

## *Coming Home to Butte and Anaconda: An Introduction*

Patty Dean, Guest Editor

Perhaps the most scrutinized and documented of Montana's cities, Butte and Anaconda possess striking material and cultural incongruities that intrigue and beguile visitor and resident alike: pristine natural beauty, toxic waste Superfund sites, unrivaled riches, subsistence and poverty, ornate edifices, back alley hovels, a planned townscape, and higgledy-piggledy urban blocks punctuated by gullies and gallus frames. This snarled, complex history aligns well with the vision of the Drumlummon Institute, the publisher of *Drumlummon Views*, the online journal of Montana arts and culture: "We see ever more clearly that the origins of these [irrevocable] changes [in the American West] lie in our tangled history, a history that gets ever more complex the closer we look."

A joint venture by Drumlummon and the Montana Preservation Alliance, this special issue explores and revels in this tangled history. The project has been generously supported by organizations whose visionary and valiant efforts have done much to preserve, promote, and interpret these matchless Montana cities: the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Butte-Silver Bow Local Government, Preserve America, Humanities Montana,

and the National Park Service. We're especially pleased that, in addition to the regular online version of this issue of *Drumlummon Views*, we are able to offer a printed version, made possible by a generous grant from the National Park Service. Notice should also be accorded to the completion of an epic endeavor to expand the original Butte boundaries of the 1961 National Historic Landmark to encompass Anaconda, Walkerville, and the Butte, Anaconda and Pacific Railroad. As of 2005, this fourteen-year endeavor became a reality when the expansion was approved by the National Park Service, and now the Butte-Anaconda-Walkerville National Historic Landmark District—made up of nearly 10,000 acres containing just over 6,000 contributing resources of national significance—is the largest NHL in the United States.

From a personal perspective, I was especially delighted to serve as this volume's guest editor as a long-time member of the Vernacular Architecture Forum (VAF), an international organization dedicated "to encourage[ing] the study and preservation of all aspects of vernacular architecture and landscapes through interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary methods." After many years of effort by a number of VAF members with ties to Butte and Anaconda, we are especially happy that the organization's conference is convening in Butte this June of 2009.

In addition to the joy of collaborating on this

project with Rick Newby, Drumlummon Institute's Executive Director, and Chere Jiusto, Executive Director of the Montana Preservation Alliance, this project provided us all with the welcome opportunity to reconnect with people whose work we have long admired as well as to connect with others whose recent work expresses a similar enthrallment with the built environment and landscape of these cities. A particular priority of mine was to highlight underutilized primary sources I had run across "looking for something else," a snare that entraps many a researcher.

Given how the old and the new are a constant dichotomy in the American West, the contributions and contributors to this volume demonstrate the perpetual fascination Butte and Anaconda has held for historians, visual artists, journalists, writers, and poets for more than 100 years.

The title of this publication, *Coming Home*, comes from Sister Joann Daley's hand-tinted multi-frame etching of the 585-foot Anaconda Stack—a tower that would nearly equal two football fields stacked end zone to end zone. And, like the word "home" itself, the theme of "Coming Home" assumes many meanings and contexts for these authors and artists. For some of the contributors, Pat Williams, Edwin Dobb, John Mihelich, Dennice Scanlon, and Ron Fischer, Butte and Anaconda are their hometowns; they are natives. For others, such as Fred Quivik, Dale

Martin, Brian Shovers, and Mary Murphy, the Mining City is the much-beloved adopted hometown of their early professional careers, a magical place that shaped their intellectual interests and kindled an enduring camaraderie that lasts to this day.

Throughout this volume, "coming home" takes on various guises. Sometimes the homecoming is a return to a place well-known if not well-loved; in other instances it is new territory; other times, it is the house, as an actual physical structure; and yet other times it is the work place or a social club—"home away from home."

In his incisive opening essay, Carroll Van West delineates the landscape of power in southwest Montana as manifested by two of the region's monuments, the Washoe Stack in Anaconda, the sole survivor of a sprawling industrial complex, detoxified and now a Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course, and Butte's Berkeley Pit, an open-pit mine whose expansion gobbled up Meaderville, McQueen, and sections of Dublin Gulch and Finntown—these last two neighborhoods named after the residents' "old country" homes. Fredric Quivik's expansive "The Industrial Undergirding to the Vernacular Architecture of Butte and Anaconda" reminds us of the cities' very *raison d'être*, the mining industry, and the many ways it operated at cross-purposes with the communities built to support it. The mechanics and meanings of the gallus

frame, a dominant feature of the Butte skyline whose industrial tracery soars above clusters of hillside houses, is lucidly explained by John Mihelich in “What’s Your Heritage Worth? Gallus Frames, Community and Experience in Butte, Montana.” Dale Martin’s “Maintenance Base for the Copper Conveyor: The Butte, Anaconda and Pacific Railway, its Roundhouse and Repair Shops, 1914” describes the Butte, Anaconda and Pacific Railway roundhouse and other West Anaconda shops, the workplace home for over 250 men, and the choreography necessary to transport the copper from the Richest Hill on Earth to the Anaconda smelter. Drawing on WPA writer Edward B. Reynolds’ extraordinarily vivid essay on work at the Anaconda smelter, Matthew Basso discusses how the built environment shapes and informs an individual’s sense of himself. A recent disclosure of Reynolds’ ethnicity (as an African American) lends an additional complexity, especially in a workplace where work assignments were predicated on ethnic identity.

Edwin Dobb’s “Dirty Old Town: Addiction and Betrayal in the Mining City” weighs the puzzling magnetism Butte has exerted on him over thousands of miles and throughout the stages of his life. Pat Williams’ foreword evokes perhaps a less complicated but equally detailed picture of boyhood moments in the metropolis of Butte with its dazzling landmarks and teeming crowds. Ron Fischer’s “The Tuna Fish

Sandwich” posits the Montana of tourism brochures against the Montana of his boyhood in his hometown-smelter town of Anaconda while Dennice Scanlon’s “Ballad for a Butte Miner” presents the grim work conditions her underground miner father and scores of others faced on a daily basis. Ron Fischer’s harrowing story, “Manus Dugan,” makes all too real the threats to life and limb encountered in the Butte mines.

But such dangerous and unhealthy prospects existed above ground in Butte, too. For thousands of new Butte residents, immigrants in particular, their new home in Silver Bow County more resembled Dante’s *Inferno* than his *Paradiso*. The city’s transformation from a mining “camp” to the largest city between Minneapolis and Seattle in only three decades’ time exerted extraordinary demands on its nascent infrastructure and housing stock. Butte’s most rapid growth coincided with the Progressive Era of the early twentieth century when the idea emerged that the morals and minds of citizenry could be improved by a beautiful and clean city. The “Report of Investigation of Sanitary Conditions in Mines, and, of the Conditions Under Which the Miners Live in Silver Bow County” documents in text and photographs the inadequacies—or even absence—of infrastructure, building codes, and planning that occurred in a city where the physical separation between home and workplace was often blurred or miniscule. Silver Bow

County health authorities were not the only ones to document shortcomings and prescribe improvements, however. Prolific Butte writer Helen Fitzgerald Sanders' "Redeeming the Ugliest Town on Earth," reprinted from a 1907 issue of *The Craftsman*, is introduced by Mary S. Hoffschwelle in a revelatory discussion of Butte's place on the national arts and crafts movement reform agenda.

Brian Shovers' "Housing on the Rocky Mountain Urban Frontier: Multi-Family Building Forms in Butte, Montana 1890-1916" examines the critical question of where some of the Mining City's most ubiquitous forms originated. A related inquiry—when, why and how did Butte workers furnish their homes—is taken up in my own essay, "Home Furnishing in the Mining City of Butte," which analyzes the furnishing purchases made by a wide range of credit customers at the city's most complete department store, circa 1910, and how these tied into socio-cultural trends of the time. Chere Jiusto's "Montana's Smallest National Historic Landmark: The Burton K. Wheeler House" illustrates how the appearance and context of his modest home contributed to and conveyed the persistent values and identity of Montana's most controversial U.S. senator.

As noted in a number of essays in this volume, Butte was home to a variety of ethnic groups in the early twentieth century, and reprints from a

continuing feature in the *Anaconda Standard*, "Queer Spots In and About Butte," highlight how a few of these communities regarded Butte as their home. Christopher W. Merritt provides a brief history of the state's Chinese for two of the "Queer Spots" features, one on Butte's Chinatown—the largest in the state by 1890—and the other on their Chinese garden and "nursery." The surprising presence of a so-called "Assyrian Colony" in Butte and the complexities of Middle Eastern Christianity are revealed by Benjamin Trigona-Harany who identifies the colony as comprised of members of an Arabic-speaking Maronite population from Hadkit village in south Lebanon. Nicholas Peterson Vrooman uses the Queer Spots' "Cree Village" feature as the springboard for telling the story of the nation's first urban Indians. Traveling on foot with dog and horse travois, these refugees of Louis Riel's rebellion in Canada fruitlessly searched for a home throughout the cities and towns of central Montana before settling in Butte for a time.

The concept of "home" in the public sphere is addressed in essays describing homes-away-from-homes and social and/or recreational clubs of a sort. In "The End of the Line: Butte, Anaconda and the Landscape of Prostitution," Ellen Baumler details the domestic appearance of these euphemistic "female boarding houses" from the late nineteenth century to post-World War II days. Essays by Kate Hampton

on the rustic Anaconda Saddle Club and my own on Butte's cosmopolitan Silver Bow Club document their respective clienteles and the cultural values that underlaid the clubs' designs. Mary Murphy's thoughtful and whimsical observations on fedora-wearing men describes their appearances as they strode about the Mining City while Jon Axline's "Extra Tasty and Fried the Way You Like It!: Butte's Historic Drive-In Restaurants" traces the history of food to-go, often consumed by travelers at nearby hotels or tourist camps.

The images of Butte's urban fabric as presented by photographer Lisa Wareham are such new viewpoints that even the native will wish to spend more time in this photographer's new home-town. Sister Joeann Daley's collages and prints from two suites, one produced in 1970 and the other in the mid 1980s, offer a capsule visual history of the Smelter City and its icons. Belying Anaconda's planned town origins, Sister

Joeann's prints present a visual cacophony of landmark church steeples, bar signs, and houses. Such exuberance is soberly balanced by other works that allude to the smelter's closing; "The Bus No Longer Stops Here," for example, depicts a smelter worker, lunchbox in hand, standing forlornly. Finally, veteran photographer Roger Whitacre presents straightforward views of the place of the final coming-home, the cemeteries of Butte and Anaconda.

Early twentieth-century essayist George Wesley Davis wrote of Butte: "There is tragedy and romance in the very look of the place and one's breath comes quickly." We hope that the contents of this issue will quicken the breath of readers for whom Butte and Anaconda are well-known territory and captivate those who are setting their virtual (or actual) footsteps there for the first time.