

# WOMEN *in the* AMERICAN WEST



*an essay in pictures*

TAKEN FROM THE PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTIONS  
THE MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
Helena, Montana

Legend suggests that western history was peopled by only two kinds of women — good women and bad. The good woman, the classic pioneer mother, followed her man across the plains in a covered wagon, then struggled quietly to raise her family amid hardship and adversity. The bad woman, according to the popular idea, was a combination gun-moll and hurdy-gurdy dancer. Neither of these stereotypes was, of course, accurate. Many a bad woman eventually married and thus became a good woman; many a good woman, no doubt, lacked a pure heart. Some women found life in the West a great hardship, others loved it; probably the great majority simply accepted it.

At the outset, women's roles in the West differed little from those in the Midwestern and Eastern states. Although men moved toward the frontier in search of freedom and opportunity, most of them had no real desire to share the total experience with women. Isolated and often lonely, most frontier women lived out their lives as wives, mothers, homemakers and loyal helpmates, and they raised their daughters in their own image. Even the status of the "soiled dove" differed only slightly from her Eastern counterpart.

As population grew, there were new occupations for women as teachers, nurses, and civilizers of the young communities, but in most cases these were merely extensions of traditional female roles. Nevertheless, the American West did provide an opportunity for gradual change. It was here that women first won the vote, providing impetus for the national suffrage movement. Along with this, the 20th Century brought a loosening of some of the old restrictions. For women in the West, however, as with women nationally, this merely added new dimensions for self-expression. It did not reject traditional roles.

The photo essay which follows, selected from the picture archives of the Montana Historical Society, attempts to understand the experiences of women in the West, particularly in Montana, through the use of photographs. We believe this use of the photographic media, which developed coincident with the settlement of the West, constitutes valid historical research. For despite the difficulties inherent in early-day techniques, Montana's outstanding photographic artists, such as F. Jay Haynes, L. A. Huffman, Christian Barthelmess, Edgar S. Train, and Fred E. Miller labored with a special kind of consciousness of the importance of what they were recording. This is true as well of many amateur photographers, among them Bertie Lord and a remarkable Englishwoman, Evelyn Cameron, whose work is represented herein.

Throughout the essay an attempt has been made to let the photographs speak for themselves about the role of women in the West. Because the history of women on the frontier has been characterized by continuity rather than by radical change, the approach is topical rather than chronological and includes photographs ranging from the 1860's to the recent past.

Evelyn Jephson Cameron, English aristocrat and amateur photographer, milking on her ranch near Terry.



Rev. and Mrs. Stanley camping near Medicine Springs, photographed by Bertie Lord.

OVERLEAF: Mrs. O. C. Bundy, sister of photographer Edgar S. Train, chats with an unknown friend in downtown Helena in the 1870s.



**Finetta Lord and coyote she shot near Eagle Rock, photographed by her husband, Bertie Lord, ca. 1900.**

**Mary Abbott, daughter of Granville Stuart. Photographed near Lewistown, sometime after her husband's death in 1939.**



life was usually lonely . . .



**Main Street in the eastern Montana town of Bainville, 1909.**



**Sod house of the Everson family near Big Sandy. Photographed by Alta Deem in 1914.**

An unidentified happy couple in the Helena studio of Edgar S. Train, ca. 1870.

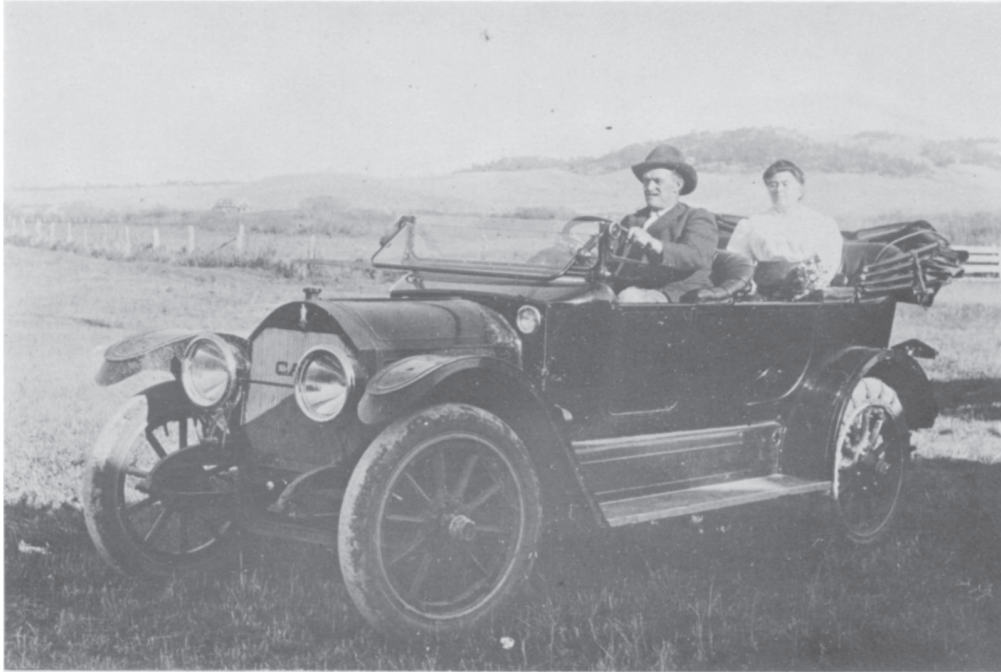


The wedding of Henry and Jane Hibbard, 1945.



The Bernie Bierman-Clara MacKenzie wedding in Havre, ca. 1925.

Julia and Ole Vinger out for a "joyride", Grass Range.



anticipation and fulfillment of marriage . . .



Dan and Amelia Stubbs Doyen, Two Dot.



An unknown homesteading couple in the Terry-Fallon area, photographed by Evelyn Cameron.

Unknown mother and child, Reinig photo.



Mrs. Thomas Power of Helena and her children in 1954. Jorud photo.



timeless, universal joys of motherhood . . .



An unknown mother and child.

Fay Posten Talmadge, raised near Nihill, and her baby.

**"Crow Madonna" by Fred E. Miller.**



**Unknown infant and admirers.**

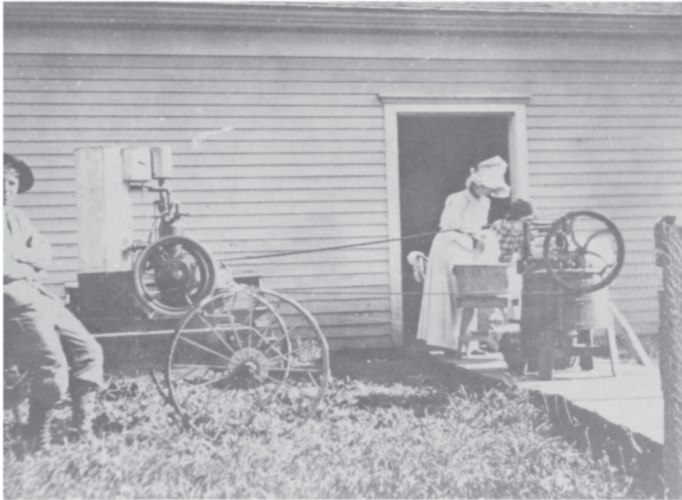


**Myrta and Albert Stevens of Missoula and their family.**

Ida Alrick sewing in the front room of the Anderson log house near Shawmut, ca. 1912.



Mrs. Goodell gets a mechanical assist on washing day, photographed near Philbrook.



An unknown homesteader feeds her chickens.

An unidentified woman cooking in the kitchen of her frame homestead.





**Mrs. Bundy tending her plants, photographed by her brother, E. S. Train, ca. 1870.**

**Carrie Nesbitt Dunn at work in the kitchen of her Jackson Hole, Wyoming, ranch, 1902.**



endless toil of keeping house . . .



**A tea party in Marysville.**



**Marketing day in downtown Basin.**

**Miss Guillott, now Mrs. Blanche Judge, mother of Montana's present Governor. Renig Photo.**



**Mary, Anne, and Marsha Kimball with their dolls in their Butte backyard, 1915.**



proper little ladies . . .



**Demure, unidentified fence sitters.**



**"Crow Maiden" by Fred E. Miller**



Three shapely show girls, Jorud photo.

. . . and those not so proper



Lieli, a dancer at Virginia City, Nevada.



"Chicago Joe," a Helena madam.

Actress F. Rowena Medini in her costume in "Red Domino"

Near Livingston, Pine Creek School students play with their teacher, 1898.



Augusta grade school graduating class, 1909.



Lissner School in Helena, photographed in the 1870's by E. S. Train.



Unknown graduate.

Homestead school near Havre, 1914.

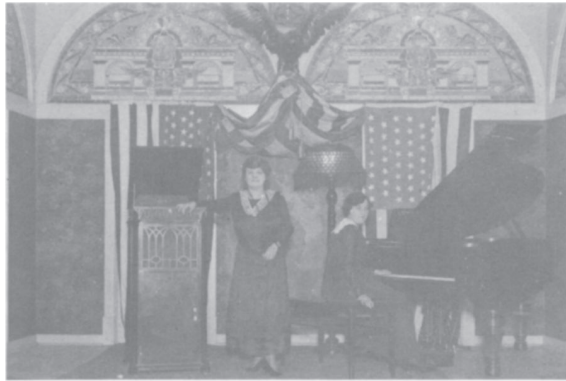


school marms and students . . .



Hodgson School, Flathead Valley, 1904.

Right. Unidentified nun, Reinig photo.  
Top. Unknown patriots, Reinig photo.  
Below. Miss Ganson on the Flathead reservation.



Red Cross workers in Helena during World War II, Jorud photo, 1942.

Salvation Army lassie and Helena friends, Jorud photo, 1939.



community rescuers and civilizers . . .



Prohibition float in Columbus parade, 1916.



Nurse at St. Peter's Hospital in Helena, Jorud photo, 1940.

Unknown switchboard operator.

Unknown secretary, 1918.



Center, Hannah McGovern, proprietor of a store in Virginia City during the 1930's.

Below, Staff of the Sheridan County Treasurer's Office, Plentywood, 1928.

Postal clerk in Virginia City, ca., 1910.

Assembly worker, Glasgow Air Force Base.



new jobs for a new century . . .



**Dr. Saralee Visscher, researcher in entomology,  
Montana State University, Bozeman, ca. 1965.**



**Sylvia Reich, laborer at the Anaconda Company  
Smelter, Anaconda, Gordon Hercod photo, 1974.**

Right, A 1960 Montana State co-ed swings out.  
Below, "In olden days, a glimpse of stocking . . ."

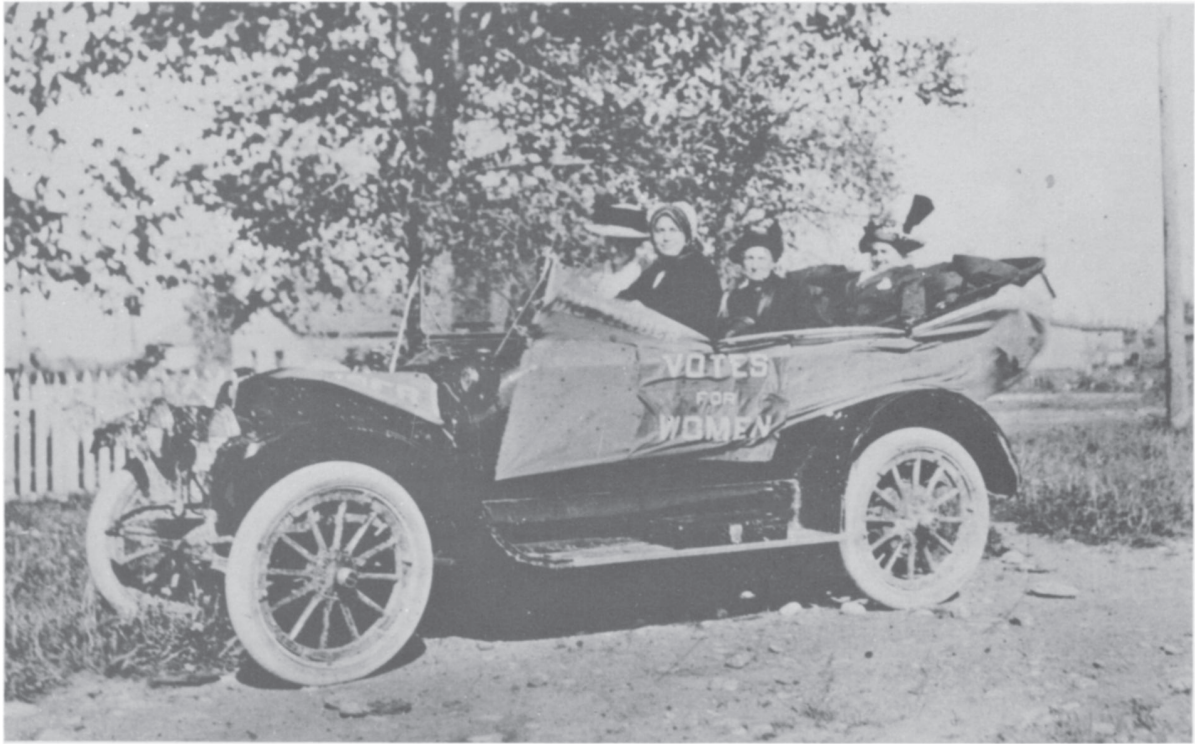


Center, Calamity Jane lifts one with "Teddy Blue" Abbott at Gilt Edge, 1897.

A tired camper lights up during a trip in the 1920's.  
Photo by Jessamine Spear Johnson.

Below, Alice Greenough, rodeo rider.

Campaigning for suffrage near Columbus, ca. 1914.



toward a new equality . . .



Have girls football team, Brainerd photo, 1924.



Mrs. Johnson, Louise Kavon, and Mabel Fishback take the situation in hand near Plentywood.