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### Building an Archives for Butte, America

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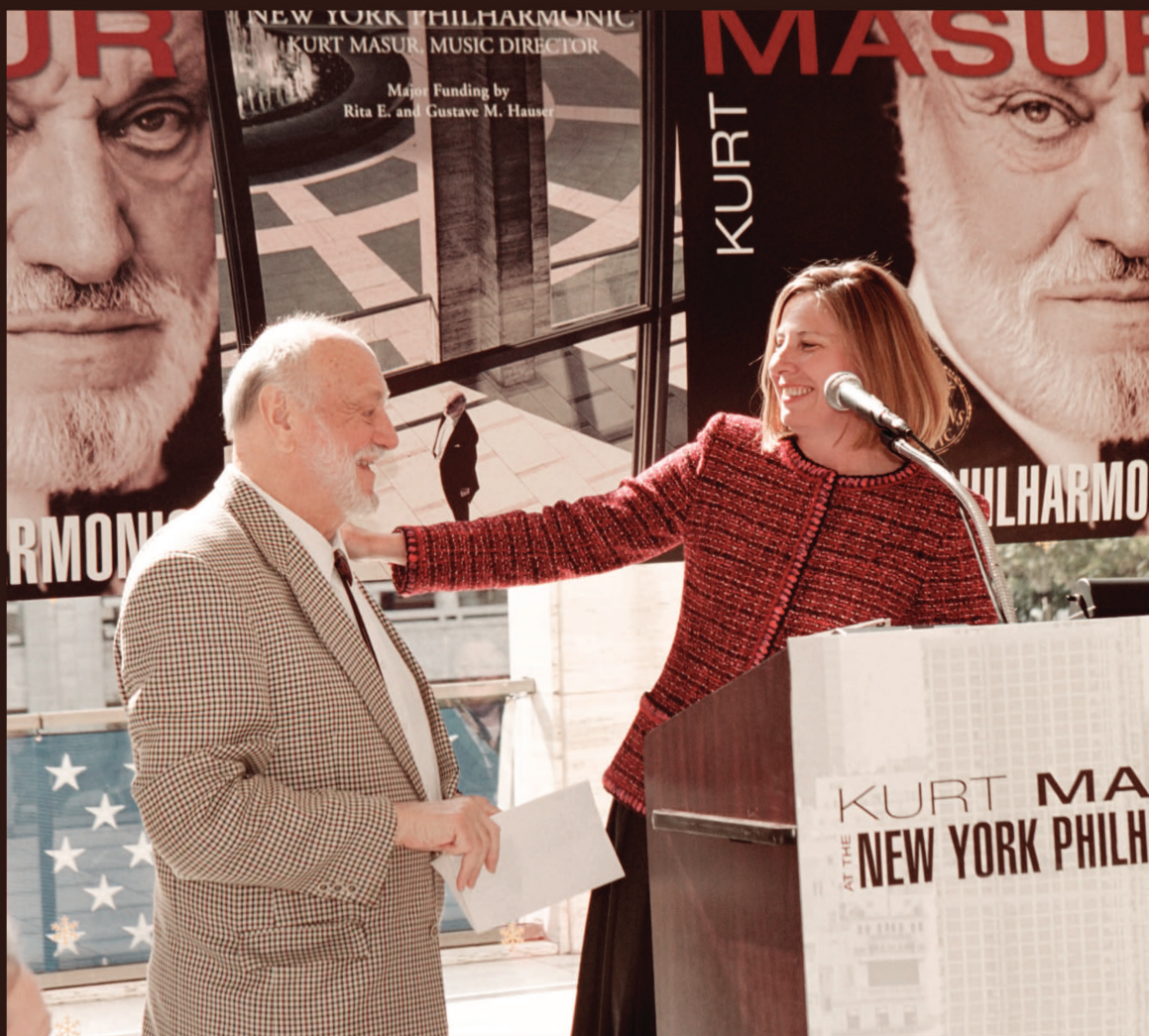
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# Many Happy Returns

Advocacy and the Development of Archives

Edited by **Larry J. Hackman**



# Many Happy Returns

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Edited by Larry J. Hackman



**SOCIETY OF  
American  
Archivists**

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Chicago

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**About the cover:** Archivist of the New York Philharmonic Barbara Haws with Kurt Masur, the orchestra's music director, at the 2001 launch of his historic CD set. In her case study (pp. 186–199), Haws describes how she sought to show the music directors and other internal power centers that the archives could contribute to their work and to persuade them to support the archives. Photograph by Chris Lee.

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# Building an Archives for Butte, America

Ellen Crain and Donna E. McCrea

*In 1981 only a few residents and scholars knew about the Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives and even fewer used its services, but by 2006 the archives was providing research assistance to more than 4,000 people each year. In 2007, Butte's voters, proud of the archives and its role in the preservation of their heritage, approved a \$7.5 million bond to support it. This case study outlines how almost twenty years of advocacy by the archives staff, Friends, and board increased access to collections, improved community awareness, and ultimately resulted in a state-of-the-art facility for Butte's records of enduring value.*

## Background

Butte, Montana, sits 6,000 feet above sea level and is surrounded on three sides by the Continental Divide. The town was founded on gold mining in the 1860s but by the 1880s had become a world leader in electrolytic copper production, helping to fuel the United States' rise to power. In its heyday Butte had an ethnically diverse population of nearly 100,000, hundreds of saloons, a famous red-light district, and the nickname "Richest Hill on Earth." Mail came addressed to Butte, America. Today, workers' cottages, churches, and social halls reflect a largely immigrant history, and black steel headframes are a visible reminder of more than a century of hard rock mining. The city was





View of Butte's Kelley Mine, ca. 1950. Courtesy of Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives Collection.

declared a National Historic Landmark in 1961 and its culture lives on in its 34,000 residents, many of whose families have been in Butte for generations.

The Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives was established in 1981 through a city-county<sup>1</sup> ordinance that states that the primary purpose of the archives is “to be the official repository of all non-current records of Butte-Silver Bow Government and the previous separate entities of the City of Butte and Silver Bow County.” The ordinance also gives the archives authority to accept “other archival material such as written, typed or printed records, photographs, tape recordings, maps, film or other material of historical significance that might be donated or loaned by private individuals or groups.”<sup>2</sup> The archives is charged with facilitating public access to the materials in its care through professional service, assisting the preservation community in the region, and working with local schools and community organizations to encourage the use of historical documents in learning environments. It is governed by a board of directors, whose seven members are selected by Butte’s chief executive and approved by the Butte-Silver Bow Council of Commissioners. Board members serve three-year terms and play an active role in archives’ affairs, including selecting its

director, although that person is ultimately hired by and “serve[s] at the pleasure of the chief executive.”<sup>3</sup>

Today the archives holds 14,000 linear feet of manuscript collections, 6,000 linear feet of local government records, more than 5,000 maps, more than 100 linear feet of photographic material, and nearly 1,000 monographs. These collections document the region’s rich industrial, labor, ethnic, and social histories and attract researchers from around the world who study, among other topics, Butte’s roles as the nation’s largest copper mining site, largest Superfund cleanup site, and wellspring of the western labor movement. But, at its inception, and despite its records management responsibilities, the archives was considered a “non-essential government department” by the Butte-Silver Bow government (B-SB). This classification was used for years by B-SB officials to limit funding, deny capital improvements, and threaten the department with cuts in the event of an economic slump. This case study outlines how almost twenty years of advocacy by the archives staff, Friends of the Archives, and the archives’ board of directors significantly increased public access to collections, vastly improved community awareness of the archives, and ultimately resulted in the passage of a \$7.5 million bond to turn the archives’ deteriorating building into a state-of-the-art facility for Butte’s records of enduring value.

## **Laying the Foundation: Advocacy, Outreach, and Service**

In January 1990, after nine years as an official department, the Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives hired its third director, Butte native Ellen Crain. Crain had become familiar with the archives as a researcher and, though she realized she had a challenge ahead of her, she jumped at the part-time position. From personal experience Crain knew the potential of the archives but also the difficulty researchers faced trying to use its materials and services. Recognizing the threat inherent in being a “non-essential” department, Crain and the board worked proactively to strengthen the archives’ political position within local government and to garner support from the community.

Crain focused her advocacy efforts on enhancing access to collections and improving public relations. She immediately expanded the archives’ hours of operation, opening its doors to both government employees and the public every hour she was there. She responded to every question the archives received, including “Where can I get help on my taxes?”, “Do you have a list

of current health care providers?”, and “Do you know who cuts lawns?” To further improve the visibility of the archives, the director and board members reached out to community organizations by speaking at luncheons, dinners, and other events about the facility, collections, and services available to the public. Archives’ staff provided fact checking, photographs, and filler stories for local media, and when a new collection was acquired—often as a direct result of outreach to community organizations—the press was invited to cover the donation. These actions helped heighten public awareness of the archives. Before long, B-SB employees and the public were coming to the archives with questions perfectly suited to its mission and resources, such as “Is that road a public right-of-way?” and “Who mined in the Washoe area?”

To encourage the use of historical documents in the local schools, Crain contacted teachers and asked to be invited into their classrooms. She started with high school sophomores, who were required to write a paper on Butte’s history. At first she carried photographs and documents to them, but soon teachers were taking their classes to the archives so they could explore a wider range of resources. Crain took elementary students on walking tours, talking to them about how neighborhoods evolved, and then brought them to the archives to see maps and images of the areas they had just visited. She told the students, “This is how we know what happened in our city.” She helped with eighth-grade civics, combining the archives’ immigration records of Butte’s residents with visits to the courthouse for mock naturalizations. Students told their parents about what they had learned and then took them on the neighborhood, mining history, and social history tours they had been on with Crain. High school seniors often returned to Crain for help finding topics and sources for their final history and government papers, and college students called her asking how to find the archives in their new town.

Crain volunteered on a number of regional and state boards, which helped spread the word about the archives and its resources. She and the archives staff were actively involved in Butte’s efforts to become a National Labor History Landmark, and under her direction the archives assisted with several projects stemming from the area’s designation as the largest Superfund site in the United States. In particular, archives staff worked with the historians and their teams, documenting and interpreting the events associated with each property or landmark in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.<sup>4</sup> The archives also took on management of a historic signage

project funded by the National Park Service to interpret National Register properties; between 1990 and 2005, more than 300 markers were placed on buildings and sites in the Butte-Silver Bow region. In addition, starting in 1993 the archives hosted a major conference each year focused on an aspect of Butte's past, pulling together scholars and experts in the fields of women's studies, labor, and mining history. Local officials were always invited, and often the chief executive was asked to provide the official welcome. During these conferences the archives held public forums, encouraging locals to hear from and talk with individuals and groups who valued Butte's history. The archives' participation in these very public projects added visible substance to the "sound bites" about the archives seen by the community on television and in print.

To facilitate better communication with resource allocators, Crain and the board of directors invited the chief executive and the commissioners to an annual luncheon at the archives (funded first by sympathetic sponsors and later by the Friends of the Archives), at which they provided an overview of the year's activities. They also produced an annual report summarizing the archives' accomplishments and outlining its challenges. Although the reports frequently included appeals for additional funds, they always focused on providing positive information about the archives. They documented the impact of outreach efforts, listed awards and commendations received by the archives and its staff, and provided patron use statistics. In addition, each report contained a bibliography of that year's productions and publications that cited or were otherwise drawn from archives' resources, calling attention to the value of the archives' collections for regional, national, and international scholarship.

Because government officials tend to be less impressed by citations and scholarly presentations than by dollars, between 1993 and 1995 the archives conducted an extensive user survey to measure the fiscal impact of its resources and services. The survey showed that 45 percent of the research conducted at the archives was genealogical in nature and 55 percent was historical; 59 percent of people who visited the archives were from outside Montana (52 percent from other states and 7 percent from outside the United States); and 25 percent brought another person with them to Butte and stayed a minimum of three days, with a few staying as long as six months. These numbers demonstrated the variety of uses of the archives and documented the department's contribution to the community by way of the local tourist economy.

Advocacy efforts by Crain and the board paid off in a number of ways. Between 1990 and 1996, archives staff grew to include two part-time assistants and about thirty hours a week of help from volunteers carefully selected for their skills and knowledge base. The director's position increased to full time and the archives opened to the public forty hours a week. In 1996 the staff assisted more than 4,400 patrons. Donations of manuscript collections had risen from about twenty to more than a hundred a year. Between 1996 and 1998 the archives received a number of important collections, including land records from the Butte-Silver Bow Clerk and Recorder's office, records of all of Butte's major banks in operation from 1876 to the 1970s, and the records of Butte's International Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union. Because the Western Federation of Miners, International Workers of the World (IWW), and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) had roots in the Butte-Anaconda region, the local press and affiliated Lee Newspapers in Montana gave significant attention to the processing of the Union collection. As a result, the Montana state AFL-CIO passed a resolution making the Butte-Silver Bow Archives the official repository for the organization's labor records. This honor brought the archives statewide attention, especially from the trades and labor organizations and their employees. In that same year the archives received the records of two of the city's oldest women's organizations, including the Junior League of Butte, whose members were well educated, active in the community, and vocal. The archives' "non-essential" designation was finally rescinded.

Although appreciation of its collections and services increased, the archives continued to face challenges from B-SB officials. In 1996, Crain's entire budget—including salaries—was only \$45,762. Requests for funds to update the building or support general operations were consistently met with, "You cannot expect the government to sacrifice health care, police, or fire protection for the community to meet the needs of the archives." In fact, although archives' staff spent at least 30 percent of their time researching for local government entities and providing records management services, the strongest opposition came from other B-SB department heads, such as those from the departments of Public Works, Planning, Roads, and Metro Sewer, who had large budgets and significant political clout. They complained that the archives was being provided trucks, teamsters, and laborers to move government records and taking these resources away from parks and public works projects. Public



Butte Fire House No. 1, ca. 1900. Courtesy of Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives Collection.

Works even asked for Crain's budget and sought to have the archives' building destroyed to provide additional parking for equipment.

In 1999, largely to raise money to buy needed computer hardware and software, the archives' board of directors and Crain created the Friends of the Butte Archives, a private nonprofit entity whose purpose was to promote, assist, and benefit the operations of the Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives. Members were mostly users of the facility and local professionals who supported the archives' efforts. The Friends ran a bookstore, hosted workshops, held fundraisers, and applied for grants on behalf of the archives. They also sponsored events that helped the archives develop relationships with community members and local government employees. The work of the Friends complemented that of the board, whose new members, although presented to the chief executive for official appointment, were carefully selected by existing board members for their knowledge, skills, or connections.

## **Creating a Framework for Support**

From the beginning, Crain and the board placed preservation of the archives' collections first, public access second, and maintenance of the archives' building

third on their list of priorities. However, by the late 1990s it was clear that the building, a former fire station constructed in 1900 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, needed to be the top priority. Small repairs had been done through the years, and the wiring was brought up to code in 1992, but by 1997 deterioration of the exterior brickwork was compromising the structural envelope. The basement, where the bulk of the archival collections were stored, had neither heat nor air conditioning, and the old firehouse doors failed to keep out dirt, water, blowing snow, insects, or rodents. A professional energy audit resulted in recommendations for a new heating system, new windows and doors, and improved drainage along the sides of the building. Although the historic building complemented the historic collections, the board knew it needed to address whether the archives should try to remain in the fire station. Was it really an appropriate place for a collection growing in both size and importance? The local government answered yes—in part because the existing archives was the only available space for the material within the city-county building stock.

In response to the audit, Crain and the board mapped out a strategy designed to balance the needs of the building, the collections, and the constituents of the archives. Board members recruited local professionals, such as a heating engineer, to donate time to building improvements. They lobbied Butte's Urban Revitalization Agency (URA), a Tax Increment District designed to promote redevelopment and stimulate investment within Butte's central business district, for increases to the archives' annual allocation. One grant from the URA paid to fix the exterior bricks, and a second URA grant funded almost 3,000 linear feet of compact shelving to shift documents off the floor. A Save America's Treasures grant, combined with funding from the Montana Cultural Trust, helped to microfilm and re-house valuable materials. The National Endowment for the Humanities funded the creation of a disaster plan for the archives. Some grant applications for collections care were rejected, however, because of the poor physical conditions within the archives, and a few successful grants had to be returned because B-SB ultimately couldn't provide the cost-match funds.

In 2004 the Friends hired a consultant to conduct a preservation assessment, offer suggestions for improving general collection management operations, and provide feedback about the archives' overall physical facilities and storage conditions. The consultant's report, while acknowledging previous

efforts to upgrade the building, underscored the significant concerns that still existed. Flanked by the board of directors, archives staff, and Friends of the Archives, the consultant offered her recommendations at a public meeting to the council of commissioners and other B-SB officials. The presentation was very effective, highlighting the fact that conditions in the alley outside the archives were more favorable than some of the storage spaces indoors. Local officials watched a demonstration of how the fluctuation in the building's temperature had literally torn a volume of council minutes apart, and for the first time they seemed to understand that the archives building and storage area were placing Butte's most valuable documents—and a large portion of its heritage—at risk. They asked, "What is the Archives doing to address these issues?" Crain and the board noted they were writing grants and soliciting funds to implement the consultant's recommendations, but they emphasized the need for more extensive financial assistance.

In 2005 the archives sought and received a \$200,000 grant from the URA to hire a firm to conduct an architectural assessment of the building and project the cost of restoring and renovating the facility to meet archival standards. The estimate was \$4 million, including work that would need to be done to meet the recommendations laid out in the preservation assessment and address a priority list of code violations. The architectural assessment was delivered to the council of commissioners and local officials and presented at a public meeting. The preservation assessment and the architectural assessment made it clear to B-SB officials that action was needed to address the problems with the building. The projected cost was well beyond the government's means, however, and Crain was left wondering how she could possibly raise the required money.

In March 2006 the secretary of the interior signed documentation creating the Butte-Anaconda National Historic Landmark District, the largest such district in the United States. This designation was the culmination of fourteen years of work in which the archives was intimately involved. In May 2006, the archives played host to an international envoy that included Mary McAleese, president of Ireland, Noel Fahey, Ireland's ambassador to the United States, and Una Fannon, Irish consulate general of San Francisco. Because of the large number of Irish immigrants in Butte,<sup>5</sup> the archives holds a significant collection of Irish-related materials, including records of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (Divisions 1, 2, and 3), the Robert Emmet Literary Association (the



Butte Branch of the Clan-na-Gael), Friends of Irish Freedom, Irish Volunteers of America, and the American Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic. In addition to providing insight into the Irish presence in Butte, the materials highlight the role Butte's residents played in the politics of their homeland. Of particular interest are documents showing that Éamon de Valera, a leader in the Irish independence movement, was harbored in Butte in 1919 and in 1921. President McAleese toured the archives and spent several hours reading manuscripts and letters, as well as speaking to historians, staff, and board members. The president was so impressed with how the materials informed the relationship between Butte and her country that she referred to them in her speeches and at press conferences and gave her honorarium to the archives to have collections microfilmed.

Both the Landmark District designation and President McAleese's visit garnered a significant amount of national and international press coverage, including articles in the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Irish Times*. The archives also received a great deal of attention in 2007 when it partnered with Montana Public Radio, an affiliate of National Public Radio, and StoryCorps, a national nonprofit oral history project, to collect Butte's stories. These major activities improved the archives' political standing in the community and solidified the archives' reputation as a place that not only served the public but also shared the importance of Butte's history with local, national, and international audiences. Still, the archives struggled to raise funds from B-SB and external sources for its building. When a major grant request to Save America's Treasures was denied in July 2007, the board went forward with a decision they had been discussing internally for more than a year—proposing a \$7.5 million bond to rehabilitate the existing building and construct an archival vault.

The board knew the decision was risky. Placing the bond issue on the ballot was asking Butte-Silver Bow community members if they believed the archives was important enough to warrant paying good money for its ongoing needs. If the bond issue failed, the archives would have difficulty stating on grant applications or in its reports that it had public support. Worse, the failure would cost the archives the political clout Crain and others had been cultivating for almost two decades. Losing the bond issue would be tantamount to telling local officials that they could place the facility on the nonessential list

again. Indeed, B-SB might even close the doors of the archives, disperse the historic records to state agencies, and put up a parking lot.

Despite the potential political consequences, the board felt the time was right to go to the voters. Years of advocacy efforts by the archives paid off as Crain, the board, and the Friends rounded up supporters, including dozens of people who had benefited from research done by archives staff, served with Crain on committees, and visited the archives with their classes. When the request to place the bond issue on the November ballot was presented to the full council, more than a hundred community members and leaders stood up to testify on its behalf. The B-SB commissioners and chief executive were quick to give their public approval—but privately warned that ultimately Butte’s fiscally conservative constituency would vote it down.

## **The Campaign for an Archives Worthy of Butte’s Pride**

Crain and the board went to work immediately. A careful review of Montana State Code showed that no public employee could campaign on behalf of the ballot issue. It was also clear that the amount of funds nonprofits (such as the Friends of the Butte Archives) could contribute was limited and that nonprofits were barred from campaigning. The Friends of the Archives opted to use the funds they were allowed to expend to hire an advertising executive from Butte. They instructed him to run an educational and informational campaign that would encourage the public to vote but not specifically to “vote yes.” The first question the advertising professional asked was, “What heavy-hitter will speak out on behalf of this issue in television ads?” The archives suggested former U.S. Representative Pat Williams and his wife, Carol, both well-respected natives of Butte. He then asked the archives for a recognizable Butte voice for radio ads and told the Friends to recruit lots of locals to write about the bond issue for submission to the print media.

After nearly twenty years of effective public interactions, the Friends of the Butte Archives easily found fifty people from Butte who were willing to pay for their own small newspaper ads featuring their pictures and personal messages about the impact of the archives on their lives.

These ads started in September. In early October larger ads—in color and with powerful taglines, including “Rooms With a Future,” “This Is Our Place in History,” and “An Archives Worthy Of Butte’s Pride In Its History”—appeared in

the *Montana Standard* and the *Butte Weekly* newspapers. The trades and labor union members purchased ads in the local newspapers and invited the archives staff to their Labor Day picnic to distribute information on the bond issue. They also assisted in funding some of the advocacy efforts and provided a platform to display information about the bond issue at their statewide conference. Educators and students, many of whom had done their own research in the archives, proved to be a powerful base of support as well; they purchased advertisements and spoke out on behalf of the bond issue. The high school History Club proposed a Ghost Tour in the Archives, during which they would tell the stories of Butte's famous deceased, to help with the outreach and advocacy efforts. The tour took place just weeks before the bond issue ballots were due back; more than 500 people attended, many entering the building for the first time.

Informational flyers were mailed out with city water bills, and supporters were solicited to write opinion pieces for the newspapers. Fact sheets were distributed to the Butte area press and other local media addressing the questions: "What is an Archives?", "Who uses those documents?", "Why is this project needed?", "Did the county explore any alternatives?", "How will the money be spent?", and "Where can we vote?" From late October through early November, television ads showed the archives' faulty electrical wiring and the dark, dank storage space paired with a voiceover saying "It's our history and it's worth it." Radio ads, funded through the ad executive's contract, broadcast the tagline "Let's provide an Archives *worthy* of our pride in Butte's history." Informational public service radio announcements about the bond issue played during the same period. The campaign reached its height when ballots were mailed out and voters had just over a week to make their decision. The archives

## About the Archives



**Jennifer Grant**  
says: *Not voting for the bond issue is like ignoring a leaking faucet. The Archives deserves a safe environment.*

Paid for by Friends of the Archives

One of fifty advertisements run in the local newspaper featuring Butte residents speaking in support of the archives' bond issue. Courtesy of Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives Collection.

hosted two open houses and hundreds of people came through the building asking questions, looking through documents, and learning about the collections. The archives staff and board hit the lunch circuit and met with as many groups as possible, frequently quoting from Montana author Clem Work, “Talking about history in Butte is like talking about food in France—there is so much of it and it is all so good.”

Early November was a time of great anxiety for the archives staff, board, and Friends. Thirty percent of eligible voters had to return their ballots for the election to be legal. By the first week of November, it was apparent that a sufficient number of voters were participating, but the board heard rumblings that the issue would never pass. At 8:00 p.m. on November 14, the clerk and recorder announced that 61 percent of the voters had turned out—and that 75 percent had voted yes! Archives staff and supporters were astounded and elated. Despite gloomy predictions, the voters not only voted, they provided a mandate—they wanted the archives funded.

## Lessons Learned: Looking to the Future


The campaign was an overwhelming success, but the yes vote on the bond issue reflected far more than just four months of marketing—it was the culmination of nearly two decades of constant outreach and effective advocacy. Crain committed herself from day one to making the archives both essential and accessible. She enlisted capable board members as advisors, and they created a dedicated Friends group to serve as allies. Archives staff learned

### Needed: An Archives Worthy Of Butte's Pride In Its History

<http://www.buttearchives.org/stay.htm>

There are many reasons why the Butte Archives is asking for your help to renovate and expand our building. However, most compelling is the simple fact that we house much of Butte's history, and without a vital upgrade and addition to our facility many of these records could be lost to the elements and public access forever.

**What Are The Archives?**  
 We safeguard and preserve the historical records of Butte: essential information on the history of Butte from its beginnings through the Copper Kings era, and into the 21st century. We document Butte's great political history, immigration history, neighborhood history, and environmental tales. The story of industry and labor as well as the women who stood behind them is in the Archives. The records are all here. The Archives provides services to students, teachers, family historians, journalists and filmmakers. We answer the question - what happened in Butte?



Proposed Archives remodeled with Vault addition

Flyer mailed to Butte residents with their municipal water bills. Courtesy of Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives Collection.

to present the same message in a variety of ways to reach the largest audience. They discovered that when they took students on tours, or helped them with projects, they were actually reaching an entire household. They used the press to announce new acquisitions and to turn boxes of records into interesting stories. Communications with resource allocators always emphasized the benefits the archives provided to B-SB and its constituents and widely distributed annual reports documented the archives' progress from year to year. Interactions with individuals, ranging from school children to scholars, local businesses to federal agencies, and the woman next door to the president of Ireland, were based on a service ethic but proved that every positive interaction could create a future ally.

The learning opportunities continue today as Crain navigates myriad issues involved in renovation, construction, and the archives' more prominent role in the community. She recognizes that although the archives is now a center of attention, it faces potential challenges as it strives to meet the community's increased expectations with only three staff members and a budget of less than \$120,000 a year. Relations with the current B-SB commissioners and chief executive are good, but elected officials come and go. Crain hopes that bringing all the inactive and archival government records under one safe and secure roof will cause other department heads to be more supportive, especially as it becomes easier for the archives staff, who currently travel to multiple public buildings for documents, to provide records management service. Once the move into the new building is complete, Crain intends to address other recommendations made in the consultant's 2002 report about the archives, including standardizing collection descriptions, expanding participation in bibliographic catalogs, and increasing the archives' Web presence to broaden researcher access. She is also starting succession planning, with the goal of ensuring that the archives builds on its accomplishments and remains relevant, visible, and effective.

In the days following the vote, as Crain heard "we deserve this" from Butte's residents, she realized that the public didn't just vote for the project. They felt real pride and ownership in Butte's rich history and its historic documents, and their vote expressed confidence in Crain and the archives. Through constant and consistent advocacy, the archives had come a very, very long way.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The City of Butte and Silver Bow County have a consolidated city-county municipal government.

<sup>2</sup> Butte-Silver Bow Ordinance No. 125, 1981.

<sup>3</sup> Butte-Silver Bow Municipal Code, 1987.

<sup>4</sup> The act requires the identification and investigation of historic properties that are listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

<sup>5</sup> According to the 1900 Census, 9.6 percent of Silver Bow County's population had been born in Ireland, giving it the highest per capita population of Irish immigrants outside Massachusetts. In the 2000 Census, 27 percent of Silver Bow County's citizens indicated that they had Irish ancestry.