who wrote under the byline, Kinsey Howard, told Tribune readers about a 12-volume work comparing beliefs and cultures of primitive tribes around the world. *Golden Bough*, by Sir James G. Frazer, is a classic work which offered people a new way of thinking about primitive people. In Howard's article, "Indian Religions Similar to Those of Other Primitive Tribes," the young writer told of
efforts to define Indian traditional belief before it disappeared under influences of the Christian religion and modern civilization. "Among the Crows superstition still has a firm hold, principally among the elders; the old dances are becoming commercialized and the medicine man is giving way to the doctor,"1 Howard explained in outlining the degree of tradition still being followed on each Montana reservation. Howard lamented the increasing loss of culture. The Indian and "his secretive character have made him chary of confidences, particularly in recent years since he has heard his beliefs become the scorn among the youths of his own tribe."2 The old medicine men are dying, he wrote, "and none are rising to take their place."3

Howard had not yet articulated his appreciation for community in this piece but he already had learned to admire Indian culture—that was a strong first step. Howard was not an adamant crusader for the Indian cause in this article, either. He was still perfecting his writing skills; the conservative nature of the Great Falls Tribune would not have allowed crusading anyway.

Howard continued his study of Indian culture. Six years later, in 1935—barely a year after the Indian Re-organization

1 Joseph Kinsey Howard, "Indian Religions Similar to Those of Other Primitive Tribes," Great Falls Leader, Vol. LIV, 19 September 1929.

2Ibid.

3Ibid.
Act passed Congress—Howard submitted a piece to the liberal magazine, the *Nation*. The work shows the growing attention Howard gave to community—and an advanced form of community: socialism. "Socialism in Our Time"—the American Indian," is the work of one crusader, Howard, (still writing under the byline Kinsey Howard) profiling the activism of another crusader, John Collier, head of the Indian Service. Collier was working as fast as possible to implement the Indian Re-organization Act which allowed tribes to vote on their own form of self-government instead of being governed by U.S. policy. Wrote Howard:

The Indian Service is trying to create a co-operative state overnight not necessarily because it believes in socialism, but because the original Indian economy was communal and co-operative. In restoring it Collier hopes to recompense the Indian for more than a hundred years of incredible injustice, and to smash forever the brutal army of greedy white parasites who have fed upon the race, sapping its vitality, its culture and its hope.¹

In this article, Howard was crusading as much for the Indian and socialism as he was crusading against whites and capitalism. He used those words in characterizing the voting that took place among the tribes: "For the co-operative commonwealth—174 tribes....For rugged individualism—73 tribes....Totals: Socialism 38,762, capitalism 23,794."² Many non-Indians had lobbied heavily against the self-determination


²Ibid.
the Indian Re-organization Act could provide. Howard quoted New York congressman Alfred F. Beiter who said: "They (the Indians) should be encouraged to enter industrial pursuits and not compelled to reside on reservations which in the past have been reserved for barbarism." Howard's response was: "Only appalling ignorance of Indian psychology could explain this betraying sentence."

Howard tried to explain Indian psychology and culture to readers over the years in his writings. In January 1945, while he was working on the Montana Study, he published an article on Indian Education in the Montana Parade section of the Great Falls Tribune. It was later re-printed and distributed throughout many western reservations. The article, "Montana Reservation Schools Relate Pupil Instruction to Environment," explained the importance of community for Indians. Howard began by saying that Indian students, like white students, accept knowledge that relates to their environment. Therefore, the school experience must be made significant in order for students to learn. He gave examples of how this philosophy of education had already been implemented in some reservation schools: students drew a mural which gave the history of their tribes; others made a cutout book

"Ibid.

"Ibid.

illustrating the construction of their new school building; still others got vocational training in cattle management. "Race has nothing to do with" education, Howard quoted one reservation teacher as saying. "Indian children are not more stupid than white children...WHEN THE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN MADE SIGNIFICANT TO THEM."

The main message in this article was to point out the qualities of traditional Indian life that the non-Indian culture would do well to adopt. The central theme was the importance of community in the Indian's life. Howard, of course, was deeply involved in the Montana Study when this article came out and advancing "community" was his main job.

The community's role in the Indian education process was much more important than it is in the training of white children, which has become more and more an institutional responsibility....The Indian child throughout the educational period remained in contact with people he knew....His associations were...with uncles, aunts and grandparents, people who were objective in their approach, who refrained from coddling him, and who could require of him those moral and physical accomplishments expected by the group without emotional conflict with him. ¹⁰

In his article, Howard lamented that this traditional way of educating Indian youngsters was melting away fast: "True folk education...of Indian children in the culture and tradition of their own people...is not a general institutional policy even though preservation of the tribal culture is a long-term

¹⁰Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.
objective of the office of Indian affairs."

For a century, Howard wrote, Indians fought to save their culture from government, missionaries and white settlers. They would lose the battle, he said, if preservation wasn’t taught in Indian schools. Howard listed the contributions of Indian culture to the American experience:

...the sense of responsibility to the whole community, [is] developed through centuries of tribal education. There is the sense of kinship with nature and animal life; the love of color, pattern or design, and rhythm, which bears fruit in remarkable progress in the arts; there is intellectual curiosity which makes teaching a gratifying, if sometimes exhausting, experience; and there is enthusiasm for group activity—many of the Indian children’s finest literary and artistic productions are cooperative achievements.

The white culture though, Howard said, often refused to acknowledge the good of the Indian culture. It angered Howard that the people of his own community in Great Falls were the worst offenders. He described, in this same article, the deplorable living conditions of the landless Indians, many of them Metis, living on Hill 57 near Great Falls, capital of Cascade County:

Cleanliness and health can hardly be expected when water must be hauled by the Indians in barrels on wagons or auto trailers one or two miles....There is no continuous over-all welfare program, nor has any apparently ever been considered by Cascade county, though landless and impoverished Indians have lived in the vicinity for 50 years.

11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
Howard also chastised his community about Hill 57 in a Leader column titled "About Our Town." He began by describing the good in the Indian psyche:

They knew no nationality other than that of the land upon which they had lived. Their patriotism was a regional thing, and poetic; they sang of mountains, and clouds scudding across their peaks; of foaming rivers of the vast arch of sky over infinite plains. Their fathers and mothers had been buried in this soil; they respected it, loved it, and above all, understood it....the name? No, they were not victims of Hitler’s aggression; they were not Poles or Czechs, Dutch or French. The great power was the Dominion of Canada and these people were the ‘breeds,’ in Canada they are known more considerately as the Metis....Today in Great Falls their descendants haul their water in barrels to their ramshackle huts on Hill 57; they lie ill and gasping for breath in one-room shacks while blistering Montana sun sears the roof overhead; the children die of malnutrition and dysentery while flies crawl over their faces.\footnote{Joseph Kinsey Howard, "Our Town," Great Falls Leader, 29 August 1941.}

Howard also criticized the federal government for not only failing to live up to its treaty obligations by caring for the Indians but trying to dissolve the reservations. The Indian community, he believed, should be preserved and revered. In his article on the value of community in traditional Indian education he wrote:

The argument that Indians must now wholly abandon their own tradition and ‘become white’ or perish reached its peak in a recent report of a senate subcommittee of which Montana Sen. B. K. Wheeler was one signer. This amazing report proposed ‘liquidation’ of the Indian bureau and abandonment of the government’s responsibility by turning the Indians’ individual lands and their $69,000,000 individual and tribal trust funds back to them to do with as they willed. It is reasonable to assume that
greedy white land seekers and traders would soon acquire the bulk of the Indian's assets and the tribesmen would be subjected to the precarious mercies of public relief, their plight made worse by race prejudice which inevitably would arise if white unemployed were also in need of help.15

The lack of respect the dominant white culture exhibited towards the Native American culture took many forms, according to Howard. For example: pishkun sites were being destroyed needlessly. Pishkun sites were areas where Indians killed buffalo by driving them off steep cliffs. Indians ate and dried the meat and skins at the bottom of the cliffs. Archaeologists consider such sites extremely valuable. These sites, some on state lands, were being mined by fertilizer companies. Howard complained to the chancellor of the Montana University system:

Apparently the state college made no effort to dissuade him [the fertilizer company owner] from the phosphate mining project and made no effort to have operations observed by scientists who could have photographed at least and reported upon relics in situ, which is the only way they are of any scientific value. This seems to me a rather notable omission by an education institution.16

Howard's concern for archeological sites and his reverence for the Indian culture blinded him to one environmentally unethical practice of the Indian. The pishkun sites that he was trying so passionately to save were examples

15Howard, "Montana Reservation Schools Relate Pupil Instruction to Environment."

of great waste on the part of the Indian. According to University of Montana anthropologist Carling Malouf, the Indians killed as many bison as they possibly could and used only what they could eat or preserve. They were remarkably wasteful, he said, but there were so few Indians that the effect of their wasteful practices was not noticeable. But according to Howard's interpretation of history "the Indian hates waste....He wastes almost nothing." In Montana: High, Wide and Handsome, Howard did not address the waste the Indians created in their buffalo runs. Instead he criticized the white man's wasteful habits: "[The Indian] has learned that the more a white man sees, the more he seizes--and that what the white man takes he uses briefly and wantonly and casts aside." Howard went on, in this chapter titled "Fifteen Salads," to describe how the Indians used the wild plants of the plains, for food, teas, herbs, spices, medicines, even abortives.

In Howard's non-fiction writing he idealized two Indian traits: virtue and attention to community. He did this in two short stories: "A Cree Could Say Goodbye" published in Collier's in 1948 and "Sun Dance" published in the Saturday

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18 Howard, High, Wide and Handsome, 15-16.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., 15-20
"Sun Dance" tells the story of a young Indian girl, Mary, who for the last three years had lived with her father on the Blackfeet reservation waiting for her husband who was fighting for the United States, probably in World War II, to return home to her. Mary receives a telegram, telling her that her husband has been seriously injured. The story tells of Mary's travels to other reservations, then back to her own, in search of elders who would allow her to do the sun dance to ensure her husband's recovery and safe return. The sun dance is a rigorous tradition that requires fasting and self-induced pain. The tribes allow only the most virtuous members, and seldom women, to partake. Mary succeeds in her quest, and at the story's end, she receives a telegram from her husband telling her he is on the way home—with a bum leg.

"Sun Dance" is a story about virtue. Note this conversation between Mary and her father:

"Do you know that Medicine-Lodge Woman must be above reproach, a sacred woman? Almost like a Sister of the church—though she can be a married woman and a Sister cannot—but she must always have clung to one husband. 'I am virtuous!' 'Do not interrupt! You are a foolish young woman: you have not had time to prove your virtue!'"

The story is also about the intermingling of white and Indian cultures. Note these examples:

"Go now to the priest. Light a candle," Mary's father, Runs Swiftly, tells his daughter. Mary obeys, but then she decides to borrow her father's horse, ride to the Canadian Indian reserves and seek help from traditional Indian religious leaders.

Mary's husband is fighting in a war that has nothing to do with her Blackfeet tribe, yet she is using traditional Blackfeet rituals to secure his safe return.

Throughout the story Mary is taken care of, fed, nurtured, and loved by a family of relatives that extends for more than 300 miles north. This reverence for family and community is matched by reverence for tribal tradition. Ella Deloria, an Indian, praised Howard in a letter she sent to the Saturday Evening Post.

"I want to thank you for publishing the story 'The Sun Dance' a few weeks ago. I have special reason for being grateful; because I am a Dakota, and am very much concerned about the fate of all Indians. So much is published that is inaccurate and unfair, or, inaccurate and over sentimental, that I almost dread to read articles about Indians. The writer of that story knows Indians and his data regarding ceremonials is exceptional. I am indebted to him on behalf of my people for his presentation, racially so true and socially so needed."

The same could be said for Howard's sensitive but riveting short story, "A Cree Could Say Good-by." The

22 Ibid.

narrator is a Metis—French and Cree. He earned his living as a translator and is telling his story to an unnamed listener who asks him to reveal his most exciting experience. The narrator tells of a full-blood Cree named Almighty Voice who kills a cow so his ailing wife will have meat. According to Indian custom he shares the meat with all members of the clan. The narrator in his short story says:

It is not easy for white men to understand this—-but had the sick woman alone eaten the fresh meat she could not have drawn sufficient strength from it to heal her. The need of all the others had entered into her body and she alone could not satisfy that need. There was, you see, the body of the woman Bright Day, and there was the body of the band; the woman was only a part of the band as this finger is part of my hand. Had she died, all would have died a little; to give her strength to live, all must eat. Had her husband saved all that meat for Bright Day she would surely have died. Anyway, such things were not done.24

When the Canadian Mounted Police find out that Almighty Voice has killed a cow, they come and try to take him to jail. Eventually he ends up killing a Mountie and escapes. For a year and a half the Mounties search for him. He is right under their noses, hidden by the people of the tribe with whom he shared the meat. The Mounties eventually discover him in a box canyon. They try to capture him. They bring in troops and a cannon. The Indians see what is happening and bring family and drums and sit on a nearby hilltop, singing and chanting. They know Almighty Voice will

die. The community is helping him say good-by with pride.

Howard’s narrator says:

Now her son must die, and die as becomes a brave man, a man of honor....It is good to die bravely, and it is not difficult, for a Cree. This is the death song of Kichemanitoway, whose name tells that in his vigil he heard the Voice of God—though the white men looked upon him as a common servant upon whom they might vent their meanness, one like themselves without pride! This is the death song of Almighty Voice. It is a strong song, well made for one bearing such a name, and sung to his mother and his wife, Bright Day, most beautiful woman among all the Cree! Never will this song be forgotten by naheyawak, our people.

The Mounties never succeed in killing Almighty Voice.

After killing a number of Mounties, Almighty Voice kills himself, so his body will not be mutilated by a cannon.

After "A Cree Could Say Good-by" was published, Paul Grieder of the Montana Institute of Arts and Sciences wrote Howard, “you surely got into the innards of pale face and redskin alike—and did it without sloshing over into sentimentality.”

Howard believed that if people knew more about the virtues of Indians it would lessen the racial prejudice evident in social life and government programs. As he explained in his piece on Indian education: “Dignity and respect—they are today as they have always been, the primary goals of

\(^{25}\) Ibid.

education in the Indian way."27.

27 Howard, "Montana Reservation Schools Relate Pupil Instruction to Environment."
Minneapolis Star reporter Jay Edgerton remembered a conversation Howard had with fellow newspaper men in a New York City hotel room in 1949:

There's no such thing as a pure race, Joe asserted, looking a bit belligerently, as if for argument. We're all half-breeds, he continued. We're half-breeds that made the grade--half-breeds who built a successful empire. My book is about half-breeds who didn't, half-breeds who had a dream of an empire that failed.1

Howard's last book, Strange Empire: A Narrative of the Northwest, was published posthumously in 1952. It's the story of the Metis rebellions on the Canadian frontier and their flight to Montana. He wrote it as a Guggenheim Fellow from 1947 through 1951. Howard's reverence for the Indian and for the land is shown in vibrant sketches of Indian culture and descriptions of the role of the land in Indian spiritual, political and economic life.

Strange Empire is a story of transition. It tells readers of a time and place in history that many are unfamiliar with. The events take place between 1860 to 1900 during the drama of U.S. and Canadian expansion and the struggle of a new race of people--the Metis. These half-breeds of French and Indian ancestors fought the Canadians twice, in 1869-70 and 1885. Both times they wanted to elect their own

1 Jay Edgerton, "Everyone Mourns 'Mr. Montana,'" Minneapolis Star, 4-9 October 1951.
representatives to Canadian government and keep their land claims. Both times they failed.

The leader of these rebellions was the mystic Louis Riel—a Metis possessed by both Catholic and traditional Indian spirits. Some say Riel was insane. The Canadians hanged him for treason. Howard wrote his publishers in 1943:

Louis Riel led the last rebellion on this continent against modern mechanized civilization and his 120-150 breeds did stand off a Canadian army for four days after licking the Mounties and Canadian troops in four previous battles. He was a religious mystic, trained for the priesthood, and one of the most fascinating characters I ever heard of—about one eighth or sixteenth Indian blood. For a while, after fleeing Canada when he staged his first rebellion in 1870, he taught school at a mission 25 miles from here. Veterans of his campaign are still living—that’s the 1885 campaign, of course—in this vicinity. He was licked by an American engineer of Jim Hill who pushed through the C.P.R. railroad before anybody believed it could be done; and by the Gatling gun—the first use of a machine gun on this continent. It was handled by a glorified Connecticut salesman named Lieutenant Howard, U.S. army, and no kin of mine, I hope. Principal cause of the two wars was the Canadians’ insistence on surveying the breeds’ lands rectangularly, American style, instead of on water fronts, French style: the breeds were right, as we found out in drought years.2

From early on Howard was subconsciously preparing to write Strange Empire. In May 1945 letter Howard explained the book’s early birth to his agent:

I have to write this book—have had to since I first heard of this story when I lived in Canada (aged 5-13) and I’ll write it whether anybody prints it or not. I did the Montana book as an obligation because it was sold in advance; but all the time I

was doing it I wanted to get at this other; still do and haven’t yet really had the time.  

In the introduction to *Strange Empire* Howard reveals an early childhood incident that explains his interest in and sympathy for the Metis. "This book was conceived more than thirty years ago in the ‘Cops and Robbers’ play of a group of boys on the prairie of Western Canada. It was then that I first learned of the incidents which are the bare bones of this narrative." The boys were acting out the war between the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (the Mounties) and the Metis. Howard was the only one of the group who possessed a Mountie uniform. The boys chose up sides. Wrote Howard in the book’s introduction:

The truth which I never dared to reveal, was that in this contest I was ashamed of the red coat; I was willing (worse, I was even eager) to adopt the role of traitor. No one else wanted to assume, even in play, the part of a member of the minority. That was the side that couldn’t ever win, made up of people who—shamefully, somehow—weren’t even white.

Howard continued: "I grew up; I met and lived among the ‘primitives’ who had lost the war; I discovered that they had a culture too, and that the whites had not been quite as

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5Ibid., 13.
Howard began doing research years before he got the Guggenheim, which permitted him to begin writing the book in 1947. The archives contain a letter written in 1939 that apparently is a response to Howard's request about information on living relatives of Louis Riel. Research was difficult because much of the material he needed was scattered throughout Canada and the United States. Some of it was written in French. Howard learned to read French in order to better research the book.

Howard left no stone unturned doing his research. Among his sources were: a librarian at the Montana Historical Society who told him about Riel's days in Montana; Canadian writer Olive Knox who explained Riel's psychological state when he was hanged; a Canadian archivist who tracked Riel's movements in and out of various mental institutions; a researcher in Glasgow, Montana, who told of the revenge sought by Riel's hangman; and from the Bibliothèque du Parlement, in Ottawa, Howard tried to get Riel's diary.

Z. Hamilton, secretary of the Saskatchewan Historical Society, wrote Howard that "Queen Victoria had attempted to save the unhappy rebel leader (Riel) from the scaffold....the British government was apparently afraid to veto the execution for fear of being accused of unwarranted


*Cushman, interview."
interference with Canadian affairs." Hamilton went on to encourage Howard: "No one in Canada has ever been able to deal in a fair and impartial manner with the life of this tragic and pathetic figure. The field is open and it is all yours."

While Howard was seeking material for his book from archivists and librarians, publishers in New York clamored and competed to sign a contract with him. The success of Montana: High, Wide and Handsome, which went into eight printings in three years, was the reason for the intense interest in Howard. John Woodburn of Harcourt, Brace and Co. wrote Howard in 1946: "We would be very much interested in seeing it as soon as it is available." Helen Taylor from William Sloane Associates, wrote that Sloane was "very much interested in that book." Stanley Salmen, from the Atlantic Monthly Press, wrote that "for some years I have been told to get after that man Howard, in Great Falls, for a book." Josh Fischer of Harper and Brothers wrote, "I


7Ibid.


hardly need to tell you that we should be very eager to have a chance to see the manuscript."^{13} But none of these won Howard over. Helen King, editor of William Morrow & Co., did, mainly because Morrow offered Howard the best contract, which included a $2,500 advance and 15 percent on all copies sold in the regular trade edition.\^{14} When Howard signed the contract in June 1948, King wrote to Howard's agent, "Getting that author is one of the most exciting things that has ever happened and ever since your call yesterday the whole force has been walking on air."^{15} King extended her appreciation to Howard as well. "If you could have heard the shouts of joy that went up the afternoon that Bernice [Howard's agent] telephoned, or maybe you did, for they were loud enough to travel that far."^{16} The contract called for a delivery date of December 1949. But the book took Howard another year and a half. Throughout the entire time King badgered Howard mercilessly to "get that damn book finished."

It's important to stop for a moment and look at all the other activities going on in Howard's life at this time.


^{15}Ibid.

Howard was under a lot of stress. His continued success meant that he was always on call to give speeches, lectures and attend writing conferences. Always an advocate of Montana writers, he took over directing the annual writers' conference at the University of Montana that Professor Merriam had begun. These "Round-ups" brought in prestigious people, such as A. B. Guthrie, Jr., and Bernard DeVoto. Howard threw himself into putting on these conferences. His friends could see the strain it put on him. Howard also taught part-time at the University's journalism school during the summer of 1951. National magazines were requesting articles from him. He was involved in the Montana Institute of the Arts. He smoked cigarettes, drank a "respectable" amount, had a steady diet of steak marbled with cholesterol-laden fat. He also took "No-Doz" and sleeping pills and had been taking this combination of drugs since the Montana Study, according to his friend and colleague, Pat Brennan Taylor. He had the genetic disposition, inherited from his father, for heart trouble. Add to this a constant stream of letters and notes of "encouragement" from Helen King:

"It's a good thing you have a good excuse about the first third of that manuscript. All right then, another two or three weeks. Seriously, I'm very sorry to hear that you have been ill, and I hope you're much better now." [According

17Letter from Helen King to Joseph Kinsey Howard 20 April 1949, Joseph Kinsey Howard Papers, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena.]
to Pat Taylor, Howard had had a heart attack and recovered, but didn’t tell anyone, for fear of worrying his mother.

"Haven’t you recovered yet? Did you ever complete part one? Do we get to see it? Going to meet your deadline in December? You'd better."\(^{1}\)

"Now see here. You seem to be doing an awful lot of lecturing, articles and now work again, for the Rockefeller Foundation. How does that affect a certain deadline I could mention? December ’49 I believe."\(^{1}\)

"That is perfectly superb writing by a man who is obviously enchanted with his subject....Can we plan on December for the completed manuscript?"\(^{2}\)

"You have exactly three months and twenty days before May 1—the deadline for an illustrated book of non-fiction to be published in the fall of 1950...and we would like to publish this book in the fall of 1950."\(^{3}\)

"What can I say except that I too am sorry....We'll keep our fingers crossed and hope that the book will make the fall...

\(^{1}\)Letter from Helen King to Joseph Kinsey Howard, 30 June 1949, Joseph Kinsey Howard Papers, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena.


\(^{3}\)Letter from Helen King to Joseph Kinsey Howard, 14 September 1949, Joseph Kinsey Howard Papers, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena.

\(^{4}\)Letter from Helen King to Joseph Kinsey Howard, 10 January 1950, Joseph Kinsey Howard Papers, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena.
list of '51—but don't let that date give you the impression that you'll have a leisurely year in which to work."22

"I grieve there is so much work to be done."23

"By now the seminars must be drawing to a close and that means, I trust, that your thoughts are returning to [Strange Empire]."24

"And when, oh my Lord, may we expect the manuscript?"25

"You probably realize that we aren't going to be able to get this book out for fall, but I certainly trust we shall make a January date."26

The combination of King's badgering, a hectic lifestyle, and heredity led Howard to an early death. Perhaps knowing the danger but not caring—because he was so driven by the urgency to do this book—Howard continued his research and writing.


Howard had originally planned to write the story of the Metis as a work of fiction. But after completing 60,000 words, he changed his mind. He told Mildred Walker Schemm: "I'm not a novelist!" Howard did use fiction writing techniques in the book: there is lengthy character development and rising tension in the story. Howard originally had a different title for his book: "Falcon's Song," which was the Metis anthem. Wrote Howard in *Strange Empire*:

> It was not a very good song: the images were crude and the sentiment not at all elevating; it was a hymn of hate and thus like some other national anthems. But it was unique in this: it was not written down. Pierre Falcon himself could not write and his song was perhaps the only national hymn in history which was transmitted exclusively by singing it.  

Helen King loved the original title, and told Howard not to change it. The archives are not clear as to why Howard decided to change the title. He may have thought another book would come out with that title, although a search of published books in those years does not show one. Howard did use "Falcon Song" as the title for the first section of his book but chose *Strange Empire*, as his new title, from the poem *Western Star* by Stephen Vincent Benet.

> That sun-dance has been blotted from the map,  
> Call as you will, those dancers will not come.

27 interview, Schemm.

To tear their breasts upon the bloody strap,
Mute-visaged, to the passion of a drum,
For some strange empire, nor the painted ghosts
Speak from the smoke and summon up the hosts.\(^2\)

Two themes that occurred in much of Howard's writings throughout his life are found in *Strange Empire* as well: sympathy for the 'underdog' and reverence for the land.

The Metis, estimated to have a population of about 30,000 "after the conquest,"\(^3\) were fighting for their land.

"The prize of victory was familiar: the grass and the water and the cardboard cut-out peaks against the wide Western horizon where the snow lay all year, whence came the water,"\(^4\) wrote Howard in *Strange Empire*. But history,

Howard continued, is not patient with intangibles:

The mystic meaning of a shadow pattern on a sacred butte, or that of the order of wild geese in flight...the roar of the black wind, the Plains chinook, which is a welcome sound; or the silence of the white cold, which is terrible.\(^5\)

This land, which could be both desolate and lovely was also the route from Canada's eastern capital to its wealth of natural resources on the west coast. The Canadians needed this land as a thoroughfare for their railroad. If the culture

\(^2\)Howard, *Strange Empire*.

\(^3\)Ibid, 40.

\(^4\)Ibid., 12.

\(^5\)Ibid., 18.
of the Metis had to be sacrificed to achieve it—too bad.

South of the 49th parallel in the United States, the whites slaughtered the Indian's main food source: the buffalo. White traders plied the Indian and his cousin, the Metis, with whiskey and offered them blankets tainted with small pox.

These incidents made the Indians and Metis, underdogs.

Howard had always revered the underdog, whether it was the poorly paid laborer, or downtrodden Indian. His reverence for the Metis—the supreme underdog—is most apparent in this book.

The Metis, who lived and worked in the broad Red River Valley, were, according to Howard, crucial for the economical development of the Northern Great Plains. Wrote Howard in Strange Empire:

They were the wanderers of the wilderness—the best boatmen, best guides, hunters, trappers and traders......Their knowledge of the country—much of it instinctive and thus inexplicable to white men—made them indispensable in development of the West....The Metis, a new people, were the cultural and economic intermediaries in the 'civilizing' of a continent. Without their help the process would have been much bloodier than it was. They also were the inheritors of the Indians' culture, and with it, the Indians' problems.33

As "inheritors" of the Indian culture, the Metis followed the Indian lifestyle. Until the white buffalo hunters killed off the herds by the late 1800s, the Metis and the Indian survived mostly on the buffalo. Howard excelled at describing Indian and Metis lifestyles. His profiles of Indian culture make the

33 Ibid., 40.
book remarkable and memorable. Here are some brief quotes from a much longer section on buffalo hunting in Strange Empire:

An Indian scout with his ear to a gopher hole could detect a moving herd of buffalo thirty miles away. The trained buffalo horse, regarded by frontiersmen as the most intelligent animal that ever lived on the Plains, was high-strung, ‘spooky,’ and impossible to hold once the killing run started; he knew his own job and expected his rider to take care of himself. If the hunter was scraped off onto the head of a bull, as frequently happened, the animal would toss and retoss him in the air, without slackening its pace, until the mangled body would no longer catch on the horns. The gun was brought down swiftly, aimed at a point behind and below the left shoulder where the bullet would penetrate to the heart. After the run—a mile or two—the hunter returned along his row, identifying animals he had shot by characteristic features of the carcasses or of the wounds. The Indian hunt was a breath-taking spectacle, full of color and sound and furious movement.

Such buffalo hunting required freedom of movement, but as Howard wrote: "Freedom of movement is incompatible with private ownership of land." Howard sympathized with the Indian view which could not reconcile itself with the notion that land should be bought and sold. In this heart-wrenching description, Howard laid out what the whites had done to the Metis:

The whites had taken the land, subtly robbed him of his age-old skills, weakened him with alcohol and disease and new, less nourishing foods, and destroyed his self-respect. The face of Nature had

34 Ibid., 296-9.
35 Ibid., 288.
36 Ibid., 298.
been transformed, the balance of Nature had been upset; by these he had lived. The white man had knifed the mother in the breast and the spirit had fled from the child.37

The protagonist in Strange Empire, Louis Riel, was the grandson of a once-great Metis leader. His mother was white. Howard wrote that Riel's mother, "was sometimes frightened to see how deeply moved Louis could be by his own words. Truly he was possessed of a spirit, and it went without saying that it was the spirit of God."38

Riel's mysticism helped make him a spiritual leader; he was also a symbol, for Howard, of the Metis race. Howard wrote:

...his thinking epitomized the struggle which went on constantly within him and in the souls of his people. He sought to be half medicine man, half Christian mystic, turning to God without ever wholly losing sight of Manito [the Indian God]. He failed--but not in the worshipful eyes of the Metis.39

Unlike most Metis, Riel was only a mediocre horseman; he knew nothing about firearms and could not shoot straight. He did not drink, seldom looked at women; he did not marry until he was forty. Despite Riel's lack of traditional Indian skills, Howard wrote that

...to his colleagues of the council and to the Metis people he was the brain. More than that, he was their voice: the only man they had ever produced who could fashion a philosophy from the crude

37Ibid., 291.
38Ibid., 103.
39Ibid., 319.
materials of their semiprimitive way of life, the only one whose eloquence could become a sort of alchemy, transmuting frontier expedients into eternal human values, shaping standards out of habits. The forlorn people, facing the loss of land and livelihood, learned from him that the old ways were good and the new ways were evil, that their struggle was significant. Out of that struggle the Metis hero emerged: Louis Riel, symbol and spokesman of the oppressed but gallant minority; revolutionist, leader and lord.\textsuperscript{40}

Howard became a Metis himself, intellectually. This allowed him to get inside Riel’s mind. Here’s one example:

There were times, however, when that courage, energy and decision were hard to come by. Then young Louis wondered why he had so eagerly accepted the responsibility his people had thrust upon him; then he feared and fumbled and wished he could turn back. He had no idea of what lay ahead.\textsuperscript{41}

Howard used the same technique—getting inside the head of a character—with Sitting Bull, the Sioux who led his people in victory against General Custer. Sitting Bull had fled to Canada. Howard wrote the following “conversation” that Sitting Bull had with himself:

Tantanka Yatanka was intelligent, ambitious, and egotistical. He had been annoyed when soldiers and newspapermen carelessly mistranslated his name, but the damage was done now. White men greeted him with vast respect, even awe; they told him he was famous all over the world as the author of the most humiliating defeat ever suffered by United States arms. The battle had been so short that he had not taken it very seriously at the time, but he was soon convinced that his achievement was greater than he had realized. That sort of reputation was worth keeping, Sitting Buffalo decided, even at the cost of being addressed forever afterward by the

\textsuperscript{40}Ibid., 148.

\textsuperscript{41}Ibid., 149.
stupid whites as "Sitting Bull." Much more exasperating was the insistence of Montana frontiersmen and the shamed military that he was only a medicine chief, not a warrior, and therefore could not have been the brain behind the catastrophe on the Little Big Horn on June 25, 1876. The whites never did get anything straight and their confusion in this instance was particularly provoking: a man who starts out in a small way and works his way to the top likes to have his progress acknowledged. He had been a medicine chief, right enough—philosopher and hack story teller for his small band of followers—but that had been a long time ago. He had made the transition to warrior and captain of warriors. That was hard to do. A medicine chief, despite his important function, was not too highly regarded when the chips were down: like intellectuals before and since, he had to prove himself in battle to the satisfaction of his skeptical peers or be told to go mix a few metaphors.42

In April 1951, when Howard finally turned in his manuscript to his editor, Helen King, at William Morrow and Company, her response—and that of her fellow editors—was both enthusiastic and guarded:

There are three weaknesses in Strange Empire that have been immediately apparent to all the readers of the book, but before I cite them, let me say that everyone here who has read it has had the same reaction that I had: that this is a major work by a first-rate craftsman, and we are tremendously proud to be publishing this book.43

King told Howard that the difference between his following the editors' suggestions or not following them would mean the difference between a small respectful audience and a

42Ibid., 273-4.

wide, enthusiastic one.  

The first change the editors wanted was a rewrite of what they said was an overly long introduction: "We think you have written a history of the winning of the Canadian Northwest," King wrote. She wanted him to add in this section the implications of the Riel Rebellions.

Secondly, King and her fellow editors wanted Howard to rewrite the first five chapters of the book. "These pages are relatively unassimilated research, and need reorganization as well as considerable trimming and placing of detail in notes." King wanted Howard to condense his research and offer it in a "digested" manner. "What a sweep there is to your pen when the material flows from you! What we want, quite simply, is an opening to the book which has that sweep."

King's last request was that Howard paint a more intimate picture of Riel. "We don't see Riel in his full stature. We do not know what it was in him that appealed to the people and made them instinctively turn to him as their leader."

Howard responded that he was "dismayed at the amount

\[44\] Ibid.
\[45\] Ibid.
\[46\] Ibid.
\[47\] Ibid.
\[48\] Ibid.
of rewriting called for," and he was concerned about when he could do it because he was busy preparing for the writing conference to be held that summer at the University of Montana in Missoula. About the suggestion that he rewrite the introduction, he agreed it needed slimming down, but he argued that the information was important. He said his book was about more than the winning of the Canadian frontier; it was also about U.S. expansion and the attempted creation of a semi-primitive society in the north.

Howard said he realized he was slow in getting to the point but his was the first book "to tell the origins of the Metis." As to their suggestion that he draw a more intimate portrait of Riel, he argued that he had already used every scrap of evidence he could find, unless he were to wade through some of the letters Riel wrote, in French, which were full of religious exhortations. These letters were in eastern Canada and not easily accessible.

Howard managed to squeeze in rewriting the introduction and the first eight chapters while preparing for the writers' conference. According to this letter written from one of the editors at Morrow, he succeeded: "I think you have done an excellent job of revision on the first eight chapters. It was a pleasure to me to see how it flowed along and how the eye

"Letter from Joseph Kinsey Howard to Helen King, April 1951, Joseph Kinsey Howard Papers, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena."
and the mind passed swiftly from one thing to another."{50}

Historian Bernard DeVoto spent most of August 1951 in Montana, involved with the literary conference Howard was putting on. While in Montana, DeVoto also discussed Strange Empire with his friend. Right after the writers' conference, Howard died of a heart attack.

DeVoto ended up preparing Strange Empire for press after Howard died. He wrote that the script was essentially complete. In DeVoto's preface to Strange Empire he lamented Howard's early death:

American literature at large has no concern with the private pain in which books are forged, and cannot be troubled by the suspicion and contempt with which the West surrounds the practice of letters, so long as fine books come of it. There should be some concern, however, when a distinguished writer dies just as his talent reaches full maturity.{51}

DeVoto said he changed merely a few words in the manuscript before submitting it to the press and made the decision not to add notes: "No one can satisfactorily annotate someone else's book."{52} Also included in the book is a bibliography compiled by Howard's friend Rosalea Fox who was married to the writer Norman A. Fox; both had spent much time with Howard.

{50}Letter from Helen King to Joseph Kinsey Howard, 12 July 1951, Joseph Kinsey Howard Papers, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena.

{51}Howard, Strange Empire, 4.

{52}Ibid., 5.
In the foreword, DeVoto called *Strange Empire* a "brilliant and enlightening book." and notes Howard’s contribution to Indian history: "Most American history has been written as if history were a function solely of white culture—in spite of the fact that until well into the nineteenth century the Indians were one of the principal determinants of historical events." Howard, wrote DeVoto, was always the champion of the exploited; he identified with the defeated; perhaps because he had seen "fearful end products of the original injustices" on present-day Indian reservations. DeVoto admired Howard's ability to get into the psyche of the Metis and Indian: "...here are the structure, the texture, the pattern, the pulse and informing spirit of primitive thought. Here are primitive emotion and primitive dream. *Strange Empire* is unique, the best that anyone has written."

DeVoto and other historians disagreed with some aspects of Howard's historical interpretation. DeVoto believed that because Howard "became one with the Indian," he fooled himself into believing that it would have been possible for the Indians to have secured their own independent nation. Wrote Howard in *Strange Empire*: "Had there been time for them to act upon it there might have been independent, semiprimitive..."
tribal societies in North America such as still exist on other
continents as near neighbors to modern states."\(^{57}\)

Montana historian Richard Roeder agrees with DeVoto.
He says the strength of the American and Canadian
expansionists would never have allowed such a semiprimitive
state, as Howard described, to have become a reality.\(^{58}\)
Other historians say that Howard gave excessively respectful
treatment to Riel's dreams for a Metis nation. Wrote Edmund
Freeman in a tribute to Howard published in The People's
Voice, Aug. 19, 1966: Howard's vision for a primitive nation
"only accents the one point I am qualified to make: that Joe
Howard had a marvelously wide range of deep sympathy for
fighters for lost causes, be they defenders of old loyalties or
dreamers of better worlds to come."\(^{59}\)

Strange Empire was published in 1952; it was 565 pages
long (not including bibliography). Howard's friend, Norman
Fox, wrote in The Montana Magazine of History that Strange
Empire "is the last impassioned plea of a writer to whom
injustice was always a challenge, the last pen stroke of one
who loved the West and pictured it with honesty and courage
and sweep."\(^{60}\)

\(^{57}\)Ibid., 15.

\(^{58}\)Richard Roeder, interview by author, Pen and paper,
Helena, 7 July 1988.

\(^{59}\)Edmund Freeman, "Josep Kinsey Howard," The People's
Voice, 19 April 1966, 6-7.

\(^{60}\)Fox, 44.
In Harper's magazine, DeVoto wrote that Strange Empire was "pure gold. It is stirring, heartbreaking, history as fine art, and one of the few books ever written that deal justly with Indians." A reviewer in the Great Falls Tribune wrote that Strange Empire was "the finest literary achievement to come out of Montana and one of the greatest books ever written under the broad classification of the war for the West. Howard's devotion to the underdog is nowhere more evident than through this book." Roberta W. Yerkes wrote in The Freeman that the book "is historical writing of the first order."

According to Howard's friend, Mildred Walker Schemm, Morrow and Co. did not promote Strange Empire sufficiently. It is hard to find evidence to support that notion, but if it is true, it may be because Howard never fully completed the revision the publishers had asked for—despite DeVoto's assertion that Howard completed Strange Empire before he died. Wrote Roberta Yerkes to Josephine: "We were looking forward eagerly to the revision which Joe had planned to do this fall and I suppose hadn't even begun."

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63 Yerkes, 318.

64 Letter from Roberta Yerkes to Josephine Howard, 30 August 1951, Joseph Kinsey Howard Papers, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena.
Whether the revision was completed or not it did not prevent DeVoto from writing in the book's foreword that Joseph Kinsey Howard "came closer to being the spokesman of the West than any other writer has ever been."  

Edmund Freeman wrote that "Joe's last book...is much more personally revealing, though indirectly so," than were his other two. One piece of evidence for that is the dedication. It's to "JEAN McREYNOLDS for whom, as for Rousseau, 'le bon n'était que le beau mis en action." (The good is only the beautiful in action).

65 Howard, Strange Empire, 4.
66 Freeman.
67 Howard, Strange Empire.
Chapter XII

Epilogue

Just a few days before Joe Howard died, in August 1951, he put on a literary conference at the University of Montana in Missoula. S.L. Groff, a graduate student and admirer of Howard’s reminisced about the event in the winter 1953 issue of Venture, a school magazine.

Joe carried the 1951 conference on his shoulders and sweated through the hot days striving to keep everyone happy. Students mingled with writers, publishers and professors. Joe Howard, when he got the chance, sipped cool drinks and swore at the heat. He was a patient man, accepting matters as they came, but the shadows under his eyes were dark and his friends commented that he needed a rest. Besides directing the Round-up and entertaining his friends, he spent the small morning hours working on press releases and thinking how to tackle the revision for Strange Empire. The last words I heard him say were on the day the conference ended. The early afternoon sun was practically tanning the steps of Main Hall when Joe came down them. ‘I’m going home,—get a cold drink and sleep for two weeks.’

Howard’s exhaustion after the conference was made worse by his use of over-the-counter-drugs which don’t "mix well with the cocktail hour."  

Howard had taken Helen Everett, an editor who had been part of the literary conference, to visit his cabin in Teton Canyon. "Joe and Helen had been up late the night before, drinking and talking," remembered Mildred Walker Schemm.

2 Taylor, interview.
3 Schemm, interview.
Howard and Everett were on their way to Choteau and had stopped briefly to visit with the Schemms.

They also stopped by A.B. Guthrie, Jr.'s cabin, to see if the family needed anything from town:

I was re-roofing the shed, so I yelled down to him that we needed nothing. Barely a half-hour later, my wife came running out of the house and yelled at me: ‘Dad, Joe Howard’s taken sick.’ I started down from the roof; she came back a second time, then, and told me he had died. We bundled right up and went to Choteau and saw Joe. It was a bad time, a bad day.

Schemm's husband, Ferdinand, was a doctor. He had raced to town too, and saw Howard alive for five or ten minutes. She asked her husband how he looked. "So very tired, so very tired; his face was full of lines."

"It was Ferd that told Howdy," Schemm said. "He went up the three flights of stairs and told her as directly as he could. I don't know if she cried. She was a strong enough woman to wait 'til she was alone to cry."

There were obituaries in all the national magazines Howard had published in, and in newspapers everywhere. His friend and fellow reporter, Jay Edgerton wrote in the Minneapolis Star:

When Joe Howard died, Aug. 24, there were men who traveled hundreds of miles over the Montana plains or across the rockies just to be with another person who knew and love him....After Howard died

--Guthrie, interview.

--Schemm, interview.

--Ibid.
there was a memorial service in Great Falls. One of his friends read a few lines from Christopher Fry's play, The Lady's Not for Burning. They read: 'What is deep as love is deep, I'll have deeply. What is good, as love is good, I'll have well. Then if time and space have any purpose, I shall belong to it.' In the opinion of many, the lines contain the essence of Joe Howard's many-sided life."

After the cremation, Howard's friends took his ashes and released them to the mountains. The same mountains that inspired Howard to write at the end of his most famous book, Montana: High, Wide and Handsome, what could be his own epitaph:

The sunset holds infinite promise. Fire sweeps up from behind the Rockies to consume the universe, kindles the whole horizon, and all the great sky is flame; then suddenly it falters and fades atop the distant peaks and the lonely buttes, ebbs and is lost in secret coulees. the Montanan is both humbled and exalted by this blazing glory filling his world, yet so quickly dead; he cannot but marvel that such a puny creature as he should be privileged to stand here unharmed, and watch."

"Edgerton.

Howard, High, Wide and Handsome, 328."
"Feel something desperately, then say it in the least possible number of words," Joe Howard told a creative writing class at the University of Montana. Howard's ability to evoke emotion with words was one of the strongest characteristics of his writing. Howard was a writer of place who often let anecdotes help explain his meaning. He was a master of detail, and used this skill to create vivid images. He had the ability to capture moods and feelings on paper so that all the senses were aroused. Howard was a lyrical writer, especially when he felt strongly about something. He could characterize individuals like a good novelist. In a word, Joseph Kinsey Howard was a superb story teller.

Howard's pictures of people were like revealing portraits. This description of the personality of one of the copper kings demonstrates the writer's insights into people's character:

The Scotch-Irishman was William Andrews Clark. He was a tight white starched little man, proud and pinchfisted, and when he went on a vacation trip to celebrate a business coup, he peddled pork en route to pay expenses. Never a dollar got away from him except to come back stuck to another, or to buy some splendid flourish for his vanity. He was a Presbyterian and a patriot; in later years he loved to be asked to sing the national anthem in public places, and he sang it in a tight thin voice and blessed America, which had permitted him to harvest scores of millions.  

1 Groff.

Note the phrase, "tight white starched little man." The reader knows that generosity was not prominent in Clark's behavior, that he was "anal-retentive" as a contemporary writer might say. The sentence: "Never a dollar got away from him except to come back stuck to another," succinctly tells the reader Clark's all-consuming value. The anecdote about singing the national anthem tells the reader the capitalistic nature of both Clark and his country.

Howard often used anecdotes to make a point and set a scene. He did this superbly in the opening paragraphs of the chapter, "City With A 'Kick' In it," in the book he contributed to called, Our Fair City. The simple telling of this humorous scene demonstrates the contradictory values of Butte:

The lady in the library said writers make her sick, and why don’t they lay off Butte? We who live here, she continued, love Butte. You’d think these writers could find something nice to say about it....But no: it’s always the gambling, or the red-light district, or ‘The Company.’ You’d think nobody sinned anywhere except in Butte; we’re just honest about it, that’s all. And as for ‘The Company,’ a lot of us wonder, where’d we be without it?

To change the subject I asked her how business was. You know, she said, I think it must be picking up. Some of the girls have been drifting back from Las Vegas, I hear; and they don’t do that unless there’s more money loose around Butte!

The lady in the library did not find it at all remarkable that the comings and goings of ‘the girls’--the dwindling band which inhabits the seedy remnant of a once-famous segregated area--should serve as a business barometer for Butte. Nor did she regard it as odd that an inquirer should elicit this information, along with official statistical data, from the eminently respectable staff of the public
Howard's juxtaposition of scenes and commentary, such as the slice-of-life in the Butte library, tell more about Butte than would reams of numbers and statistics.

Howard's vivid descriptions put the reader where the action is. In his last book, *Strange Empire*, Howard describes the journey of the Mounties through inhospitable land during bad weather: "The men stumbled across the cruel blue ice of Lake Superior and reflected sun glare beat on their faces like whips, leaving the flesh hanging in strips and their lips gashed and bloody." The reader is both fascinated and repelled by such scenes. Here's another from the same section of the book:

The Canadians were floundering north on crude prairie trails; one day their horses slipped and stumbled to their knees on hard-packed snow or ice in the ruts, the next they plunged to their bellies in quicksand; or in mud which had the consistency and color of porridge. Their wagons, carts and guns were continually mired in the marshy creek bottoms. Alkali bubbled out of the sod to poison their drinking water, burn the horses' hooves like acid, eat into the cheap leather of the troopers' boots. Moisture and cold seeped through the shoddy uniforms which had been ripped and almost worn out on the trek around Lake Superior.

The above selection is full of detail that embellish the scene and provide layers of meaning. The terms, "shoddy uniforms" and "cheap leather" tell the reader the Canadian

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Allen and Howard, *Our Fair City*, 297.

Howard, *Strange Empire*, 400.

Ibid. 423.
government was not putting much money into this campaign.

The nouns Howard chooses show the extremes of the Canadian prairie: snow, ice, quicksand, porridge, marsh, sod, alkali, poison, acid, cold. His choice of verbs show the tough, dreary struggle the Mounties were enduring: slipped, stumbled, plunged, mired, bubbled, seeped, ripped, floundering.

The images and emotions that Howard gives the reader include sympathy, dread, adventure, danger, hardship, and despair. All that in several sentences. It is proof of Howard following his own advice: to feel desperately then use few words.

Howard's favorite place to write about was Montana. With the exception of Strange Empire, which took place in Canada, most of Howard's articles and his other two books were about the state he loved and lived in all but 13 years of his life. When Howard felt strongly about something, as he did about the Montana landscape, his feelings burst through the page to the reader's heart. In the closing chapter of Montana: High Wide and Handsome, Howard evokes a feeling and mood about his favorite place that arouses the senses and stirs the reader's emotions.

Between the sky and the horizon's edge is rainbow's end. It is there the sun rests in intermission while the spirit dancers of the aura thread their way, silent and a-tiptoe, through the grave measures of their minuet; there too are the Sand Hills, where wander shades of dead warriors in perpetual pursuit of phantom buffalo. There is the goal of all the mysterious old trails--green well-watered pasture, the brimming reservoir, the never-failing field of
wheat. Even peace is there."

A sense of heavenly tranquility comes through in
Howard's choice of words and phrases: the sun rests in
intermission, dancers of the aurora, silent, a-tiptoe,
mysterious, grave, well-watered, never-failing, peace. The
reader senses from these words a place of eternal good, and
longs to go there.

In discussing land, Howard sometimes addressed an
unnamed character. For example, in the following passage,
Howard talks directly to the homyocker, or homesteader, who
is coming onto the Montana prairie with little knowledge of
the land's ecology:

'And how could you have been expected to know,
homyocker, that even a 'normal' 15-inch rainfall
would have given you no guarantee of success, for
'normal' means nothing on the arid high plains. It
is not the 'normal'...but the frequency and extent of
variation from the normal which indicates the crop
potentialities of the soil."

Howard often used the land when making analogies. He
compared the selections in his anthology, Montana Margins,
with the various kinds of grasses on the plains. He writes in
the introduction:

'It is not truly an anthology in the classical
sense. 'A collection of flowers of literature, that
is, beautiful passages from authors,' is the Webster
definition; however, few anthologies are that, any
more. There is some terrible writing in this book.
There are flowers, too, but their appearance is
incidental to the main purpose.

Howard, High, Wide and Handsome, 328.

Ibid., 180.
The heavenly blue of Plains larkspur may afford the range rider some momentary pleasure, but what he is really concerned about is the look of the new grass. If it is thick and rich, his cows will prosper; if it is thin and poor, the lovely larkspur will poison them when they turn to it for want of something better to eat.

Nor can the range rider judge the grass from the road. That's why city folk are often wrong when they say, 'The country looks good.' It does--from a speeding car. But the grass of the Northern Plains is bunch grass, and because it is tall it does not always follow that it is good. A dry winter and a wet spring may bring tall grass which stirs pleasingly in the wind, but the bunch is thin and the forage value of the field is low.  

Howard explains that just as the prairie is full of grass of different value and use, so is Montana Margins full of writing of different value and use. Writes Howard: "If another Montana anthologist can find a better range with thicker grass, can graze it more neatly, and can afford to pay for it, I hope he will do so."  

Although it ended up being much more, Howard's anthology was originally intended to be a teaching tool. Howard himself was a visiting professor at the University of Montana. One of his students remembered what it was like having Joe Howard for a teacher:

He wore glasses only when he read and often held them in his hand when lecturing or answering questions. In the classroom, he gave no long prepared lectures, but used a conversational tone of voice with numerous anecdotes from his own experience to illustrate the point in question. His information was honestly practical and captivating to his students. Notes taken in his classes were

Howard, Montana Margins, vii.

Ibid.
extremely usable and would in themselves make an ideal small text for both beginning and more advanced writers.¹⁰

Howard's mastery of detail, use of anecdotes, vivid descriptions and captivating scenes were possible in large part because of his thorough research. He explained how he did some of his background research to students:

Get the feeling of the place. Talk to its people and find ways to get them to talk to you. There are all kinds of people: cabbies, bellhops, cops, waitresses, sales clerks, barflies and prostitutes. They all know something different. Pathos, humor, fun and tragedy, it's all there somewhere. Look in the shop windows and see what is displayed—and who the displays are designed to attract....If you want to get next to the story or to the heart of the community, find the bar closest to the railroad tracks, get yourself a beer and buy a few for others---then sit around and keep your ears open.¹¹

Howard was a 1948 "graduate" of the prestigious Breadloaf Writers' Workshop where he joined poet Robert Frost in leading discussions. He attended a writer's conference in the Northwest. Wrote Richard Neuberger in the Oregon Journal in 1953:

Participants in the Reed college writers' conference of 1946 remember Howard as a nervous intense young man who repeatedly condemned what he regarded as injustices against minorities and raids on the West's natural resources. The students on the campus, apparently attracted by his burning idealism, crowded around him and often ignored writers with so-called bigger names.¹²

Howard was a founding member of the Montana Institute

¹⁰Groff.

¹¹Ibid.

of the Arts, a state-wide organization that promoted theater, music and writing. He was chairman of its writers' group. He was also director of one of the most promising cultural movements in the Pacific Northwest--the Northern Rocky Mountain Round-up of Regional Arts. This writers' conference was held on the University of Montana campus for three summers. A book reviewer in the New York Times wrote that as a result of these conferences, he "found more literary ferment around the tree-bordered campus in Missoula than at any other place in the 11 western states."

Howard died several days after the 1951 writers' conference.

13Ibid.
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