

MATRIMONIAL BAR

An interesting glimpse into the past is afforded by a rare little publication *The Historical Directory of Montana* published by Risk Bros., of Helena, M. T., and copyrighted by Frank W. Warner, 1879. There's nothing new here about Hurdy-Gurdies. The fact that prostitutes and oft-tainted dance-hall girls frequently married and became proper Western matrons is also widely known. This material, however, from the 1879 "historical directory", presented a fresh clue: Interviews with responsible old-timers reveal that the Hurdy-Gurdy houses sometimes were a clearing house for "clean" girls and high-minded young men—with honorable matrimony resulting. Here is the pertinent text, including the second from last paragraph, which sparked the final conclusion:

. . . The absence of good female society, in any due proportions to the numbers of the opposite sex, is likewise an evil of great magnitude; for men become rough, stern and cruel, to a surprising degree, under such a state of things.

In every frequent [sic] street, public houses with open doors and loud music are resorted to, in broad daylight, by hundreds—it might almost be said—of all tribes and tongues, furnishing another fruitful source of "difficulties" which are commonly decided on the spot, by an appeal to brute force, the stab of a knife, or the discharge of a revolver. Women of easy virtue are to be seen promenading through the camp, habited in the gayest and most costly apparel, and receiving fabulous sums for their purchased favors. In fact, all the temptations to vice are present in full display, with money in abundance to secure the gratification of the desire for novelty and excitement, which is the ruling passion of the mountaineer.

One "institution" offering a shadowy and dangerous substitute for more legitimate female association, deserves a more peculiar notice. This is the "Hurdy Gurdy" house. As soon as the men have left off work, these places are opened and dancing commences. Let the reader picture to himself a large room, furnished with a bar at one end—where champagne at \$12 (in gold) per bottle, and "drinks" at twenty-five to fifty cents are wholesaled—and di-



vided, at the end of this bar, by a railing running from side to side. The other enclosure is densely crowded with men in every variety of garb that can be seen on the continent. Beyond the barrier sit the dancing women, called "hurdy-gurdies," sometimes dressed in uniform, but more generally habited according to the dictates of individual caprice, in the finest clothes that money can buy, and which are fashioned in the most attractive styles that fancy can suggest. On one side is a raised orchestra. The music suddenly strikes up, and the summons, "take your partners for the next dance," is promptly answered by some of the male spectators, who paying a dollar in gold for a ticket, approach the ladies' bench and—in style polite or otherwise, according to antecedents—invites one of the ladies to dance.

Let us describe a first class dancer and her companion. There she stands at the head of the set. She is of middle height, of rather full and rounded form: her complexion as pure as alabaster, a pair of dangerous looking hazel eyes, a slightly Roman nose, and a small and prettily formed mouth. Her auburn hair is neatly banded and gathered in a tasteful ornamented net, with a roll and gold tassel at the side. How sedate she looks during the first figure, never

smiling till the termination of "promenade eight" when she shows her little white hands in fixing her handsome brooch in its place, and settling her glistening earrings. See how nicely her scarlet dress, with its broad black band round the skirt, and its black edging, sets off her dainty figure. No wonder a wild mountaineer would be willing to pay—not one dollar, but all that he has in his purse, for a dance and an approving smile from so beautiful a woman.

Her cavalier stands six feet in his boots, which come to the knee and are garnished with a pair of Spanish spurs, with rowels and bells like young water wheels. His buckskin leggings are fringed at the seams, and gathered at the waist with a U. S. belt, from which hangs his loaded revolver and his sheath knife. His neck is bare, muscular, and embrowned by exposure, as is also his bearded face, whose sombre hue is relieved by a pair of piercing black eyes. His long black hair hangs down beneath his wide felt hat, and in the corner of his mouth is a cigar, which rolls like the lever of an eccentric as he chews the end in his mouth.

As a rule the professional "hurdiess" are Teutons, and, though first rate dancers, they are, with few exceptions, the reverse of good looking.

In the dance house you can see judges, the Legislative corps, and everyone but the minister. He never ventures further than to engage in conversation with a friend at the door, and, while intently watching the performance, lectures on the evil of such places with considerable force; but his attention is evidently more fixed upon the dancers than upon his lecture. Sometimes may be seen gray haired men dancing, their wives at home in blissful ignorance of the proceeding. There never was a dance house running for any length of time in the first days of a mining town in which "shooting scrapes" do not occur; equal proportions of jealousy, whisky and revenge being the stimulants thereto.

CONCLUSION:

[According to reliable old timers, some persons prominent in U. S. life today are descendants of these old west German hurdy-gurdy girls. According to them, many strait laced young fellows from the east were among the early Montana adventurers. They neither drank, gambled, nor at first, patronized the dance halls. Some Helena dance hall proprietors concluded, wisely, that these easterners would become patrons, if they could dance with other than "fallen women." So they imported these unsophisticated, wholesome German peasant girls who were considered good dancers. The girls were rigorously chaperoned. They were not permitted to have their escorts buy drinks for them. As a result, few of them long remained in the hurdy gurdies—leaving to become good wives and mothers, an ever-present frontier need.]

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LEWIS AND CLARK EXPEDITION

"Tale of Valor," a novel about the Lewis and Clark expedition, written by Vardis Fisher, has been announced for release by Doubleday, June 23. The story of the forty-odd men and Sacajawea, the Indian girl and her child, who made an 8,000 mile journey to the Pacific and back, certainly is one of the epic chapters of American history. In preparing his fictional version, according to Doubleday, Vardis Fisher personally retraced the full course of the expedition.

Born and raised in Idaho and at present a resident of Hagerman in that state, Vardis Fisher is one of the country's best known novelists. "Tale of Valor," his twenty-fifth book, will be reviewed later.

THE OLD WEST IS NOT DEAD . . .



The artist who would not let it die, whose almost three-thousand paintings, models and illustrations—such as the minute replica of a magnificent oil, above, keeps it forever alive—was not only a prolific graphic historian, but a real Western character in his own right. That man, of course, was Charles M. Russell. The one man who knew him better than anyone else was his nephew, Austin Russell. Fortunately for all lovers of the West, this happy circumstance has resulted, finally, in the production of the most intimate and compelling book yet produced on this beloved subject—*Charles M. Russell, Cowboy Artist, A Biography by Austin Russell*.

The spirit of this important new book is quickly sensed in the introduction. Austin Russell writes:

“Charles Marion Russell, the Cowboy Artist, was my uncle and when I was young I lived with him for years both at his Great Falls home and his summer camp, Bull’s Head Lodge, up in the Rockies. I went with him on packtrips, and when he and Nancy his wife were away I batched in his log cabin studio . . . In his own field—the northern plains Indians and the cattlemen—Charlie was as accurate a historian as Catlin a century earlier. He never romanticized his subject; he never improved on his punchers and Indians—he painted them as they were. I have tried to do the same sort of job with this biography. It has not been novelized or fictionalized in any way: there are no invented incidents or conversations, and there is no plot except the Course of Charlie’s remarkable life . . .”

Every lover of The Old West will find this book fascinating and informative. Every fan, collector or admirer of the great Cowboy Artist will find his shelves bare, indeed, without this precious personal volume. In hard covers, attractively jacketed, 247 exciting pages, yet the price is only \$4. Order directly from:

TWAYNE PUBLISHERS, INC.
31 Union Square West,
New York 3, N. Y.

A YOUNG GRIZZLY.—As a hunting incident we mention the following, for the edification and amusement of old hunters. On the return of John J. Healy Esq., from his trading expedition in British America last spring, and when within about one hundred miles from Sun river, he and his comrades discovered an old she grizzly and two good sized cubs, endeavoring to make good their retreat. The party gave chase, part after the old one and one of the cubs, (which got away) and Healy after the other cub, which became separated from the rest. After pursuing this cub for some distance, Mr. H. caught it with a lasso, and after considerable of a battle, hoisted it before him on his horse, and carried it in triumph to his residence at Sun river, one hundred miles from the place of capture. The animal is quite tame now; fights every dog that prowls around with impunity, and is fat and frisky. This animal, we learned, is to be brought to Helena, when he is to be handed over to Andy O’Connel for future attention.

Rocky Mountain Gazette, (Helena)
August 10, 1870

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ARRIVAL OF SUGAR.—Garrison & Wyatt’s bull train, of twenty-six wagons loaded with staple groceries for the enterprising firm of Lenan & Bro., arrived last night and unloaded to day. Among the other goods received, were 350 sacks of sugar and 124 sacks of coffee. Garrison & Wyatt have five other large trains *en route* from Corinne, principally loaded with groceries for our merchants. Some of the trains are but a short distance from Helena, and are looked for daily. It is estimated that 3,000 sacks of sugar and 2,000 sacks of coffee are on these trains, all, or nearly all, of which, is consigned to our wholesale and retail grocers of this city. These staple articles which have been run up to exorbitant prices by the “ring,” will certainly decline, and we shall soon be able to announce this good news to the readers of the *Herald*. Mark the prediction.

Helena Daily Herald
Nov. 18, 1871