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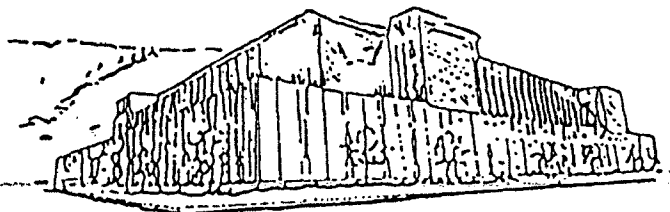
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Date Dec. 12, 1997

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**Changing Patterns of Everyday Living in Livingston, Montana:  
Oral Histories of Women Who Worked for the Railroad**

by

Julia Katherine Keffer

B.J. The University of Missouri, 1990

B.A. The University of Missouri, 1990

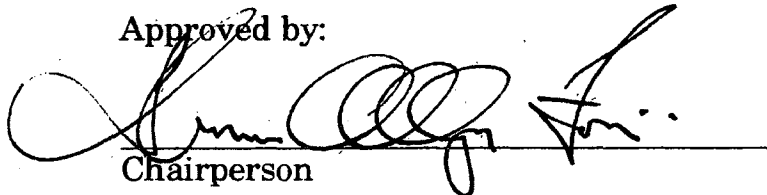
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for the degree of Master of Arts

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1998

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## CHAPTER 1

# LIVINGSTON: A NORTHERN PACIFIC TOWN An Introduction

Train tracks crisscross the American landscape. They are a potent symbol, particularly in the western United States, considered by the majority as a sign of progress; an emblem of power; the embodiment of the ability of science and human ingenuity to conquer the wilderness. The impact of railroads on the American West cannot be overemphasized. In contrast to many other parts of the world, railroads in our country's west often *preceded*, as well as contributed to, patterns of settlement (Martin 1990:1).<sup>1</sup> In small towns across the West, like Livingston, Montana, the local depot became the link to civilization. Mail, goods, news, and far-off visitors came by train. Money and messages could be sent from the depot office.

The railroad has been an integral part of the lives of many Livingston families. The tracks cut through the center of town, like giant embroidery stitches flat against the land. Neighborhoods grew up on both sides of the tracks in this windswept town. Working folks walked to the train shops and offices each morning for three or four generations. In the mind's eye, these might all be men in coveralls and caps carrying lunch pails, a mass of

hardworking humanity juxtaposed against the hard and awe-inspiring natural wonders of the area -- the unpredictable Yellowstone River swinging through the valley, the endless, top-heavy blue sky, and the row of mountains that forms the Sleeping Giant. Railroading lore is masculine -- full of men on trains struggling through snow drifts, grass fires, smoke and grit, hobos, long distances, and dark nights of little sleep. The bulk of railroad jobs were in the shops (engine and car repair) and also in the less visible accounting offices on the second floor of the depot. Day-to-day details -- the mind-boggling bustle of accountants, telegraphers, steno clerks, agents, and other railway office workers -- lacks the raw adventure and daring so prevalent in tales of the Wild West. The majority of women workers dealt with details, and their contributions are often absent from our understanding of the railroading way of life. This professional project aims to remedy this deficiency by focusing on the life histories of Montana women who worked for the railroad. Interviews were conducted with women ages 44 to 94, with most in their sixties and seventies (for additional information on interviewees, see the Appendix and the chronologies at the end of Chapter Three.) Before presenting the interviews of these former railroad workers and analyzing the patterns they reveal, it is critical to frame these oral histories with a brief study of the Livingston-area community where all the women lived at least one point in their lives (Mintz 1984:307).

The late 1800s and early 1900s saw Livingston, like many other western towns, grow under the watchful eye of its masterful and imposing parent, Northern Pacific.



The Northern Pacific was the major factor in the creation of a corridor between Minnesota and Puget Sound, filled with towns, farms, and industry on a scale that had not existed there before. It brought people, economic development and new levels of government... Current population density maps show the railroad origins of these communities... The NP itself platted town sites and sold lots in them, especially in agricultural areas. These towns still have a distinctive appearance, with blocks of commercial buildings fronting on the railroad right-of-way set aside for warehouses and industrial activities, as well as railway facilities... Immigration and land agents represented the railroad in the eastern United States and in Europe, recruiting settlers. [Martin 1990:9-10]

Railroad management and local work forces recognized their mutual dependency, but despite their reliance on the railroad as a main source of livelihood ( or perhaps because of this), workers were often ambivalent toward the railroad owners. Anti-corporate sentiment was initiated in part by labor practices which led to the rail strikes of 1877 and 1894 (Davis 1992). Reasons behind this uneasiness also include a 1901 consolidation attempt by J. P. Morgan and James J. Hill, two powerful men intent on uniting Northern Pacific, Great Northern and Burlington under a single umbrella -- the Northern Securities Company (Martin 1990:7).

Governments of the northern states feared a monopoly and challenged the merger in court. The consolidation was ruled illegal by a federal circuit court, and in 1904 the U.S. Supreme Court voiced its agreement with the ruling of the lower court. These kinds of maneuvers by wealthy businessmen increased public distrust of corporate leaders (Martin 1990:7-8). It was this tense mixture of animosity and desperate necessity that a *Livingston Enterprise* editorialist noted in a column on the completion of the town's new

depot in 1902.

In many instances communities are loathe to rejoice over any achievement of a corporation, notably among which are listed the railroads of this country, but in this one particular instance every resident of Livingston from top to bottom, side to side, circumference to center raises his voice in universal and prolonged praise over the work of the Northern Pacific in this city during the year just ended.<sup>2</sup> ["Livingston's New Depot," 1902]

Repair hub and gateway to Yellowstone National Park, Livingston had had other depot buildings, but the new structure's style and grand scale prompted special celebrations and high expectations. The depot was formally opened with a public reception

in which all classes of citizens gathered in the waiting room of the depot to view the interior of the building, to unite in their expressions of admiration not only for the structure itself but for the company that erected it, and to participate in the tendering to [Northern Pacific] Superintendent Horn of a handsome memento. ["Formally Opened," 1902]

During the event, businessmen and town officials presented the Northern Pacific spokesman with a gold watch as a token of their appreciation. Both the mayor of the town and the railroad superintendent addressed the audience. The following excerpts of the mayor and superintendent's speeches offer a fascinating example of the multi-faceted relationship between city and corporation. First the mayor addressed Superintendent Horn:

I am giving away no secret Mr. Horn, when I say there is a mutual dependence, locally speaking, between the Northern Pacific Railway company and our city, in which, however, the odds are largely in favor of the company. The company, strange as it may seem, could get along fairly well without the city of Livingston, but Livingston would fair poorly without this greatest transcontinental line... To us, therefore, the good will of the railway company has been a matter of great concern... But you

readily perceived the unity of interest between your company and our city... Your kindly assistance has begotten a lively sympathy between your company and our citizens and I believe you have never asked a favor for the company which our municipality has not granted. ["Formally Opened," 1902]

The mayor's address was followed by a few words from Superintendent Horn.

After thanking the audience for their gift, Horn noted,

... I shall always appreciate much more the ready willingness of all to help out and cooperate with me in handling the company's affairs on this division... I do not think any mistake is being made when a railroad like the Northern Pacific puts money into a place that is ready and willing to cooperate with it... This token indicates to me the strongest possible assurance of your goodwill towards me, and your action in the past indicates your goodwill to the company. Keep it up; cooperate with the company, and both city and company will win out. ["Formally Opened," 1902]

This notion that the railroad is obligated to take care of Livingston residents continued to pervade the town, even during the crises of the 1970s and 80s, as the era of the iron rails truly came to a close in many towns where it had been a primary employer. Northern Pacific merged with Burlington, and initial attempts by Burlington Northern to sell the Livingston depot were met with fierce resistance in this town of 7,000, in part because of the relationship the depot building symbolized. "This depot is the heart of Livingston, and I don't want to see it cut out," retired conductor Warren McGee told a reporter for the *Bozeman Daily Chronicle* in 1981. He noted, "The railroad created this town, and I hold them responsible for its future" (Israel 1981:24 B). But the early 1980s were tough times, and Burlington Northern was struggling to save itself. By 1982, BN had executed 10,000 system-wide layoffs. With business down by thirteen percent, company executives focused primarily on their

relationship with their customers, although they also recognized that the massive job losses would overwhelm many communities in Montana (Woolf 1982). BN Railroad Chairman Richard Bressler initiated Livingston into an uncomfortable new era as he explained the company's modern business strategies not only with the hard facts underlining the slump in some of the region's extractive industries -- many of which were BN subsidiaries -- but also with a modern vocabulary full of phrases like 'advanced technology,' 'consolidation of forces,' 'productivity improvement program,' and 'survival tactics' (Woolf 1982). Understandably, many Livingston residents who had relied on railroad jobs for generations were devastated. In an effort to understand the loss, not only of jobs but of a way of life, a few in the town choose to believe that future national energy shortages will result in a resurgence of the railroad -- for both freight and public transportation -- proving that the company's abandonment of the town was shortsighted (Israel 1981). Others realize that the days of lifelong employment with one company are over. Those who stayed in Livingston have found other jobs, and many now believe their children's futures will be secured not with promises from corporate officials but with a good college education (see C. Bosley, interview by author, March 21, 1997).

Amtrack passenger service was discontinued in 1979. By 1985, the railroad was also in the process of closing down the local maintenance shops, which led to the loss of over 1,000 union-wage jobs in just a few years. The Livingston area experienced dramatic economic changes following these cutbacks by Burlington Northern Railroad, its primary employer. Yet for

many, the old depot building remained a potent symbol of a past that seemed more promising than the future. Explaining his sentimental attachment to the depot, Mr. McGee said, "I think that some of the values this country had in the past should be preserved, and this station was a part of what made America great" (Israel 1981:24 B). In 1985, Burlington Northern, Northern Pacific's successor, offered the old rundown depot to the city of Livingston. The Depot Foundation was created in the spring of 1985 by a number of Livingston business leaders who believed development of a broader commercial base -- including an increase in the tourist industry -- was crucial to the town's health. The City now leases the building to the Foundation, and the Depot operates as a museum during the height of the tourist season -- from mid-May through the first of October.

A five-year contract was signed in 1987 with the Buffalo Bill Historic Center in Cody, Wyoming, to provide a major exhibit from mid-May to early October. However, a long-term goal of the foundation was to create its own major, professionally produced summer exhibition and to begin a permanent collection for the Depot Center. This new exhibition, *Rails Across the Rockies: A Century of People and Places*, opened in May of 1989 ("1998-99 Montana Cultural Trust," 1996).<sup>3</sup> At the heart of the Depot Center's mission is the aim of contributing to the revitalization of the community through cultural tourism and to the education of area residents through exhibits, tours, and cultural programs ("1998-99 Montana Cultural Trust," 1996).

Past evaluations of the Livingston Depot Center museum have indicated that although the current exhibition is well-designed, it lacks both audio and

video elements specific to the Livingston area and neglects the history of women in the railroad. I proposed interviewing some of the local women who worked for the railroad in various capacities and recording their histories as a way of augmenting areas of the Depot's current exhibit, *Rails Across the Rockies*. In conducting these interviews, I hoped to not only gain information about the various jobs held by these women during their employment for Northern Pacific and Burlington Northern, but to understand the position this work held in their lives and how they integrated employment with other aspects of their day-to-day living.

## CHAPTER 2

### GOALS AND METHODS

Every exhibit should tell a story. Storytelling is one of the primary ways to promote visitor interaction in a museum setting (Gartenhaus, “Interactive Teaching Workshop,” October 4, 1997.)<sup>4</sup> The notion that stories, in the museum context, are political as well as informational and educational is a relatively new idea. Minority groups and others who have been under-represented or misrepresented in the past are now demanding the right to have a say in how their culture or group is interpreted. In many cases, museums are following these mandates and attempting to represent diverse points of view in their exhibits.

“Museum exhibitions draw on the resources of public culture and popular imagery to produce their effects” (Karp 1991:375). However, exhibits must avoid relying solely on enduring cultural images. By augmenting its “Rails Across the Rockies” exhibit with women’s stories that speak specifically to the Livingston railroading experience, the Depot Center will allow a previously muted group of voices to be heard, interpreted, and digested by the public. Including women’s perspectives in the exhibit will more closely align the

museum's efforts with the goals stated in the American Association of Museum's policy of "Excellence and Equity," intended to enhance the educational and public dimension of museums. Meant as a touchstone to guide U.S. museums into the twenty-first century, the report offers recommendations outlining how institutions might best enrich the experience of all possible museum audiences (Excellence and Equity, 1992:10). The particular importance of achieving diversity in museum exhibits is emphasized. "As public institutions in a democratic society, museums must achieve greater inclusiveness ... [T]hey should attempt to reflect pluralism in every aspect of museums' operations and programs" (Excellence and Equity, 1992:8). Key to this notion of inclusiveness is the ongoing endeavor to give divergent points of view a voice in the interpretive process (Excellence and Equity, 1992:19).

Objects are no longer viewed solely as things in themselves, but as things with complex contexts and associated value-laden significance. Each visitor supplies yet another context and another layer of meaning by bringing individual experiences and values to the encounter with objects in a museum setting. Changing interpretive approaches will have a strong impact on museum collections and the public's understanding of them. [Excellence and Equity, 1992:12]

During the summer months, exhibits focusing on the heyday of Northern Pacific passenger and freight service are displayed in Livingston's restored depot. Because of this focus, interviews collected for this professional paper include primarily women who worked while the N.P. was in operation in Livingston. Photographs of local women who worked for the railroad are scarce, although there are a few sources, such as the collections at the Park



County Historical Society. Material obtained through these interviews might be useful as an audio supplement or label information for particular elements of the exhibit, such as the telegraph. Finding some of the machines used by women up in the accounting offices, such as a comptometer, would also add a new dimension to the exhibits. However, the actual development or reconfiguration of exhibits based on these interviews is of secondary concern. Primarily, this project aims to both add new material to existing data on female railroad employees and to develop a framework through which to interpret the work experience of these women.

“Women’s voice” adds an important, often ignored dimension to the understanding of the railroading way of life. A generous amount of material has been written about women doing their patriotic duty during the world wars by temporarily taking over positions traditionally held by men in many different industries. While this wartime contribution is no doubt an important aspect of female involvement with the railroads, it is but one piece in the whole load of laundry. The oral histories collected for this paper come primarily from women who held traditional female positions within the railroad hierarchy. Most of these women did clerical work and accounting work; some worked as telegraphers and agents at small rural stations; and the two who began working as the civil rights bill of 1964 was being implemented in the early 1970s, pioneered somewhat reluctantly into shop positions formerly open only to men. Those interviewed mentioned others who worked as food servers on the line from Livingston to Gardiner, train nurses, as cooks for linemen, as waitresses at the beaneries, and as timekeepers for gangs working on the

tracks. Although records are scarce, there is evidence that women in America worked at various occupations for the railroad almost since its inception. As early as 1838, women were hired by some lines as sleeping car attendants specifically to aid female passengers riding in their separate compartments. On the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, beginning in 1855, four women worked in service-oriented jobs including charwoman and restaurant keeper (Burman 1994:38).

Some researchers have tended to focus on women's inroads into traditionally male occupations and to disparage women who held positions customarily delegated to them. In discussing the charwomen, restaurant keepers and female sleeping car attendants, historian Shirley Burman writes, "Admittedly, their work was not of major importance at the time and was not written about in corporate history books" (Burman 1994:38). Thus historical accounts have ignored or underemphasized the contributions of female railroad employees who held positions traditionally reserved for their sex. The inference is that the labor of women who did not struggle to claim legitimacy in male-dominated fields is not worth mentioning. Ivan Karp, a museum curator at the Smithsonian Institution, notes that when the "Other" -- in this case women -- is defined simply in terms of negative features, what it lacks when measured against the yardstick of the dominant group, then it becomes impossible to produce a positive account (Karp 1991:374). This perspective not only ignores the importance of the work these women performed, but also neglects the crucial analysis of how these women saw *themselves*. The oral histories gathered for this paper consider not only the work women did, but why they

worked for wages, what they thought of work, and how paid labor was integrated with their other roles as mother, wife, daughter, and community member.

The concept of women's voice has undergone many changes since the 1970s. Early feminist historians have said, "No matter what women we choose to interview, regardless of how typical or atypical their life experiences have been, there are certain common threads that link all women" (Gluck 1984:223). Generalist notions of certain experiences common to all women have given way to more complex analyses of the diversity and instability of social and cultural processes (Ginsburg and Tsing 1990:5). Instead of talking about a universal female experience, the focus is now on gender negotiations and on how gender is constructed in different situations and environments. "[G]ender is not a unified category, but a many-faceted one, open to change and variation.. [G]ender is seen not as fixed or 'natural' but rather as a category subject to change, and specifically to *negotiation*" (Ginsburg and Tsing 1990:2). In fact, feminist scholars today believe women have multiple identities and are consciously involved in both forging and challenging gender roles (Ginsburg and Tsing 1990:5,8). Women often argue against each other, "reflect[ing] the unevenness of women's circumstances in daily negotiations of race, class and sexuality" (Ginsburg and Tsing 1990:3). The very concept of a homogeneous 'women's voice' is now viewed by many feminist historians as counterproductive (Stewart 1990:43). Some, such as scholar Teresa De Lauretis (as cited in Stewart 1990:43), suggest abandoning the strict dichotomy of male versus female and focusing instead on how 'the feminine' is

determined in various cultural settings. A methodological advantage of this approach is that it allows the interviewer to abandon the emphasis on shared female experience and simply let each woman describe her life in her own terms. Theoretically, it emphasizes that notions of gender are socially constructed phenomena, thereby allowing one to highlight changes in a culture or group's beliefs about gender and possible causes for these modifications and reformations.

“Gender is not constructed as a closed identity but enacted as a shifting position that has to be continually reconstructed” (Stewart 1990:48). One of the most fascinating outcomes of this project, other than the stories themselves, is a growing comprehension of the various frames of reference used by these women to measure and understand their lives and the world around them. In attempting to uncover the reality of these women's day-to-day existence, it was necessary to analyze their narratives from several different angles. For instance, women speak differently about their own lives and the lives of others. They may define ideal behavior or roles for men and women, yet their specific stories often involve falling short of the ideal. They fill in this gap between real and ideal with specific strategies for coping. Connected with this is the gap between national or general trends and the personal. A disturbing societal tendency can be tamed through personal or familial approaches to solutions. In addition, the past can be reinterpreted through the perspective of present day. By examining not only what these women did with their lives, but their descriptions of how society ought to function, one can hope to construct a multifaceted description that most

accurately describes a group of complex lives (Haviland 1985:309).

A few of the women interviewed decried the prevalence of latchkey kids in modern-day America -- a result of their mothers being in the work force. Yet if they had children and worked or if their daughters were working moms, they accepted this and described the specific ways their family coped with this situation.

Well, you can see what's happening to these poor little latchkey kids. They don't have any place to go, and I don't like that. But both of my daughters work too. But they're fortunate -- and like my daughter Cathy lives right up above me, out there in the country, so when she needs a babysitter, she's got Grandma. And the other one out in Kennewick, Washington, has always had real good baby sitters. [M. Frelich, interview by author, February 7, 1997]

With a few exceptions, most of those interviewed did not define themselves as feminists. Most felt strongly that there were certain jobs that men could do better than women -- particularly those involving heavy lifting and hard labor. However, in their personal lives, these women had often done strenuous ranch work and the like. The two women who took over traditionally male positions in the shops stressed that, *personally*, they did at least as good a job as the men they worked with -- often better.

I did a lot of things that some of those fellas who worked down there didn't do. Some of 'em, if they went home and told their wives they were tired from working -- I don't know where they were working. You don't have to do anything if the journeyman isn't there. You're supposed to be supervised all of the time. And I was in the road shop -- the last place, and the journeyman was hardly ever there. But he set me up, and like I say, I'm the only woman there, and everybody's kind of looking. I can't just stand there with my arms crossed. So I did a lot of work while he was gone... And I know when I was soldering on this one engine that the foreman -- the top guy -- came over and he says, 'Well, you know, that takes a woman's touch. You do better than these

guys do.' [C. Kahle, interview by author, May 29, 1997.]

Yet, *in general*, both felt that innate differences between men and women meant that each sex was naturally suited for certain types of work. Carolyn Kahle, a former electrician's apprentice with the railroad, felt similarly to most of those interviewed. She described men being better at the heavy labor, but noted that women also had their special gifts.

But as far as intelligence or anything, I actually think women are more intelligent in certain ways, because they can figure these things out, and maybe they're more compassionate... more realistic about... I don't know -- If there's something wrong, a man just doesn't want to think about it, and it'll go away. But a woman knows she has to think about it. [C. Kahle, interview by author, May 29, 1997]

Cathy Bosley, former laborer, explained that while there are some things that men in general might be better at -- particularly those jobs requiring heavy lifting -- there are a few women who can do just as well. "So I wouldn't say just because you're a woman you shouldn't have a chance at [certain physical jobs], but I think a woman should be smart enough to know her capabilities. But that's if you take pride in your work" (C. Bosley, interview by author, March 21, 1997).

Both women noted their personal success in the shops, but spoke of problems that arose between men and other newly hired women.

You know, I might as well take anything that's coming to me. I think equal pay for equal jobs and all that, that's exactly right. But... I don't know. See, there were some girls that would come in though, and -- you know I was always treated with respect out there, and other ones weren't. So then I can see the wife at home worrying that there's a girl down there working and all that kind of stuff... I think they were flirting more than they should have, and a lot of them didn't pull their own weight. But other ones really did pull their own weight. So I think it just depends on the person. [C.

Bosley, interview by author, March 21, 1997]

The shifting gaps between the general and the personal and the real and ideal are not the only way these women define their lives. Women have different scales with which they measure time. The life of the railroad is a point of reference braided into familial references and personal measures of girlhood and womanhood. Women might place an event in time by saying, 'That was after my youngest boy started the third grade' or 'I did that before I got married.' When describing work, women alternate between railroad markers and familial or person ones. These railroad references -- 'That was after the merger,' 'After the accounting office closed,' 'Before the pullout,' or 'When the passenger trains still came through here' -- are part of a vocabulary shared by both men and women in Livingston.

Just as railroad events have become embedded in residents' minds as points of reference on a measuring stick of the town's history, the railroad is also a dominant physical presence on the local landscape. The railroad tracks run perpendicular to Livingston's Main Street, effectively dividing the town into three neighborhoods. In the past, these divisions might indicate class, ethnicity, or religion. The Northside is on the hill above the tracks. The Eastside is south of the tracks and east of Main Street. The Catholic Church is on this side of town, and many of the Italians who came to work on the railroad live in this neighborhood. A second group of Italians settled on the Northside. The Westside was thought to be more elite. Many of the town's merchants lived on these streets, south of the tracks and west of Main Street.

There is an elementary school in each neighborhood. Chinese and Japanese track workers initially lived apart from the rest of the community, but those who remained in town moved into established neighborhoods.

It was difficult to talk about prejudice and discrimination with the older women interviewed for this paper. Many of the women interviewed spoke from a different angle, obliquely addressing such issues and refusing to dwell on them. The 1980s and 90s have seen the development of new vocabulary pledged to the gargantuan task of training us to value all cultures equally and recognize the richness in cultural differences. The women interviewed do not talk of intellectual ideals. Theirs was a world where people knew their place. And this sense of knowing one's place included women like themselves. When questioned about how they felt regarding a certain practice that might have seemed tough or unfair, many replied again and again, 'That's just the way it was.' Some were children of immigrants, and they spent time negotiating their place, playing with the 'American kids,' and trying to fit in. There were railroaders, ranchers, and merchants; Catholics, Japanese, Irish, Italians, and people from Northeastern Europe -- Sweden and Norway, and from Slovenia and other eastern European countries. Many of these groups intersected at several levels, weaving various strands of the town's population together.

Such connections were not always smooth. Railroaders might feel that merchants looked down on them, yet merchants relied on the railroading families who patronized their businesses. Italians might live in separate enclaves in town, yet men mixed with others at work and older children went to high school with Livingston children of diverse backgrounds. Marge Frelich,



from an Irish Catholic family, recalls a conversation she had with an Italian friend. “[O]ur first boss, his name was Greenough, and oh, he was a mean son of a gun. And anyhow, when she went to work for him, she said, ‘I had three strikes against me, right from the start... I was Italian, I lived on the Eastside, and I was a Catholic.’ He hated all those things, you know” (M. Frelich, interview by author, February 7, 1997).

Most of those interviewed were disinclined to talk about such issues at all. They referred to the Italians or the Japanese as ‘great people,’ and were usually unable or unwilling to recall particular instances of ethnic, religious or class strife. The fact that there was discrimination is difficult to address since even those women who experienced it first hand don’t refer to it that way. They mention few specific incidents, but don’t dwell on them, and they are quick to point out that these days relations are good. So while certain divisions existed, along with prejudices against Italians or Catholics, and so on, these breaches appear to be muted in retrospect. In many ways, the railroad, employing workers from these different groups, brought them together in a situation in which a certain amount of cooperation was required and where respect might eventually be won through hard work on the job, day in and day out.

### **Data Collection**

A summer internship at the Livingston Depot Center museum in 1996 was the impetus for this project. Past work in Livingston as a free-lance reporter for *The Billings Gazette* and as a feature writer and news announcer

for Livingston's KPRK radio station familiarized me with many of the town residents as well as with the pleasures and problems involved in the interview process. However, it was my grandmother-in-law, Bernadine Gerfen, who truly laid the tracks that allowed my entrance into the overlapping circles of bridge groups, church membership, hair appointments, charitable organizations, and restaurant-going retirees, ranchers, and other locals that proved essential for this paper. While my internship work yielded a few names with which to begin my research, Bernie quickly became involved and greatly facilitated my efforts. She mentioned my project to many of her friends and acquaintances; introduced me all around during lunches at the Yellowstone Motor Inn; dinners at the Paradise; weddings; and P.E.O. summer picnics. Through our frequent correspondence and evening phone calls, she passed along names and numbers she continued to gather throughout the project. Bernie's letters are valuable themselves, as they reflect something of the tone of many of the interviews and illustrate the nature of these interlocking circles of acquaintances firmly rooted in the every day.

Julia, this was my morning at the hairdresser's. Beryl Foltz came in to get a new perm. She had spent a part of her morning making this new list for you. She was enthusiastic about it. She was so sorry that she could not give you an interview the day (Saturday) that you phoned. She wants you to call her and arrange for an interview with her...

Beryl's cousin... lives in Superior, Montana. That's about 57 miles west of Missoula. It might be a nice drive for you... some afternoon. Beryl said that she'd tell her cousin about you so that she'd be expecting to hear from you... Beryl also said that Rose Amsk is looking forward to your calling her again for an interview. I think you'll find that Rose has interesting information too. She and Beryl worked together. [B. Gerfen, personal communication, March 13, 1997]

I conducted interviews with eighteen different subjects -- sixteen women and two men -- and these composed the core research of my study. All subjects are white. One interview was conducted through correspondence, but all other interviews were conducted in person and taped. In addition to these interviews which I personally conducted, I benefitted greatly from oral histories recorded and transcribed by the Park County Historical Society and by newspaper clippings collected by Historical Society members. The oral histories compiled in no way represent a random sample. Rather, they resemble the individual beads of one of Bernie's many multi-strand necklaces held together by firm thread and delicate knots. Most of the subjects for this paper are women who stayed in Livingston despite the gradual deterioration of railroad opportunities. Others returned to Livingston after retirement. There were still other women who transferred to railroad towns in far-flung parts of the country as various Northern Pacific and Burlington Northern facilities in Livingston either shrank, closed up, or were relocated. Their voices are beyond the scope of this study.

## CHAPTER 3

### WOMEN WORKING For the Railroad and for Family

Livingston women employed by the railroad were no strangers to hard work. Many, though not all, had worked all their lives helping out their mothers, lending a hand on the family ranch, canning and gardening, feeding a husband and children, doing laundry for the household and occasionally taking in laundry for others, cleaning house, and at paid part-time jobs around town. If her family had a ranch outside of town, a young woman often had to do domestic work for her room and board when she moved into town for high school. Most women interviewed 'officially' joined the work force right out of high school; working in department stores, as cooks, and as secretaries for various businesses. During the Depression, both married and unmarried women did what they could to help the household.

I worked... while I was still going to high school. I would like to have gone to college, but my folks could not afford to send me. This was in the Depression days, so I didn't get to go... My father had some cattle and some sheep. My brother and I --during the war -- we were his sole help, because he couldn't even hire people to come and work... And one summer... he couldn't find anybody that would take care of the sheep, so I spent one summer herding sheep. And it was the most interesting part of growing up, I feel -- living out. I'd get up at 5 o'clock in the morning and take the

sheep out for the day, and get in around nine, 9:30 at night... People that want to go back to the good old days -- I don't want to go back to them. I like things the way they are. There's things we could do better with, I'm sure. But we're doing pretty good. [B. McGee, interview by author, February 6, 1997]

Like Mrs. McGee, Harriet Carpenter also came from a ranching family. She describes a family where everyone worked in the fields. Children's jobs were based on age and experience, not sex. Carpenter (interview by author, February 20, 1997) described her mother as a both housewife and her father's "right-hand man."

[I]n the summer, there was haying, raking, and driving the stacker team -- that I did. My older sister did the mowing and raking. My mother did... whatever else. We just kind of fell into a pattern. Big Sis, she started out raking... then she took over on the mower, and then I moved up on the raking. Part of the time I was driving the stacker team. And then Brother took over the stacker team. [H. Carpenter, interview by author, February 20, 1997]

In most cases, these women were not the first generation of females to seek work outside the home. Despite idealizing the stay-at-home mom, these women's mothers, and sometimes even grandmothers, worked outside the home in various capacities or worked on the ranch. Mothers ran boarding houses, travelled around the area providing in-home care for the bed-ridden, or worked for the railroad themselves. Women of different ages were interviewed for this study, but in many instances their stories are strikingly similar. The window of time this paper examines stretches from 1914, when Natalina Parisi started to work as an engine wiper, to the present. Many women continued to work after they were married, but most quit full-time employment while their

children were young. However, divorce or other economic hardships could force a woman with young children to continue full-time work outside the home. Yet the shared ideal remained a stay-at-home mom (for more information, see the chronologies at the end of this chapter).

Natalina Parisi, whose family moved to the United States when she was a child, began working for the railroad when she was 13 years old. In a presentation for the Park County Historical Society, she described three generations of working women.

I was born in Italy in the town of Fiato... We came to the United States when I was five years old. Before then,... I was playing out near my grandfather's place -- my grandfather was a shoemaker... And grandmother was a hairdresser. And there, she had to go to the houses. They didn't come to get their hair fixed or cut -- she'd go. Every morning she'd pick up her little basket, put her tools in there, and she'd go house to house combing women's hair...

So when I was five years old, we came to the United States... We were supposed to meet Dad in Chicago. He was there with his cousin, and he was working. And the day we landed in New York, he took off for Montana cause they were building up a crew to come out and -- I think they put a railroad going to Wilsall... When we got to Chicago, why, there was no Dad. And my dad couldn't read or write, so he had to wait until he found somebody that could write and send a letter back to Italy -- to Mother. Well, my grandmother just fired it back to Chicago. So then [Mother] wrote to him -- my mother could read and write. Well, then he had to find somebody to read the letter for him, and then he sent money to Chicago. We were staying with his cousin.

[In the meantime] my mother went to work at the factory where they made men's clothes, and she'd work there all day and then bring a big bundle home to sew buttons on coats, you know, and pants, and put the cuffs on. [N. Parisi, Park Co. Historical Society transcript, December 14, 1981]

Eventually, mother and children were reunited with Natalina's father in Livingston. World War I opened up new employment opportunities for women,

and Mrs. Parisi worked for the railroad during the war years. She recalled over 20 other women who also worked in the shops. The gritty work they performed earned them the nickname 'The Dirty Dozen.'

I was thirteen when started to work for the railroad. I told them I was nineteen. If I'd told them I was thirteen I wouldn't have went to work... I worked in the roundhouse during the First World War. I worked there for three years... When I first started, I was wiping engines, and then I was oiling -- put the oil, you know, in those little deals up on the cab, and put grease over those wheels. And then later on I went on the turntable, and I stayed there until I quit... That was my job. I'd follow the engine when it'd stop, and they had these chains about 'yea big around,' and I'd just throw it under a wheel -- one on each side... They would knock the fire out of the pits and then go up on the turntable, and I'd turn the table for each stall. [N. Parisi, Park Co. Historical Society transcript, December 14, 1981]

### **Railroad Time**

Working for the railroad differed radically from ranch life. The notion of train time was diametrically opposed to that of ranch time. The personal or familial could no longer be so casually and integrally entwined with work. Work was now segregated from home, particularly when husbands were part of train crews, travelling to far-off cities and always on call. Not only were husband and wife frequently separated, but a gulf often developed between a young couple and their ranching parents over the elders' inability to understand or accept lives regulated by the schedule of the railroad. While still placing high value on family and traditional roles, employment with Northern Pacific demanded adherence to a new notion of time and allowing this obedience to the clock to blanket over all other aspects of life.

[M]y husband worked for the railroad, and at first he was a

switchman. And he had no time off when we were first married. He worked seven days a week. And sometimes he worked the three to eleven shift. Sometimes he worked the eleven to seven shift. See, he was young on the railroad. No seniority. Rarely did he ever get to work days. So consequently the ranching family could not understand that. Come holidays, maybe we could come for Christmas dinner at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Or sometimes we'd have to leave before three. And they just never could understand why we couldn't have the whole time off. That was hard to understand for non-railroading people. And particularly those shifts... [W]e finally kind of quit going out to the ranch because it was too hard with our little one and everything, because we'd have to interrupt the day and come back so he could go to work. Well, then we got so we built our holidays around whatever time he could be off. If he worked three to eleven, well then we couldn't have Christmas Eve together. My folks just couldn't understand it -- why we couldn't come and be there the whole day. [B. Foltz, interview by author, March 20, 1997]

Bernice McGee, wife of a conductor, also discussed adjusting to 'railroad time.'

Sacrifices had to be made for the good pay and relative security of employment with Northern Pacific. She described the railroad as "the center of our lives" -- it became so whether one liked it or not.

Being the wife of a railroad man who is on the road... if you had children, you could expect that *you* were raising those children most of the time. Because your husband would come home -- might come home early in the morning, have to sleep most of the day, and then he would be called out again that night. It was a hard thing -- especially when you're raising children. We never were able to count on having a birthday at home or having him home for Christmas, or Thanksgiving, or Easter -- or any of those times. Most of the time, it seemed like they were at the other end of the line -- in Helena or Laurel or Butte...

It's been very interesting. I have no regrets at all, except I would've liked that we had had more family life together while our son was growing up. Sunday school programs -- I could count on one hand, I think, the number of times Warren was home for a Sunday school program, or a school program or anything like that. Your mother was the one that took care of that... We were the ones who went to the PTAs. We were the ones that went when they had teachers' conferences -- it was us that went to them. And the life is different, but it's also very interesting. [B. McGee, interview by author, February 6, 1997]



Mrs. McGee's husband now suffers from failing eyesight, and our interview was punctuated at regular intervals with verbal reminders of the passing minutes from the talking clock in the dining room.

### **Unpaid Labor**

Housework provides a thread of continuity stitched into the lives of all those women interviewed. And of course, housework continued after wage work was begun. This section explores women's housework strategies and their thoughts on female roles in housekeeping. Married women negotiated the gaps between realities of working-class life and the imposed societal expectations of wife and mother. The women interviewed for this paper, most of whom joined the work force in the 1940s and 50s, were perhaps more affected than their mothers by the tension generated in this particular era's overt agenda of feminine fulfillment in domesticity and the hidden agenda -- the substantial expansion of the labor market and increased consumerism (Woloch 1996:280).

Housework was, in many cases, much more strenuous than paid work for Montana women. Cleanliness was perhaps one of the most difficult tasks to accomplish, particularly in rural homes without hot water heaters, electric-powered washing machines, and other amenities more readily available in town. Yet it most clearly symbolized commitment to the domestic ideal even when one's circumstances fell short of it. To be clean was to keep up appearances, regardless of one's current situation. Those women interviewed rarely put down anyone else, but they occasionally remarked disparagingly on

someone who was dirty. Looking at an old photo of the 'Dirty Dozen,' Parisi commented on one of the women,

And this one, I can't remember her name, and she was always so filthy dirty. Look at her clothes. She never did change those clothes... Ah, cleaning engines, we had to crawl in and go through all that grease and dirt, and she was just filthy dirty. [N. Parisi, Park Co. Historical Society transcript, December 14, 1981]

Miriam Wright divorced her first husband after a very difficult marriage. She took two of the children with her, first to Spokane where she attended a telegraphers' school, and then all across the state of Montana as she briefly filled in at depots when regulars took leave or vacation. Accommodations varied from situation to situation. In one instance, she and her boys slept on blankets on the floor of an old depot waiting room that was no longer being used. However, even in dire circumstances, the boys went to school clean, their clothes having been washed in pots. Wright said no one could ever say her boys were dirty (M. Wright, interview by author, October 1, 1997).

Florence Loeffler was a young housewife during the Depression. For her and other women engaged in housework before an automatic washing machine was a common appliance, laundry tasks were particularly difficult and consistently generated lively, detailed descriptions in interviews.

[W]hen I was first married, you had to wash all your clothes on the board... [A]fter I had the kids, I had to wash every day, when they were young, to keep their clothes clean. And then, you had to wash them, and you put them through the rinse tub -- there were two tubs -- and then you took them out and hung them on the line... Oh yeah, you had to wash everyday when they were small, because they had their diapers... That's what I had to do for a long time, was wash on the board... with soap and the whole bit. And then you put 'em in the rinse water. And you had two rinses -- to get all that soap and stuff out. And then some things,

some types of clothing, you put them in what we called our boiler... a great big container you put on the stove and boiled them... to get them nice and white... You put them first in the rinse water, then you put them in the boiler, then you put them in the second rinse water, and then you put them out on the line. It was a job, I'll tell you. That was a day's job. Then you had to bring them all in and iron them. [F. Loeffler, interview by author, February 7, 1997]

Mrs. Loeffler's detailed recollection of tasks performed about 60 years ago is the result of compounded experience. During the Depression, as she and her husband struggled to make ends meet, Mrs. Loeffler not only washed her own family's clothes but took in the laundry of three or four bachelors who worked for the railroad (F. Loeffler, interview by author, February 7, 1997). Marge Frelich gave up her railroad work when she got married and had children. She helped her husband out on the ranch, but she eventually returned to the railroad, finding the work much less taxing.

I had an old wringer-type washing machine. I had to heat water on the stove. I was peddling cream, and I had to sterilize all the jars, and had to sterilize the separator, and -- have you ever seen a separator? There's all these little rings. Each one of those you had to do separately. I would be so tired sometimes, that I just didn't think I could drag one foot after the other. So that's why I went back to work. Because I thought, 'This is too much.' And you know the first thing I bought when I went back to work? A hot water tank. [M. Frelich, interview by author, February 7, 1997]

All those interviewed were asked what happened to housework once women began full-time jobs for the railroad. Sons and daughters might help with chores. Meals required forethought, and many relied on stove-top well-cookers that allowed them to prepare the evening dinner's main course early in the morning before going to work. Housework remained a woman's domain,

and only one subject described negotiating with her husband so that he shared in some housekeeping duties.

[H]e was very good about it. It took some conversation over it. But he was good, and he could cook and do things like that if need be. But you see, he was working so many different shifts than I was, that a lot of times we weren't even together, only in passing. But when he was home, sometimes I'd come home and he'd mop the floor, or he'd peel the potatoes or something like that -- after we had an understanding about it... Of course, I had the responsibility of the shopping and the laundry and things like that, but he would still help...

Of course George and I didn't have any children for the first four years. So then after I had my daughter, I was at home. So then those responsibilities were mine, and I accepted them. [B. Foltz, interview by author, March 20, 1997]

Mrs. Foltz's story is unusual, and even then she remained responsible for groceries and clothes washing. Most women continued to do the lion's share of the housework even while working full time. However, none of the women complained or spoke poorly of their husbands in this regard. While a woman would feel lucky if her husband helped with the housework, in most cases it was not expected. In fact, some of those interviewed seemed to pride themselves on being able to do it all. Mary Davis continued to take care of her boys' clothes, even after they left for college. As Ruth Schwartz Cowan (1991:380) explains, "Laundering was not just laundering; but an expression of love."

I did it all myself, and my daughter would help me. Every Saturday, we'd clean house. I used to do all the ironing after. I know people said I would stand here [in front of the living room's big picture window], and they could see me. They'd say, 'Saw you were ironing last night.' I'd have maybe thirteen or fourteen shirts for the boys and Don. When they went to college in the early 60s, you didn't have your wash and wear, see. And one of the boys had a big tin box, that he would send me his clothes in, because he didn't like to -- you know -- he wanted them to look nice. He didn't do it. He'd send it to me, and I'd send it back. [M.]

Davis, interview by author, February 21, 1997]

### **Railroad Work**

There are many different reasons why some Livingston women worked outside the home. For some women, work was simply a stage between finishing school and finding a husband. For others work was an important way to supplement the family income. Some women raised and supported families single-handedly, either after the death of a spouse, after a divorce, or in order to provide a stable income if the husband proved to be unreliable because of excessive drinking or other problems. But underneath the variety of explanations for working, lies the key to why these women worked -- money.

The single socioeconomic factor which correlates most strongly (in cross-sectional studies) with married women's employment is husband's income, and the correlation is strongly negative; the higher his income, the less likely it will be that she is working.  
[Cowan 1991:381]

During this century, women have received contradictory messages about employment. "The Great Depression and World War II were disruptive 'emergencies' that changed women's roles, at home, at work, and in public life" (Woloch 1996:280). As a consequence of this emergency status, women rarely thought of themselves as having a career (A. Page, interview by G. Peterson, February 10, 1986, OH #158-1, University of Montana). Work was not something hoped for, it was just what must be done as necessary. During the Depression, women were advised to stay home, and leave what few jobs there were for men who were supporting a whole family. During World War II, they

were urged to join the work force and replace the men now in the military. Despite the different messages, both situations led to an increase in the number of women in the work force and drew married women into the labor market, setting the stage for today's female labor force (Woloch 1996:289). However, the change in work patterns was not accompanied by a general change in society's notions about women's roles. "On the contrary, the emergencies confirmed a shared conviction that in the best of times as in the worst of times woman's place was in the home" (Woloch 1996:280). In fact, the interviews conducted for this project suggest that these domestic ideals continue to hold a strong place in the minds of Livingston working-class women -- although many have now resigned themselves to the fact that the ideals are unattainable for the current generation.

[W]hen I was growing up, when you became pregnant and were going to have a baby, you automatically quit working. Everybody did. And I always thought, 'Gee, I never worked when mine were little, and I still don't think one should.' Because that's the years you should be with the kids, when they're little... Some of them will have one, and two weeks later they're back to work, and someone else is taking care of their kid. But nowadays it's a necessity. Circumstances are different. [M. Davis, interview by author, February 21, 1997]

The contradiction between having to work yet believing it's best not to has meant that while women may have held a series of paid jobs throughout their lives, they rarely considered their employment as a 'career.' Writer and former railroad brakeman, Jocelyn W. Knowles, does an excellent job at succinctly describing the reality of many female employees hired on the railroad during World War II.

In their previous lives most of the women had been casual nonunion labor -- manicurists, nursemaids, typists, file clerks. One had been a nun. The fact is that we regarded ourselves as society did; we were transients, not serious breadwinners, people who might eventually be supported by men. We felt ourselves temporary in any work force, *although most of us knew we'd be working at one thing or another all our lives*. [Knowles 1995:68, emphasis added]

Ms. Knowles' story is similar to that told by many of the retired Livingston women. The railroad job was often just one of many that were held over the years.

"I graduated from high school, and from then on to the school of hard knocks, because I went right to work! ...[I]t was during the Depression that we graduated, most of us... I started to work right after I got out for the ... clinic in Lewistown and for Tommy Down who had a Chevrolet dealership, and I worked for the theater and ushered when you had those cute outfits. I held three jobs at one time to make \$75 a month -- on all three. [M. Davis, interview by author, February 21, 1997]

Some held their railroad job for only a few years, until marriage or birth of a child. Others took the full-time positions after their children were in school. Still others started working for the railroad with the intent of just working awhile, yet ended staying on until retirement. Mary Davis started with the railroad in order to help save some money to send her children to college. "I thought I'd work awhile, but then I worked thirty years -- just about thirty... After you get seniority and work awhile... the wages are better than anywhere else in town" (M. Davis, interview by author, February 21, 1997).

While there were times in Livingston's history when women entered into traditionally male railroad occupations, in general women found employment in positions customarily relegated to their sex. The majority of Livingston women

who worked for the railroad worked in the accounting offices on the second floor of the depot. Others worked in various offices along the tracks. All took pride in their work and enjoyed it -- in terms of the camaraderie, the skill required, and the money. Women rarely advanced through the ranks into managerial positions, yet any feelings of disappointment that might have been felt at the time were muted during the interviews. Lack of professional advancement for women was the norm, so some types of promotions were simply not expected.

Mr. Nelson, who was the district storekeeper at the time, wanted to make me an assistant, but they would not let a women have those jobs -- not then. Now it's different. If then were now, you wouldn't have any trouble getting it. But St. Paul [the central office] would not tolerate a woman in any job like that. Another job that was hard for a woman to get was chief clerk, but once in awhile one of us would get it... Men would be promoted when they didn't think of promoting women to any of those positions... [I]t didn't bother me too much because it just wasn't done. See you just didn't expect it like you would now. [M. Davis, interview by author, February 21, 1997]

Women did build seniority and were thus able to add stability to their position. The seniority system might mean a bit of instability early on, but provided job-security the longer one worked. If a layoff or job cut occurred, a person who had seniority could simply 'bump into' a different position held by someone with less seniority. That person would in turn bump someone else, the final result being that the person at the bottom of the line was out of a job until something new opened up. In fact, office jobs were considered steadier than many of the shop jobs. A woman's husband might lose his job in a mass layoff at the shops, and she'd still have her office job.

It was common for Livingston girls to take the business course in high



school. They learned typing, shorthand, bookkeeping, commercial law, and accounting basics. This prepared many for railroad office jobs. Others went to Spokane for agent and telegraphy training or to a school there offering instruction on the new comptometer machines. New female employees might start out as messengers, responsible for mail distribution, or in the 'machine room.' The machine room was separate from the main accounting office. There were many young women and a few men working in the machine room, watched over by a male supervisor. Employees who worked longer might eventually bid for jobs in the main office or 'big room,' although those interviewed don't remember too many women working out there. The machine room was always noisy, and it was hot in the summer when the sun beat in through the windows. The various machines were used for different accounting procedures.

We had to run all the freight, and we had to figure all the lumber and everything... [Y]ou got so you knew these engines... And then they'd send all these little slips up from the shop, you know, if they had to get a nut or a bolt, they had to get a little form and make it out. Then you had to price all those. And then we'd have to run it once and somebody else would check it. [G. Isbell, interview by author, March 21, 1997]

Helen Watson worked in the machine room but eventually bid on a job in the front office. She was a time keeper, figuring the hours people worked and what they worked on. Women might also work as clerks in other offices in the train yard. Some worked in the Materials Department and others in the Yard Office. Katheryn Brasier worked in the Yard Office and explained what her position entailed:

It was a job... working with figures all the time, and all of these things to memorize... Station numbers, ...those had to be memorized. You had to know what kind of cars, the length of cars -- it was just a multitude of things. You had to be on your toes all the time... If there was a car set out short of destination, say from Laurel to Livingston, then we had to know that car number, what it was set out for, then that had to be wired into St. Paul. [K. Brasier, interview by author, February 21, 1997]

The yard clerk's position was eventually combined with the caller's. A caller was responsible for getting together a train crew. If men couldn't be reached by phone, then the caller would have to go by car to find them (K. Brasier, interview by author, February 21, 1997). Morris Gullickson (interview by author, February 7, 1977) remembers that when he was young, boys were often hired as callers, walking or riding their bicycles to various houses and calling the men into work.

When the accounting office was relocated to headquarters in St. Paul, Minnesota, some women 'bumped in' to other positions throughout Montana or moved to the Twin Cities. Florence Loeffler went to Helena and bumped into a position in the Freight Office. Her husband had been transferred to Helena five years before, and the two had been commuting on weekends to be with each other. When Mrs. Loeffler finally transferred out of Livingston, all her children had completed high school (F. Loeffler, interview by author, February 7, 1997).

Women often worked as agents and telegraphers at outlying stations. These positions differed from those in the accounting office in that they involved travelling around, especially for new employees. In the eastern United States, women agents and telegraphers were not expected to work nights, but in the West night work was not uncommon for women (Jepsen 1996:75). It

took seniority to ensure good hours and stability in an operator's situation.

As far as operators went, we had what was called the extra board. And you worked the extra board until you could hold a permanent position. On the extra board, you'd fill in for somebody that was on vacation or somebody off sick, whatever. So it might be two weeks here, two weeks there. Maybe a month some place...

Probably the first time I bid in a job I'd only worked for about seven, eight months. And then I only worked that job a month and I got bumped out of it -- might've been somebody back out of the service... Then it was back on the extra board again... I think I probably worked the extra board for, oh, probably a couple years that time before I ended up bidding something in. [H. Carpenter, interview by author, February 20, 1997]

While most who worked the extra board did not bring their families with them, women might bring along children if circumstances required it. Sometimes they relied on extended family, kindly hotel owners, or fellow female employees to help watch their children (M. Wright, interview by author, October 1, 1997).

### **Benefits**

The three key benefits reported by women who worked for Northern Pacific were equal pay for equal work, paid maternity leave, and excellent insurance. In addition, retirees cited the security of the railroad pension. Mothers cited railroad insurance covering various emergencies that would otherwise have overwhelmed their families financially. Most credit the unions with having ensured these benefits.

The unions were good. If it hadn't been for the unions, we wouldn't have had the salaries we had. You had to pay dues. In fact, I still send them money... We're all under the Railroad Retirement Act, see? Everybody else is Social Security. We paid in all the time, and actually railroad retirement is better than Social Security. It pays much better. [M. Davis, interview by author, February 21, 1997]

Miriam Wright's son was eighteen when he was badly burned in an accident. She said one of the first things she did was run home and look at the insurance papers. She could finally breathe a sigh of relief when she saw that her children were covered through their eighteenth year (M. Wright, interview by author, October 1, 1997). Cathy Bosley (interview by author, March 21, 1997) took advantage of both maternity leave and the insurance when her first child was born pre-maturely. Paid maternity leave was usually three months, but Mrs. Bosley was given six. During her pregnancy, she had continued to drive the forklift over the railroad tracks, and do other difficult work, and she went into labor early. The liberal maternity leave ensured that she had a job waiting for her when she returned.

Livingston women spoke proudly of receiving equal pay for equal work.

The unions, to be sure, had successfully contested sex discrimination in wages in many 'equal pay for equal work' cases... But although sex differentials were narrowed as a result of these struggles, they were not eliminated...

Still, because men and women rarely did 'equal work' ... the outcome... was to narrow sex differentials in wages, not to eliminate them. [Milkman 1991:444]

While Livingston women did not have much opportunity to advance within the railroad, they considered the pay and benefits extremely fair.

Advancement of women into most supervisory positions was simply not expected. Some of those interviewed indicated that railroad pay was double what they had been making in previous jobs at banks and offices around town, restaurants, stores, and baby sitting. Despite modern legislation mandating equality in the work place, after Burlington Northern closed down operations in

Livingston in the early 1980s, women were not able to find other jobs that paid as well. For many, the struggle to make ends meet had become more difficult. Union jobs with the railroad offered a good salary and benefits and the protection afforded by accrued seniority -- and nothing has appeared to take the place of those positions.

Some families left town. Those not yet retired who stayed in Livingston -- men and women -- found other jobs and continue the quotidian efforts of raising a family and making ends meet. However, a sense of security based on the parental guise of the railroad company towards its employees had disappeared. Many of those interviewed likened fellow railroad employees to family and noted that once you landed a railroad job, you expected to have it until you retired. The relations of a society at large are often mirrored at other levels; that of company toward employees, and at the personal level of household relations (Muller 1977:7). Several generations of Livingston residents found comforting continuity in the relationship between the town and the railroad. The pullout of Burlington Northern in the 1980s marked the end of an era, and one might predict that as old understandings of the relationship between company and employee changed, so too would household relations and personal conceptions of gender for those affected by the closing of the shops.

### **Chronology of Significant Events in Livingston History**

The following chart outlines significant events in Livingston history. The second chronology lists milestones in the lives of the women whose voices fill the pages of this paper. Although these lists of dates and events lack texture, they bring together important pieces of data. Juxtaposing the two time lines allows one to see where the circumstances of a particular woman's life fall with regard to various episodes both in Livingston and at the national level.

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1882	Northern Pacific platates Livingston townsite. (Martin 1996:1)
1893	The Panic of 1893. Northern Pacific experiences financial troubles.
1894	Railroad Strike of 1894
1902	Livingston's current Depot building built, its grand style symbolized Livingston's importance as the gateway to Yellowstone National Park.
1914-18	World War I
1920	Nationally, railroad payroll reaches its peak (Martin 1990:8).
1922	Railroad Shopmen's Strike of 1922
1930s	Great Depression
1939-45	World War II
c. 1959	Northern Pacific's Livingston accounting offices are relocated to St. Paul, Minnesota.
1964	Civil Rights Bill is passed.
1970	Burlington Northern absorbs the Northern Pacific Railway in merger (Martin 1996:2).
c. 1970s	Civil rights legislation implemented at railroad in Livingston. Women are now hired for traditionally male jobs in the shops and

trains.

Telegraphy phased out at rural Montana stations.

- 1979 Passenger service (Amtrak) through Livingston stopped.
- 1981 Burlington Northern puts Livingston Depot up for sale. Livingston's former railroad employees angered.
- 1985 Burlington Northern maintenance shops close in Livingston, and BN offers old depot to the city. The Depot Foundation is created, and the city leases the building to the new foundation.

## **Lives of Women Who Worked for the Railroad: A Chronology**

Key to abbreviations:

RA-Rose Amsk	BF-Beryl Foltz	NP-Natalina Parisi
CB-Cathy Bosley	MF-Marge Frelich	HW-Helen Watson
KB-Katheryn Brasier	AG-Anne Gwaltney	MW-Miriam Wright
HC-Harriet Carpenter	GI-Gery Isbell	rr-railroad
MD-Mary Davis	CK-Carolyn Kahle	
CD-Carol Devine	FL-Florence Loeffler	

Data used in this chronology was taken from transcripts and notes gathered during interviews with subjects. For additional information on those interviewed for this paper, please see Appendix.

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- c. 1901      NP born in Italy.
- 1902        HW born.
- 1908        FL born.
- c. 1914-18   NP worked in rr shops.
- 1917        MD born.
- NP married (?).
- 1920        KB born.
- c. 1921      MF born.
- MW born.
- 1922        BF born.
- 1925        RA born in Italy.
- 1927        AG born.
- GI born.
- 1929        MW's mother dies. She and her brother are sent to live with



- relatives in Paradise Valley.
- c. 1932 HC born.
- 1935 CK born.
- MD graduates from high school, and she holds three jobs at once before marriage and children.
- c. 1937 MD gets married.
- 1938 MF graduates from high school, then goes to college in Los Angeles for one year.
- KB graduates from high school.
- c. 1939-45 BF is married. Her husband is in military, so she travels with him and finds various jobs wherever they live.
- MW married to first husband c. 1939.
- 1940 KB married. (This first marriage later ends in divorce.)
- 1942 MF starts work at rr.
- KB starts work at rr. (She feels she must work because of domestic problems. She continues working with three young children. Her mother helps her care for them.)
- c. 1943 HW starts full-time railroad work. Previously, she worked at a hotel and restaurant and had substituted for a friend at the railroad offices. (It is likely HW was married at this time.)
- RA graduates from high school and begins work for rr.
- c. 1945 FL begins rr work. She is married and her children are in high school. (After high school, FL worked as a grocery clerk and as a bookkeeper and seamstress for Singer. After marriage, FL washed men's clothes for extra money during Depression.)
- c. 1946 MF gets married and quits rr job. However, she helps husband with creamery business. Does no rr work while children are very young.
- c. 1947 AG and GI start at comptometer school in Spokane. (Previously, both women had been working at a Livingston bank.) In August, AG and GI begin rr work. Both are single.

- BF is divorced and returns to Livingston. She then goes to comptometer school in Spokane and begins rr work.
- 1948 RA gets married. After marriage, she has twins and later returns to work. However, she gets pregnant with another set of twins soon after and quits the rr. (While children are growing up she does some part-time work and helps her husband with the family business of making pine cone jewelry.)
- 1949 AG gets married.  
CD born.
- 1951 AG quits rr and leaves Livingston because husband has job at a ranch in Dillon.
- c. 1952 AG begins work for phone company in Helena. (She and her husband left Dillon after he broke his leg in an accident.) They have no children.  
HC starts telegraphy school in Spokane. (Previously, she had lived for two years at her sister's in Livingston working what she describes as "piddly" jobs.)
- 1953 In April, BF takes maternity leave to have first child. She has gotten married while employed at rr. After her maternity leave expires, she resigns.  
MD begins rr work at 34 years of age. She has 4 children, but all are school age.  
HC reports to headquarters in Missoula and begins telegraphy work. Her job involves travel. She is single.  
CB born.
- c. mid-1950s CK's first marriage (right out of high school).  
GI takes rr maternity leave with first child. She returns to work briefly, but quits when she and her husband move to their ranch.
- c. 1955 MF returns to work at rr.  
HC's first marriage. It later ends in divorce.

- c. 1956 MW separates from first husband and returns to Livingston. She starts to telegraphy school in Spokane in the spring and brings two of her children with her. She begins rr work the next year.
- 1959 Northern Pacific offices close in Livingston.  
HW quits railroad and begins work for city/county.  
FL transfers to Helena to continue rr work. Her husband has already been transferred there.
- c. 1963-64 MW quits rr after 6 and a half years. She gets married again.
- 1966 HW retires at the age of 64.
- 1968 KB remarries.
- 1969 HC's second marriage. It later ends in divorce. (HC does have one daughter. She continues to work and does some moving while her daughter is still in school.)  
CD has graduated from high school and is working for the railroad.
- c. 1970 CK gets divorce and works for school administration in order to support her children.
- 1971 CB graduates from high school and goes to Bozeman's Vo-Tech for secretarial training.
- c. 1973 KB retires from rr.
- c. 1975 FL retires from rr.  
In November, CB begins rr work in shops. She is single. (She had worked for school administration before applying for the rr position.)  
In December, CK joins rr as an electrician's apprentice.  
CD resigns from rr to be full-time homemaker and mother to her two children.
- 1976 In June, CK quits the rr because she is getting remarried.  
RA's youngest child graduates from high school, and RA returns to full-time employment -- now for the courthouse in Livingston.

- 1978 CD divorces and is forced to return to work. She works at rr again, but now 'A' and 'B' rosters have been combined, so she is placed in traditionally male positions.
- 1981 CB gets married. She later her first child, takes six months of maternity leave, and returns to work.
- 1982 MF retires from rr.
- CD moves from materials department to property tax department.
- c. 1983 MD retires from rr.
- c. 1985 The rr pulls out of Livingston. CB quits and finds a new job at Westmont Home Health.
- Some rr offices in Billings close, so CD moves from Billings, taking a rr position in Kansas.
- 1990 RA retires from courthouse.
- CD promoted to Manager Purchasing and relocates to Fort Worth, Texas. (She is still working and has remarried.)
- 1993 HC retires from rr. (She retired from a position in Helena.)

## CHAPTER 4

### Getting by: Acting like a Lady and the Realities of Full-time Work

Montana goes by many names -- Big Sky Country, the Last Best Place, Treasure State -- none of which allude to the pressure and stresses often encountered in the day-to-day travails of making a living. The sparse population, the harsh climate, and out-of-the-way location have often made it difficult to cobble together a secure existence. Hard-working women take pride in their fortitude, yet cling tightly to the comforts of an ordered world. When these women look at contemporary society, they see many problems and reflect nostalgically on times past. Railroading life had its difficulties -- life lived by the clock and occasional layoffs -- yet offered relative security to most of the Livingston residents employed with Northern Pacific, and later, Burlington Northern. While decrying certain modern trends perceived as dangerous or problematic, they are sympathetic toward younger members of their own families enmeshed in such predicaments, who they view as forced to play by today's rules. Indeed, the women are also sympathetic towards themselves and their own deviations from the domestic ideal. Many explained, for instance,

that they never intended to work while their children were in school, but circumstances forced them to compromise. In the face of adverse or trying conditions, they did the best they could to get by. Marge Frelich explained her situation this way:

I was 26 when I got married, so I had worked for four years. And then, wanting to be the perfect mother, I quit my job. So I quit for nine years, while I was having children, you know, while they were young. And we lived on a farm again, finally. And if you know anything about farming -- I went back to work... I was delivering cream to people, and one of my customers was a storekeeper [at the railroad]... [H]e... asked if I would do some relief work... And that started the ball rolling again. I wasn't *looking* for work, because you know I did -- I wanted to stay with the kids, but it just worked out that way. [M. Frelich, interview by author, February 7, 1997]

In many Livingston families, things 'worked out' so that the wife worked outside the home before, after, and sometimes during her children's early years. Some might be working to make ends meet, to help make house payments, or provide 'extras' for their children. Mary Davis and her family moved to Livingston in 1952. Before that time, when she was in Glendive, she typed up records for one of the local physicians at home. And while in Billings, she occasionally filled-in at a small dining establishment she and her husband had purchased with two other men. Once in Livingston, Davis began work for the railroad as a steno clerk, yet says she had no intention of staying as long as she did.

Diane was in the eighth grade, Mary was in the sixth, and the twins were over here [at Winans School] in the third grade... Because we were just across the street [from the school], and it wasn't hard for them. I'd go early in the morning, and the kids would all go and come home and make their sandwiches and whatever. And it worked out fine.

See, Diana was in the eighth grade, and I wanted to start saving some money. I bought U.S. Savings Bonds so she could go to college, you see...

I thought I'd work awhile, but then I worked thirty years... After you get seniority and work for awhile the [railroad] wages are better than anywhere else in town. So we helped -- Don and I -- four kids through college. [M. Davis, interview by author, February 21, 1997]

By emphasizing the transient, unplanned nature of their work, women downplayed the importance of their employment and emphasized traditional values. This is one of the ways they were able to negotiate the realities of full-time employment without abandoning the core ideology that defined their identity. Most chose to give greater meaning to their role as mother and housewife and to consider employment as a secondary factor. Anthropologists and other scholars note the significance of this realm beyond experience where people have the power to interpret life experiences and imbue them with symbolic meaning.

[T]raditional gender roles... were the basis of status, moral worth, and self-awareness linked together in a system of "interworking meanings." The importance of the phrase "interworking meanings" is suggested by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who -- while acknowledging the importance of class interest and social "strain" in shaping ideology -- insists that belief systems reveal a dimension of human experience beyond interest. That dimension is the meaning which people attribute to symbols and through which they represent social reality. [Mathews and De Hart 1990:154]

The majority of women interviewed did not consider themselves feminists and believed the push for equal rights has proven, for the most part, to be detrimental to women. This social reality was described in specific events or

ideas that held particular meaning for the interviewee. For Marge Frelich, problems with feminist movement were crystallized in an incident that occurred at the office.

I always said, 'If you act like a lady, you're going to be treated like a lady.' But after this women's lib really became pretty prevalent, there was a difference. Like one time, I was walking into the office, and I had an armload of books that I was carrying in, and a man went in the door ahead of me and let the door shut right in my face -- I wouldn't do that to a man -- and that's after I had worked there for years. I had never had anything like that happen before. So we lost a lot of respect, I think. Oh, we did gain in one way, I suppose, but... [M. Frelich, interview by author, February 7, 1997]

Working-class women have long been leery of feminism, considered the bastion of middle- and upper-class women with more comfortable lives. After women gained the right to vote, newly enfranchised suffragists turned their attention to sex-based discrimination in the law. However, a debate which began in the 1920s continues to this day. Women had originally sought better working conditions for women *because* of their sex, and it was feared by some that equal rights legislation would undermine these protective laws for women. Rather than extending the legal net of these labor laws to include men, it was feared that the protective legislation would be done away with altogether (Cott 1991:356).

The prevailing political tradition sets up a dichotomy where "the goal of enabling women to have the same opportunities and situations as men [is set] against the goal of enabling women to freely be different from men without adverse consequences" (Cott 1991:357). Traditional Montana industries, ranching, timber, railroading, and mining, involve hard physical labor and



dangerous working conditions. Some of those interviewed had seen these occupations take their toll on fathers and husbands and found the idea of women taking on such work simply to prove a point to be both foolhardy and the root of many problems in the work place.

I'm not a women's libber. If they're going to do the same type of work as a man, and if they can do it equally as well, well then that's okay. But we had women working out in the back of the store department later that couldn't do the heavy work that the men could do. And then in the meantime, the men came into the office, and they weren't trained to do clerical work. And it was kind of ridiculous.

Like I said, I'm not a women's libber. I look at what's going on in the army -- these women, you know, they insist on going into the army, and now you hear all this stuff about sexual harassment. You didn't have that before, you know. [M. Frelich, interview by author, February 7, 1997]

This gulf between the belief systems of feminists and traditionalists has resulted in a dichotomous, 'us' and 'them' mentality. Feminists are viewed as breaking female solidarity and wanting to be like men (Mathews and De Hart 1990:153). Women's libbers are 'pushy' women who, believing this isn't a man's world any more, barge in where they don't belong (G. Isbell, interview by author, March 21, 1997). The equal rights movement is seen as partially responsible for the necessity of two incomes in many households, although, in many cases, subjects came from families with a long history of women doing paid work -- some only occasionally and others full time (C. Bosley, interview by author, March 21, 1997). Those interviewed did not elaborate specifically on how they arrived at their views about the equal rights movement. Yet it seemed to them -- and rightly so -- to represent an upsetting of the traditional order of things and to place a new emphasis on women in the work force, the

very thing that most of these Livingston railroading women had downplayed throughout their lives. This new emphasis threatened not only established gender roles, but the whole notion of family (Mathews and De Hart 1990:18).

Negotiating new circumstances, yet adhering to traditional values requires a great deal of flexibility in interpretation. How does a woman fit new, customarily male *occupations* without also taking on male *roles* or the role of a 'women's libber?'

The two younger women interviewed who made inroads during the 1970s in traditionally male positions on the railroad drew lines between themselves and feminists who wanted to prove something and between themselves and women who fooled around, didn't take the job seriously, or wanted to be coddled by the men. They did this by underlining the fact that they were willing to work hard and took the jobs simply because the pay was so much better than anywhere else. Like the discourse of the older generation, the tenor of these interviews indicated that while taking advantage of positions opened up to women in the 1960s and 70s, these women did not intend to upset the traditional order of things -- they were simply doing what they had to do to get by (C. Kahle, interview by author, May 29, 1997).

Anyone thought to upset this traditional order was suspect. The railroad brought in college-educated women from St. Paul to increase the efficiency with which the Livingston operation was run. Livingston railroad office workers weren't distrustful of a college degree alone. This situation presented many other dichotomies as well: big city versus small town; career women versus traditional women who happened to be working; local needs versus cost-

cutting measures instituted by management from St. Paul; and experience versus education.

Later on, after the merger, there were women coming in who had gone to college, and they would be these efficiency experts, and they'd have never worked on railroads, and we resented that a lot you know. They were very intelligent women, but they didn't have the background, and so there was a lot of resentment about that you know -- but they weren't from here. Well, they were usually sent up here from St. Paul, that was our home office at the time. And that's still going on to this day. They didn't take over our positions, they were just sent up here to cut jobs... so you can see why there was resentment... Well, you know how it goes whenever these people come into town and that's what they're there for. [M. Frelich, interview by author, February 7, 1997]

It is not surprising that Livingston women who saw themselves as traditional housewives and mothers would be suspicious of the efficiency experts at several different levels. The college-educated women from St. Paul threatened established norms that local working women actively strived to maintain. Their presence not only foreshadowed job cuts which would affect individuals, families, and the town in general -- but they were a different type of woman suddenly thrust into the domain of others with a dissimilar social reality, contesting, by their very presence, the primacy of that reality.

### **Division of Labor: Women First, Workers Second**

The railroad was like most other industries in that it typed jobs by sex and by race. "[O]ccupational sex-typing had helped to ensure that employed women would continue to view themselves as women first, workers second" (Milkman 1991:441). Thus sex-typing worked to maintain one strand of the

'interworking meanings' instrumental in helping Livingston women maintain their social reality emphasizing traditional values.

The railroad regulated employment with a system of A and B rosters. These were two separate employment tracks; with clerks on the A roster and laborers and other shop workers on the B roster. Women worked only in A-roster positions. Men's positions might be on either roster. However, once on a particular track, one did not cross over into the other for job advancement. Livingston's male and female railroad employees working in the 1940s and 50s did not view this as discriminatory. In general, A-roster jobs were thought to be better-paying. Even though most supervisor's jobs were held by men, when a man and a woman did hold the same type of position, they got equal pay (M. Frelich interview by author, February 7, 1997; K. Brasier, interview by author, February 21, 1997).

Well, the railroad never discriminated against women as far as wages. They always paid them the same as they did a man, and that's all there was to it. But now they did -- clear up until the time I started working, '52 to '55...-- they held certain jobs open for women. Secretaries, the accounting office, the PBX boards, telephone operators, [and] so forth... Some of the very high officials -- and I think this was just their wives or for their own personal protection -- they wanted men secretaries. They did a lot of traveling -- but nobody thought anything different of it. The ones that did work got full wages. And full benefits. [M. Gullickson, interview by author, February 7, 1997]

There is some disagreement among those interviewed about the purpose of the 'A' and 'B' rosters and the rules surrounding them. Mrs. Brasier (interview by author February 21, 1997) believed that 'A' clerks could hold 'B' jobs, but those on the 'B' roster could not move into 'A' positions. Mrs. Frelich (interview

by author, February 7, 1997) held that there was no movement between the two. All those interviewed who worked when the dual-roster system was in place felt that 'A' jobs were better than positions on the 'B' list. When asked why the railroad might have had such a system, Mrs. Brasier said education was not a factor, but rather it was simply an "organizational thing." Data on early Northern Pacific hiring practices is unavailable, but evidence from other railroads indicates that segregation in the labor market had both ethnic and gender dimensions (Nash 1989:619). For instance, on the Pennsylvania Railroad during the First World War, while most white Protestant women of Northern European origin were hired for clerical and office jobs, black, Slavic, and Italian women were usually hired as shop laborers (Nash 1989:619). Many railroad unions also maintained color codes and gender barriers until well into the 1950s (M. Gullickson, interview by author, February 7, 1997).<sup>5</sup>

The dual-roster system continued into the 1970s. Carol Devine, now Manager of Corporate Travel for Burlington Northern - Santa Fe, quit the railroad in 1975 to become a full-time mother. After a divorce, she returned to the railroad in 1978, and by that time the A and B rosters had been combined.

Therefore, I was required to work non-traditional female positions of janitor, crane crew groundsmen, forklift operator, and dock laborer... I worked on the material dock until 1982 when I accepted a management position in the Property Tax Department in Billings. [C. Devine, personal communication, June 26, 1997]

She described the shop work as extremely difficult, particularly for women, and noted that women had the extra burden of proving they could perform these traditionally male duties (C. Devine, personal communication, June 26, 1997).

With A and B rosters combined, the realities of new employment opportunities challenged long-held world views. Livingston women began to talk openly about the necessity of two incomes to keep a modern family above water, yet they resisted letting this admission directly challenge their belief in traditional gender roles. Historians have described this national phenomenon that started at the end of the 1960s.

By the end of the 1960s...increasing numbers of women would challenge classification by sex... [C]ritics would attempt to separate 'sex' (anatomical differences) from 'gender' (the meaning a particular culture attaches to such differences)... In the meantime, practice was operating more effectively than theory as changes in the work place undermined traditional gender roles in the postwar years even as women continued to pay them lip service. [Mathews and De Hart 1990:31]

In attempting to ameliorate the tension created when working by new rules and living by old ones, the Livingston railroading women emphasized the practical. In the 1970s, the Livingston shops began hiring women for traditionally male occupations -- engineers, conductors, brakemen, laborers, and electricians. Cathy Bosley and Carolyn Kahle were two of the first Livingston women to take advantage of the implementation of civil rights legislation in the 1970s. Both women were employed at the school district administration office when they learned that positions in the railroad shops were being formally opened up to women. Mrs. Kahle explained her decision to quit her office job this way:

Cathy and I both worked at the administration office, and we weren't getting much money at all for what we were doing. And I was not getting child support... So this is when this big deal on minorities came up. And I had a friend whose husband worked for the railroad, and he says, 'Carolyn, you should try that because

you *are* the minority.' And so I went down and applied as an electrician's apprentice. And unbeknownst to me, Cathy had gone down about the same time... So I started working there because I made twice the money. I needed the money to raise my four children. [C. Kahle, interview by author, May 29, 1997]

Like women of past generations, the railroad provided a reasonable income for Carolyn Kahle and others who found themselves unwillingly thrust into the position of primary breadwinner. Railroad jobs allowed women to provide for their children in the event of divorce, an alcoholic spouse, or the layoffs that might be part of the cycle of a husband who worked in the shops. While neither Mrs. Kahle nor Mrs. Bosley set out to 'prove' anything by working in the shops, they also felt they had a right to be there.

And I will say I got along very well with the men. They respected my rights as a woman. And you know, there was no funny business. I got teased of course. And of course, being the only woman there, you're always on show, so you want to make sure you're doing the right thing. And I will say one time, this electrician that traveled all over came up one day, and he said, 'Just what are you doing down here? Are you one of those women's libbers?' And I said, 'No.' I says, 'I'm down here for the same reason you are -- I'm down here to make money.'

'Well, doesn't your husband pay child support?'

I says, 'No, he doesn't.'

'Oh, okay.'

So then that was alright. I wasn't trying to be a -- you know - - 'just because a man can do this I can do this.' I was down there to make money. [C.Kahle, interview by author, May 29, 1997]

Mrs. Bosley, a single woman when she applied for the position, also enjoyed her work at the shops. Most of the men appeared to accept her, although she occasionally encountered direct animosity. Both women felt that they got along with most male co-workers because their reasons for seeking employment in the shops were practical and legitimate.

The guys were real nice. I'd say most of them were really nice. The ones that were younger, like my age -- and I can only think of three offhand -- they'd use profanity and stuff and try to do the shock systems, but everybody else was just father images or whatever...

I would [occasionally] hear things like, 'Here you are taking a job away from a man who has to support his family.' Well, at the time, I was single, and I thought, 'Hey, I've got to support myself, too. So what's the difference here?' But you know, you really didn't get into that very much. [C. Bosley, interview by author, March 21, 1997]

While not initially taking shop jobs to make a point, women who entered the shops in the 1970s spoke of having to prove themselves, feeling like they were on display, and feeling under pressure to perform well. All those who knew Carolyn Kahle when she was young describe her as exceptionally pretty. In fact, one of the women interviewed said Carolyn had been the most beautiful woman in Livingston. In the shops she was an object of curiosity. The roundhouse boss made the night crew take down *Playboy* pinups, but new female shop employees still had to put up with what they described as 'teasing.'

I know the one kept razzin' me one time, and finally I just looked up at him -- and I can't remember exactly what I said. He says, "Well, I was beginning to wonder if you ever got mad." And so then after that he called me "Sunshine"...

They used to tease me. We had to wear bandannas so our hair wouldn't get caught. So I always rolled my hair up, and then of course wore my bandanna. And one day, the superintendent came over and said, 'I heard you're wearing your hair down today.' I mean all the way from the main office, you know. And then another day he said, 'I heard you had your fingernails painted today.' [C. Kahle, interview by author, May 29, 1997]

Such teasing was one method of negotiating and coming to terms with changing gender roles. It could be used to make a woman feel more isolated or



to make her feel like part of the group. Teasing might also be a way for men to act out their hostility towards the new arrangements in the traditionally male work environment. Under the guise of a joke, certain tensions could be released.

Every day was a new adventure. We'd clown around. They threw -- I was a lot smaller then than I am now -- they threw me in my locker one time and set it on fire. They really did! They were just joking, you know. Yeah, ha ha. They got me out. Nothing happened or anything." [C. Bosley, interview by author, March 21, 1997]

Mrs. Bosley downplayed this incident. She later suggested that women who had a hard time might have come in expecting trouble. Because of the newness of the situation, there was psychological room for interpreting the meaning behind such 'clowning,' and Mrs. Bosley chose to see it as teasing and not as harassment. Perhaps one reason behind her acceptance of this behavior is that she felt as though by beginning work in the shops she was entering into a male domain. Another woman, who believed the work place was no longer 'male' but rather now belonged to all workers regardless of sex, would likely have considered such actions as abuse or harassment.

### **A Man's Job**

Well over fifty years before Mrs. Kahle and Mrs. Bosley entered the shops, another woman started there and worked diligently for thirty years. Like them, her reasons for seeking railroad employment were entirely practical. Even more than they were, she was labeled as something of an oddity. For many reasons, Bertha Gonder became a symbol and folk icon for Livingston

residents. She represented hard-working ideals and the toughness of body and spirit on which these Westerners prided themselves. She was first of all a mother, a woman forced to engage in a man's occupation in order to support her family. Mrs. Gonder began work at the Northern Pacific in World War I in 1918 and did not retire until 1948, having served the railroad in both World War I and II. She was born in Bern, Switzerland in 1883 and came to the United States with her parents when she was a year old. In 1901, she married Frederick Gonder. Many details about her life are unclear, but in 1914 her husband died. In 1915, she moved to Livingston with her nine children, the oldest of whom was ten, and the youngest still a baby ("Bertha Gonder," obituary, 1962). In 1918, Mrs. Gonder began working at the railyard as an engine wiper to sustain herself and her young family (News article, March 22, 1946, newspaper name obscured, on display in the Park County Museum).

According to all accounts, Mrs. Gonder was not only tolerated in a man's realm, but respected for the hard work she did when life's circumstances demanded it. Yet, in reminiscences, she is described almost as a comic figure, short and round, and dressed like a man in her coveralls and cap. Many longtime Livingston residents have vivid memories of seeing her walk to work each morning. There are interlocking explanations as to why Mrs. Gonder was tolerated in a traditionally male occupation. She worked during both world wars when women were called to fill-in while men were gone; her circumstances were desperate; and she was merely an exception to the then largely unchallenged gender roles. Thus she was viewed as non-threatening and even applauded for her fortitude.

Mrs. Bertha F. Gonder... esteemed Park County matron,... won the respect of Northern Pacific and other railroad officials across the nation and her fellow employees when she demonstrated that a woman could successfully hold down a job as engine wiper at the local roundhouse. ["Bertha Gonder," obituary, 1962]

In fact, Gonder's situation was seen as such an anomaly at the time that she attained minor celebrity status. She was brought to the attention of Robert L. Ripley in *Believe It or Not*, and was also featured in *Look* magazine and in a letter to the editor in the November 21, 1938, issue of *Life Magazine*. The letter was accompanied by a posed photo of a smiling Mrs. Gonder wearing coveralls, work gloves, cap, and glasses and standing next to an engine with her wiper in hand.<sup>6</sup> Remembered for swabbing sooty engines, Mrs. Gonder apparently performed other custodial tasks that were nearly as dusty but not likely to spark the public's imagination. According to another woman who worked in the shops during the first world war, "She wiped engines for awhile, and then she was sweeping -- cleaned out the offices and then swept all around" (N. Parisi, Park Co. Historical Society transcript, December 14, 1981).

Women were non-threatening -- to other women, as well as to men -- as long as they knew their place, which meant sharing the same core beliefs about gender as fellow community members. For many of those interviewed, World War II marked a change in the way some women thought about work, leading to a shift in how some viewed employment. While women often held traditionally male jobs at many of the nation's railroads during the world wars, because their work was seen as temporary, they were denied seniority in many cases (Knowles 1995; see also Milkman 1991). A key argument against

seriously considering women in many railroad jobs was based on the notion that much of the work was simply too physically taxing for them. Most Livingston women interviewed would agree with this. Yet there are others who contested this widely held belief, insisting that the work was needlessly difficult and was perhaps kept so in order to keep women out. These women had begun to consider their jobs as an important part of their identities and lobbied for “work saving innovations that would be profitable to men and women alike: oiling switches, using aluminum markers, and so on” (Knowles 1995:74). Jocelyn Knowles, a brakeman during World War II, recalled a particular incident, in which she and another female employee, nicknamed ‘Little Smokey,’ were allowed to go out and throw a switch.

One day I was working with a girl named Claire Fredericks who talked a conductor into letting us throw a switch... The engineer stopped the train a short distance before the first switch. Mr. Keefer [the conductor] stood on the steps of the head car and watched us... It was a big heavy switch, and it was rusty. I tried to pull it up. Smokey tried. We tried pulling it together, my hands over hers. Then Smokey bent down and grabbed the switch with both hands, and I stood behind her and grabbed her at the waist... We both fell backward, but the switch had moved! A fraction. We went to the other side of the switch and tried kicking it up. I attempted to use my backside as a lever... At last, kicking and pushing and pulling, we got the switch halfway up, then over the halfway mark. Smokey jumped on it. We both bounced on it. The switch went down... Mr. Keefer sent the flagman to throw the next switch. We were humiliated. We were surprised at how difficult it had been. [Knowles 1995:67]

Knowles said she then asked the conductor why the switches weren’t oiled to make them easier to throw but got only a non-committal response.

“You’d think the men would want them oiled,” I said to Little Smokey as we counted our tickets.  
 “Not them,” she said good-humoredly. “They’re proud of their hernias. You got to have a hernia to be a real railroad man.”

[Knowles 1995:67]

Other explanations have been put forward for past male-dominance in the railroad industry. While not a Northern Pacific alumni, former Chesapeake and Ohio employee Milton Dolinger (personal communication, April 29, 1997) echoed sentiments of other interviewees in his description of certain employment practices. Mixing men and women on trips away from home was seen as a recipe for disaster. Rather than setting up rules of behavior to govern such trips, before the 1960s and 70s, women were simply not considered for such positions.

When I started with C&O in 1954, there were no women that I knew of in substantive positions, other than secretaries. And even at that there were great numbers of male secretaries because rail executives had to travel quite a bit, and it was obviously better to take their male aides with them. [M. Dolinger, personal communication, April 29, 1997]

Historical analysis has shown that gender definitions are intricately linked with biological categories, social cohesion and moral order (Mathews and De Hart 1990:xii). Women who challenged widely held beliefs about proper sexual division of labor found their motives questioned on several different levels. While a woman's ability to pull her own weight in situations necessitating physical labor was one issue, there were others that more directly threatened those who maintained the established social perspective. Those who continued to define the world by traditional gender roles felt certain railroad occupations, particularly those that involved travel, would undermine women's primary roles as wife and mother. This would in turn threaten the very status of the

family. The family, as primary educator of children, would no longer be effective in teaching adherence to a traditional moral order. Those interviewed did not talk in terms of moral order and social cohesion, however, but in terms of traditional obligations accorded by gender. They voiced their concerns with practical questions. How could a marriage stay together if a woman insisted on a job that took her away from home regularly? Such a situation would not only disrupt family life, it would throw the women together with male employees in motels in distant locales -- almost surely leading to marriage problems for some. If a woman traveled regularly, how would she ever find a babysitter willing to watch her children for a full two days or more? Mary Davis suggested women with such jobs would find themselves old maids (M. Davis, interview by author, February 21, 1997).

## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusion: “I will tell you, it takes guts.”

This project has focused on the collection of oral histories from Livingston women who worked for the railroad and on the interpretation of those narratives. It is hoped that both the narratives themselves and the interpretation will add texture and a new depth to the Livingston Depot Center museum's representation of the railroad heyday and the railroading way of life. The personal narratives discussed in previous chapters cause one to reflect on the changing and contradicting notions of femininity. As is illustrated by the words of these women as they attempt to reconcile traditional values with changing times and new economic circumstances, the pursuit of an ideal femininity is a venture fraught with the tensions inherent in weaving contradictions into a coherent reality. “[T]he individual desires an internally consistent femininity, whereas the ideal is socially structured as inconsistent” (Marks 1989:50-51).

The Livingston community faced special stresses. The pull out of Burlington Northern marked the end of an era for the town and put into question old models of social organization. The closing of the shops caused

anxiety as a result of lost jobs and forced decisions about whether to stay in town or to move. In addition, through the 1960s, 70s and 80s, women began to talk more openly about the necessity of two incomes to support a family, thus indicating a shift in their self-perception and in the value they placed on their employment.

Many radical changes occurred in Livingston within a few decades. Changes in employment practices -- the hiring of women in traditionally male positions that began in the 1970s -- accompanied other changes in the community. None of these changes won immediate acceptance. The merger with Burlington Northern in 1970, the shop closures in 1986, and the sale of the former transcontinental trackage to the shortline Montana Rail Link were all fought actively in the courts by Burlington Northern employees ("Livingston Depot Center," 1988:420). Historically, the town took much pride in the fact that it laid along a transcontinental route. Railroad employees had also valued and found identity in their union status and the ability of unions to negotiate with railroad officials, but with the pullout, unions lost most of their earlier influence.

The transition from a railroad town to one focusing on tourism has proven difficult, not only in terms of identity, but financially as well. In fact, the bulk of the money for restoring the Livingston Depot came from a \$400,000 Community Development Block Grant given to communities suffering economic hardship after the closing of a major industry. "The grant application was approved after several months of resistance from the EDA [Economic Development Industry], which did not equate an increase in tourism-related



jobs with the loss of 1,000 high-wage railroad jobs” (“Livingston Depot Center,” 1988:42).

These radical changes influenced the dreams some former railroading women held for their children. Once upon a time, a job with the railroad was considered the ticket to long-term financial security. Nowadays, a college degree is viewed as the best collateral for the future. Cathy Bosley and others encouraged their children to go to college.

No job is guaranteed anymore. You know, it used to be like when you did get a job on the railroad, you were set for life. And that was a good learning experience -- you're not. In fact, my ten-year-old, she already wants to go to college and become a teacher... We just have to figure out how to pay for it. [C. Bosley, interview by author, March 21, 1997]

Most women presented here completed high school and perhaps took further training at a technical school before working for the railroad. A few went to college for a semester or two, and many had hopes that their children would go further than they did themselves or proudly told stories of well-educated, talented sons and daughters.

I graduated from high school in Livingston, Montana, and completed two semesters of college at M.S.U. During that time I was working for the Northern Pacific Railroad as a clerk in the union. This was in 1969, and I held various different clerical positions within the union ranks. I truly believed I was making more money than I ever could with a college education, so I quit college to work full-time at the railroad...

My oldest son has completed college, and I am still trying to get my youngest son to return after only 1.5 years. They own their own business and work together in Overland Park, Kansas...

I would like to go back to school and get the education I so carelessly disregarded when I was younger... It may be something I pursue down the road. I think any future promotions depend on me furthering my education. [C. Devine, personal communication, June 26, 1997]

Natalina Parisi went to work for the railroad when she was thirteen and got married at sixteen. She had eleven children, but when one daughter, Adeline, showed special promise, she and her husband helped her through school.

She started teaching when she was eighteen years old. It was during the war, you know, and there was a shortage, and she went to school that summer...[in] Dillon. She went there that summer and fall. She taught outside of Clyde Park -- there was a little country school up on the hill. And then she went back [to school] the next summer, and then she taught at Wilsall, and then she went back to school that summer...

So then her dad says, "Instead of you going to school just in the summer, just go ahead and finish school." And she says, "Well, I don't have no money." And he said, "Well, we'll put you through school." So she went through school. And then the Superintendent of Schools from White Sulphur went to the college there and picked out the teachers that he wanted. He picked my daughter. [N. Parisi, Park Co. Historical Society transcript, December 14, 1981]

An education is not the only way to escape a hard-scrabble existence. Some mothers were simply happy that their daughters married well and were living comfortably.

These Livingston women loved working for the railroad and are proud of their accomplishments in the industry, but many consider their children to be their most outstanding achievements. Conversations turned often to subjects relating to children. A successful manager of corporate travel for Burlington Northern-Santa Fe wrote, "I have two children (both boys) that are now 27 and 22 years of age... They are my greatest accomplishment since they are such hard-working, goal-oriented, handsome young men" (C. Devine, personal communication, June 26, 1997). Women marked time by indicating a child's

age or grade level. Reasons for working often included making more money to give their children a more comfortable life or help them through school. The basis for giving up paid employment also revolved around children's needs. Most stayed home with young children, and once children were in school, they tried to maintain a schedule that would have them back home and ready to greet the children at the end of the school day.

These Livingston women may have placed more emphasis on their traditional roles as wife and mother than they did on their paid employment with the railroad, but the opportunity to work at a challenging, well-paying job gave many confidence, particularly those who were supporting themselves or a family on their own. Mrs. Kahle hired on with the railroad after a divorce. Her new job enabled her to make ends meet. She did quit her work in the railroad shops after remarrying. Her new husband wanted her to stay at home, and she was happy to. She said she didn't think it would be right for a chiropractor's wife to be working in the shops. But the job had seen her through a hard time in her life -- both financially and emotionally.

I will tell you, it takes guts. It takes guts to walk in this room of fifty men and do something. Because you know everyone's watching you to see how stupid or clumsy you are. And you have to take a test. You take tests for this. And I passed all my tests with A's or 100's or whatever. So I did just fine...

I guess I had proved a point that I could do it. Sometimes in your life, you're so beat down, you just don't think you're capable of much of anything. And I went down there, and I did something that no one else had ever done, and I was proud of my accomplishment -- I needed that. [C. Kahle, interview by author, May 29, 1997]

## APPENDIX

While this paper focused on their work for the railroad, during interviews many revealed other interesting aspects of their lives. The following notes on the subjects of this study contain information from our conversations that I was unable to include in my professional paper -- but which is none the less important in understanding these women's identities.

■ **Rose Amsk's** east-side home is very lively. Our interview was punctuated by the phone ringing, sounds of hammering from a son's project in the backyard, and relatives and friends drifting in and out of the cozy kitchen, stopping briefly to swap stories.

Rose, 77, was born in southern Italy but moved to the United States with her mother when she was about nine months old. An uncle had come to Livingston, and later he sent for a bunch of his nephews -- Rose's father was one of them. Her father later returned to Italy and married, and after he'd settled in a bit, he sent for his wife and new daughter. The family spoke Italian at home, and when she went on a trip to Italy while in her early seventies, Rose decided to look up her relatives. She found many first cousins who were very welcoming and has since been back several times.

■ **Cathy Bosley**, 44, comes from a railroading family. She was the first woman to employed in the Livingston shops after civil rights legislation was implemented in the 1970s. Her grandfather was an engineer, and her mother Marge Frelich also worked for the railroad. Cathy's husband was a machinist in the railroad shops. He now owns a beauty shop in Livingston. He had often cut his friends' hair while working at the railroad, so when the Burlington Northern shops closed in Livingston, he moved "from welding rods to perm rods," as Cathy puts it. Cathy thinks it's interesting that she worked in a the shops -- traditionally thought of as a man's world -- and now her husband works in a typically female realm as a beautician. Currently, Cathy works as a clinical secretary for Westmont Home Health. She enjoys her job, but told me, "I wish BN was back."

■ **Katheryn Brasier**, 77, arrived at our interview elegantly dressed. After our more formal discussion about her family and her work for the railroad, I asked Katheryn about her hobbies. She became animated as she talked about her current passion. Since retiring from the railroad, Katheryn has become an ardent doll collector. Katheryn not only collects dolls, she also shows them for organizations like Livingston's Christian Women's Club.

Katheryn's father came from Sweden. Her mother was from Minnesota, but her mother's parents had also emigrated from Sweden. She said her

parents rarely talked about their past, but she knew her father had left Sweden with his brothers, coming to America in search of a better life. Her father worked for the railroad as a divisional lineman.

■ **Harriet Carpenter**, 65, struck me as an extremely practical woman with a high level of common sense. After finishing high school in Drummond, she came to Livingston and stayed with a sister who was teaching school. She got started with the railroad after seeing jobs advertised in the newspaper. Harriet trained at a telegraphy school in Spokane for 6 months, reported back to headquarters in Missoula, and hired out after passing a series of tests.

Harriet has one daughter. Harriet said she encouraged her daughter to go to college. Her daughter got a degree in education and is now teaching in California. Harriet herself traveled all around the region in the course of her employment with the railroad, but now that she's retired she returned to Livingston, settling down near her sister again.

■ **Mary Davis**, 79, comes from hardy stock. She is the second-to-youngest of five sisters, and all were still alive at the time of my interview with Mary. Both Mary's parents came from Croatia. She said they always referred to it as the "Old Country." Her father worked in mining most of his life -- first in Minnesota and later in Montana. Her mother kept an acre garden and sold some of the produce. She also cared for the family's chickens, pigs, and two cows. While Mary, her mother, and her sisters lived their lives on the surface of the earth, their father spent long days deep underground in the mines. He used to tell Mary, "I never saw the sun."

Mary and her husband Don worked hard, and all four of their children graduated from the University of Montana. For recreation, Don and Mary liked to dance when they were younger. In fact, Mary was the first woman president of one of the local dance clubs. Nowadays, Mary does crossword puzzles. "I work every puzzle I can get ahold of," she said.

■ **Carol Devine**, 48, was born and raised in Livingston. She comes from a railroading family. Both parents worked for Northern Pacific. Her mother started out as a waitress in 1937 and later became manager of NP lunchrooms in various Montana cities including Missoula, Butte, Forsyth, and Livingston. Her mother quit her job in 1946 and got married to Carol's father in 1947. He began his railroad career as a fireman in 1941 and retired from Burlington Northern in 1980 as a locomotive engineer.

■ **Beryl Foltz**, 75, was born and raised in Paradise Valley. Her father was born in a covered wagon. Her mother's family also moved west by wagon. Both of her parents' families eventually settled on ranches in Paradise Valley south of Livingston. Beryl left the area during World War II and traveled with her first husband who was in the service. She found work wherever she was -- as a typist clerk, factory worker, and even as an elevator operator. Later, Beryl and her husband were divorced, and she returned home. Someone told her about a comptometer school in Spokane, so she studied there on the latest calculating equipment and then returned to Livingston to work for the railroad.

She worked just under six years and quit when her daughter was born.

Beryl and her second husband raised an intelligent, independent daughter who received a bachelor's degree in French and later obtained her M.B.A. Their daughter has been a successful stockbroker for a firm in Portland, Oregon, for about 18 years.

■ **Marge Frelich, 76**, is a gifted storyteller. She dove into our interview with a treasured story about how her parents met. Marge's father was a railroad man. As a young single woman, Marge's mother worked at a factory in Omaha that made gloves for train engineers. As a joke, some of her mother's friends put her name and address in a pair of those gloves, and it was Marge's father up in Montana who bought them. He found the slip of paper and wrote a letter to Marge's mother. But she received it none too warmly and wrote back a scathing reply. However, thinking it over later, she regretted her harsh words and wrote again. It was the beginning of a correspondence that would last five years and result in marriage.

Marge says watching how hard her father had to work before the unions were strong made her a staunch union supporter. Her father worked two jobs and received no away-from-home expenses, even though he had to keep a second place in Laurel. Every week Marge's mother would take his clean clothes down to Laurel, bringing one of the children each time, so that they'd get to visit with their dad.

■ **Morris and Norma Gullickson** provided some excellent background material for this paper. Morris, a retired conductor, is very knowledgeable about the history of the railroad.

Both Norma and Morris are children of the Great Depression. Norma's parents lost a farm in Missouri and came out to Montana on the promise of a job in Great Falls. Morris' folks lost their home during the Depression and had to move back in with Morris' grandparents.

Morris' grandfather was a foreman with the railroad. He walked out with the men during the strike of 1922, but when the strike was over, he was not rehired. He was devastated and went up to Yellowstone Park, staying there as a winter caretaker. With no phones and no convenient transportation in the Park, the family would go without hearing from him for six months at a time -- not knowing if he was alive or dead.

■ **Anne Gwaltney, 69**, and her husband **Brownie** live outside of Wilsall in a comfortable house with a demanding cat. Anne became friends with Gerry Isbell when the two worked at First National Park Bank. They decided to go to a comptometer's school together in Spokane, and afterwards both landed jobs in the machine room at the railroad offices on the second floor of the Livingston Depot. The two did a lot together -- they even met their future husbands at the same time.

Gerry and Anne went to the Melville rodeo, and as Brownie tells it, "They were sitting on the fence. And Virgil and I... we were walking up through the arena. He bulldogged, and I rode bareback horses. And we were walking up

through there, and Gerry Lu says, 'I'll take the little one,' and Anne says, 'I'll take the big one.' And they didn't even know us! And they got married with us that way. So that shows you how much chance a man's got."

■ **Gerry Isbell**, 69, and her husband have a ranch down the road a bit from the Gwaltney's. While in her early twenties, Gerry bought a brand new red Ford convertible for \$2,188 with some of her railroad earnings. She remembered that car fondly as we sat around the Gwaltney's kitchen table discussing railroad work and other memories. It was that shiny convertible that delivered the two young women to their destinies out in Melville where they met a pair of rodeo riders who would later become their husbands.

Both Gerry and Anne have cherished memories of the big old boarding house they stayed at while studying in Spokane. Male boarders lived downstairs, and the women lived upstairs. Everyone ate together in a large dining room.

The two women returned to Livingston after about six months of instruction and started work at the railroad in August of 1947. Gerry took maternity leave when her first child was born. She went back to work briefly, until she and her husband moved out to their ranch.

■ **Carolyn Kahle**, 62, was one of the first women to work in the Livingston shops in the 1970s after implementation of civil rights legislation. She hired on as an electrician's apprentice. As a child she'd followed her dad around, and told me, "He could wire anything." Electrical work had always interested her. She did some wiring at home and even fixed a lamp for one of the guys when he brought it down to the shops.

Now blind, Carolyn is adept at getting around her house, and she is an advocate for other visually impaired Livingston residents. After our interview, Carolyn took me around the house to see the wide variety of delicate and whimsical statuettes her brother, a professional artist, has sculpted and sent her.

■ Large, black musical notes decorate the wall of **Florence Loeffler's** apartment, but she rarely plays her piano any more because she doesn't want to disturb her neighbors. Florence, 89, learned how to play the instrument as a young girl while staying at her aunt and uncle's house during the school year. Teachers also boarded at the house, and one gave piano lessons to several children in the area. Later on, Florence went to high school in Livingston and took lessons there too. She told me modestly that she was never much of a player, yet she often played at events for the Royal Neighbor Lodge and the Eastern Star Lodge. She also played at country dances -- teaming up with a friend's husband who played the saxophone and violin.

During our interview, we spent most of the time talking about railroad work and housework. But Florence did say that when there was a break from her job and chores, she liked to have fun. In fact, she met her husband at a dance at a place called the Railway Club that used to be on the second floor of a building on Second Street.

■ **Bernice McGee**, 75, is a Livingston City Council member and wife of a retired railroad conductor. Both she and her husband are civically active. Bernice worked in Boy Scouts and taught Sunday school for seventeen years. Her husband Warren has been involved in numerous volunteer and beautification projects around town and was chairman of the anti-merger committee that fought the merger of Burlington Northern and Northern Pacific.

Bernice and Warren met when she was a waitress in a Big Timber restaurant. Warren was on a work train, and the crew ate at the restaurant. The railroad was the bread and butter of many of these restaurants, and Bernice said her boss told all the waitresses, "No matter who we were waiting on, when those fellas came in we were to drop what we were doing and go wait on those fellas because they had twenty minutes to eat."

Bernice and Warren celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary in September of 1996.

■ **Helen Watson** was the oldest subject I interviewed. At the time of our conversation she was 94. She said she had always loved working with numbers. When the local railroad office closed, she hoped to buy one of the comptometers, but the headquarters in Saint Paul would not allow it. Helen hasn't lost her interest in figures. We talked about inflation -- the current price of hamburgers and rumors circulating at the retirement home that the rent is going to be raised again.

Helen worked hard for every cent she made, so she knows the value of money. She was angered by a recent television show where hosts discussed lives of millionaires and billionaires.

"That doesn't mean anything to me," she said. "I don't think anybody is any better because they have billions of dollars. If they share it, that's fine, but when they just accumulate it, that doesn't mean anything to me. I don't believe in that."

■ **Miriam Wright**, 76, resides in the quiet town of Superior, Montana. Miriam's mother was a school teacher, and she died when Miriam was about eight. Miriam said at that time, people didn't think widowed fathers could take care of their children, so she and her brother were sent to live with their cousins on a ranch in Paradise Valley. One of those cousins was Beryl Foltz, who I also interviewed for this paper. Miriam's younger brother had contracted polio the year before his mother's death, and as his older sister, Miriam felt responsible for him. "He was my little brother, and he depended on me," she said.

Miriam got married when she was 18. Her husband's father owned a dry-land ranch near Reedpoint, but her husband worked various jobs -- ranch work, lambing, dairying, and logging. Miriam often worked too, sometimes helping with the cooking at various ranches. When certain circumstances made her marriage unbearable, Miriam left her husband and forged a new life for herself. At 35, she took a out a loan in order to go to telegraphy school in Spokane and then began working for the railroad to support herself and two of her five



children.

## NOTES

1. Mr. Martin is a free-lance historian from Bozeman, Montana. He wrote several articles to be used as supplementary information for Livingston Depot Center's museum exhibits. While the Depot does host traveling exhibits, it has gathered a collection of locally relevant materials for use in its own *Rails Across the Rockies* exhibition. It is hoped that the narratives collected for this professional paper add further depth to the interpretation of *Rails Across the Rockies* exhibits or form the foundation for a special exhibit on Montana women or female railroad employees.

2. This and other articles relating to the Livingston Depot were compiled by Doris Whithorn of the Park County Museum and collected in an unpublished manuscript titled Bird's Eye View of Livingston, Mon., Gallatin County (n.d.). The work of local railroad enthusiasts and historians made much of the foundation work for this project easier to come by.

3. Much of the information that appeared in this grant application was taken from previous applications and other Depot Center materials. The job of writing these grants over the years has required the work of many dedicated people. I greatly appreciated being able to use this information that had been so painstakingly compiled.

4. Mr. Gartenhaus' workshop, titled "Interactive Teaching Workshop: Using Museums to Expand Creative Thinking" was given at the Mountain-Plains Museums Association Annual Meeting, October 4, 1997. Mr. Gartenhaus is an educational consultant and publisher of The Docent Educator, Kamuela, Hawaii.

5. All those who worked for Northern Pacific belonged to a union. According to Morris Gullickson, retired conductor, there were eleven different unions: pipefitters, sheet-metal workers, enginemen, trainmen, clerks, etc. Women belonged to the clerks union. Unions helped protect workers' rights but were also instrumental in maintaining the status quo. Some of the unions had color codes into the late 1950s. Mr. Gullickson described the situation of an African-American Livingston man whose father was white. His dad had been a conductor, and he hoped to follow in his father's footsteps. However, when he tried to join the trainmen's union, he was denied membership. He eventually joined the clerks union, which didn't have a color code, and that's where he stayed until he retired.

6. Much of the information about Bertha Gonder was obtained from displays at the Park County Museum. While highly descriptive, some of the collected articles and photocopies lack dates and publication information.

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