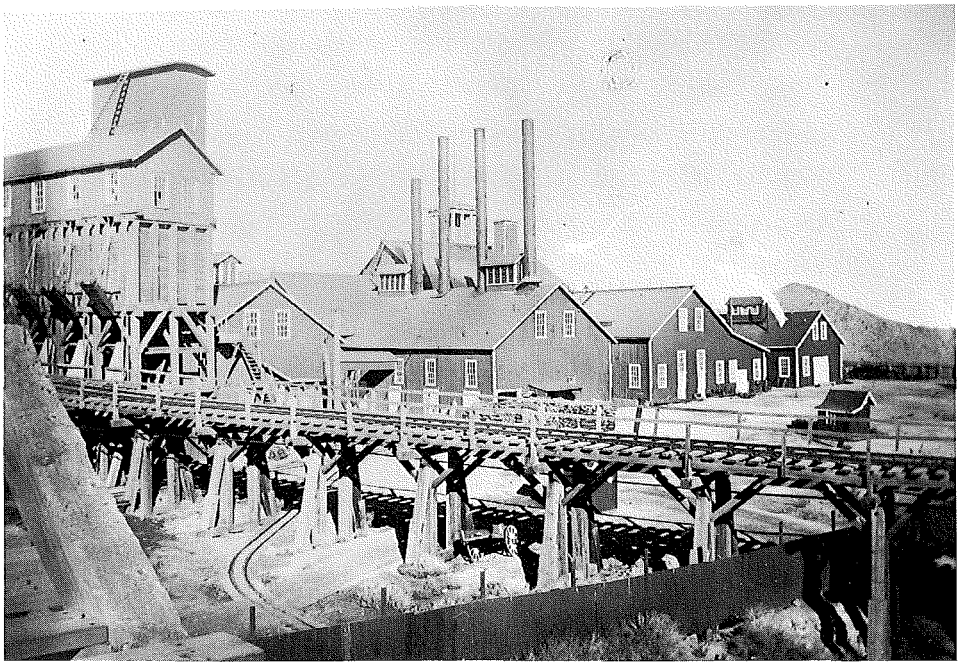
Nevada

Historical Society Quarterly



FALL 1993

NEVADA HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY

The *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* solicits contributions of scholarly or popular interest dealing with the following subjects: the general (e.g., the political, social, economic, constitutional) or the natural history of Nevada and the Great Basin; the literature, languages, anthropology, and archaeology of these areas; reprints of historic documents; reviews and essays concerning the historical literature of Nevada, the Great Basin, and the West.

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Historical Society Quarterly

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Front Cover: The Ophir mill in Virginia City. *(Chapman Family Collection, Nevada Historical Society)*

Book Reviews

WOMEN OF THE MINING WEST
Virginia City Revisited

Ronald M. James

Augusta Ackhert, a thirty-nine-year-old German immigrant, lived on Virginia City's commercial C Street in the midst of the Comstock Mining District during the early 1880s. Widowed a few years earlier, she worked at a candy store and took in lodgers to support herself, her eleven-year-old Irish-American adopted daughter, and two younger children. She had left New York about 1875 and eventually arrived in Nevada, coming by way of California. Her renters included an African-American family of seven. Concurrently, down the hill in Chinatown, Ty Gung of China cared for her infant daughter and kept house for her sixty-year-old husband, a cook who had been unemployed for nine of the previous twelve months. And Emma Earl, a fifty-one-year-old miner's wife born in Pennsylvania, augmented her household's finances by working as a dressmaker.

These profiles, based on the tenth United States Manuscript Census, incorporate the only type of information available on the thousands of women who made the Comstock home in 1880. Arriving at an understanding of distant lives is a challenging task at best. Isolated census entries provide too little information to allow much progress, but taken together, they can suggest general trends. A comparative overview based on census records provides, therefore, not only a means to organize the existing data, but also a basis for further research. In this way, it is possible to place the Augusta Ackherts, Ty Gungs, and Emma Earls in context and to understand them and their counterparts better.[1]

The role of women in Nevada's nineteenth-century Comstock Mining District is poorly understood and infrequently addressed. Clearly, women played an important part in the development of Virginia City, the district's principal community and one of the most significant towns in the mining West. Histories dealing with Comstock women typically focus on individuals such as Allison "Eilley" Orrum Bowers, boarding-house operator turned bonanza queen, and Marie Louise Mackay, wife of millionaire miner John Mackay.[2] Julia Bulette, by

Ronald M. James, state historic preservation officer, presented this paper at the 1993 Nevada History Conference held at the Nevada Historical Society. His book *Temples of Justice: The County Courthouses in Nevada* will be published by the University of Nevada Press in the spring of 1994.

virtue of her career as a prostitute and her violent murder, has also attracted attention.[3] Moving toward a broader interpretation, Marion Goldman's *Gold Diggers and Silver Miners: Prostitution and Social Life on the Comstock Lode* is extremely useful, but her narrow focus does not allow for a general understanding.[4] As a result, an overview remains wanting.

Developing an Overview of Comstock Women

Statistical summaries of data on Comstock women are easily obtained. Censuses in Storey County from 1860 to 1880 provide information on trends within the female population.[5] Table 1 shows the size of the female population over time and in relation to that of males. Figure 1 uses a population pyramid to illustrate the distribution of age groups for males and females in Virginia City for 1880. Although they include fundamentally important data, such tables and figures are nevertheless sterile. It is possible, however, to gain insight to the lives underlying the statistics by using other primary sources, including diaries and recollections, newspapers, and county and church records. Accounts such as Mary McNair Mathews's *Ten Years in Nevada* and John Waldorf's *Kid on the Comstock* provide remarkable insight into day-to-day family life.[6] Newspapers are problematic, being by nature unreliable and preoccupied with the sensa-

Table 1
Male and Female Populations, Storey County, 1862–1990

Census year	Males		Females		Total
	N	%	*N*	%	*N*
1862	3,843	85	655	15	4,498
1870	7,864	69	3,495	31	11,359
1875	13,415	69	6,113	31	19,528
1880	9,294	58	6,821	42	16,115
1890	5,144	58	3,662	42	8,806
1900	1,933	53	1,740	47	3,673
1910	1,781	58	1,264	42	3,045
1920	803	55	666	45	1,469
1930	378	57	289	43	667
1940	709	58	507	42	1,216
1950	354	53	317	47	671
1960	295	52	273	48	568
1970	343	49	352	51	695
1980	767	51	736	49	1,503
1990	1,250	49	1,276	51	2,526

SOURCES: U.S. census reports, 1860–1990; Territorial Census of 1862; Nevada State Census of 1875.

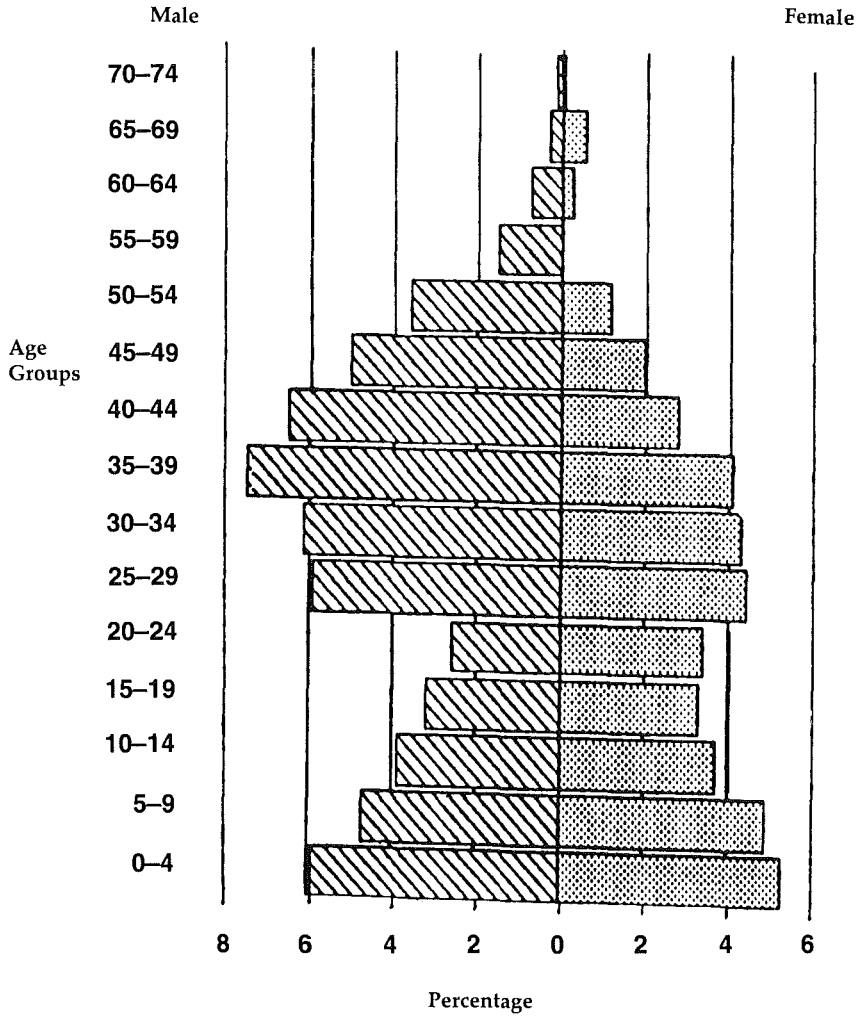


FIGURE 1. Male and female populations, distribution by age, Virginia City, 1880 U.S. Manuscript Census

tional. Still, with care, such accounts can be read to yield reasonably solid, if vivid, illustrations of everyday life. County and church records are abundant, and many are untapped, but their volume and largely unorganized condition make them difficult to use.[7] The present overview draws on some of these sources while using the eighth (1860) and tenth (1880) manuscript censuses for statistical grounding.

Source criticism is important when using these sources because situations were rarely as simple as the census enumerator would have it. For example, women could pursue a number of occupations simultaneously, a juggling act perhaps less frequently required of men. Mary McNair Mathews, who lived in

Virginia City in the 1870s, worked as a teacher, nurse, seamstress, laundress, and lodging-house operator, and yet she would have appeared with only one pursuit. The census provides only the occupation which a given woman, her neighbors, or the enumerator chose to place at the top of the list. Presumably, that occupation was usually the employment that dominated the woman's time, but this may not always have been the case. A woman might declare the occupation she regarded as most prestigious even if infrequently pursued. Neighbors or the enumerator may have assessed a woman's principal occupation as the one that was most obvious. In spite of these problems, however, census records provide ample opportunity to understand the women of Virginia City.

The eighth United States Manuscript Census occurred in 1860, only thirteen months after the discovery of silver on the Comstock, providing a snapshot of the community during its first boom. Predictably, its women were rare, an observation several other primary sources repeat. Samuel Clemens, for example, describes a chance encounter in New York with Etta Booth, a woman he had known from his days on the Comstock in the early 1860s. She precipitated a memory of

> a great ballroom in some ramshackle building in Gold Hill or Virginia City, Nevada. There were two or three hundred stalwart men present and dancing with cordial energy. And in the midst of the turmoil Etta's crimson frock was swirling and flashing. . . . Her mother, large, fleshy, pleasant, and smiling, sat on a bench against the wall in lonely and honored state and watched the festivities in placid contentment. She and Etta were the only persons of their sex in the ballroom. Half of the men represented ladies, and they had a handkerchief tied around the left arm so that they could be told from the men. I did not dance with Etta, for I was a lady myself. I wore a revolver in my belt, and so did all the other ladies—likewise the gentlemen.[8]

Such accounts, while charming and vivid, do not speak to the whole. The census allows for a demographic profile of most women, and the perspective it provides challenges commonly held views of boom-town life in the mining West.[9]

The myth of the Wild West incorporates the idea that the earliest period of a boom town's social development was dominated by dance-hall girls and prostitutes who led the community in an unrestrained stint of abandon. This era is imagined to have ended when respectable women arrived and held the licentious proclivities of humanity in check. This has resulted in a twist on the Frederick Jackson Turner story: Substituting frontierswoman for frontiersman, some see westering white women (the bad and reckless followed by the good and upstanding) taming the frontier. Although the manuscript census records no prostitutes for Virginia City and Gold Hill in 1860, careful examination of the information concerning the documented 111 adult women suggests that probably fewer than 12 single women were working in that capacity.[10]

Few women declared occupations on the Comstock during the 1860 census, and, given the already low numbers, developing a statistically valid demographic profile for any profession is impossible. In addition, there is no way to

ascertain the reliability of the declarations: Perhaps the school teacher, the three seamstresses, the laundress, the milliner, and the two saloon keepers were nothing more than they professed. But most were young and single, and they could just as easily have been prostitutes misleading the census taker. Emma Rigg, a seventeen-year-old native of Nova Scotia, claimed "theatrical" as an occupation; she was recorded along with three men, including her husband, all with the same profession. The diversions of 1860 were certainly growing in complexity, but the census is more tantalizing than informative in this case. Nevertheless, women who may have been less than respectable by the standards of the day were in the minority: Of the 111 women, 83 were living with husbands in the two communities, and 43 of these were looking after more than a hundred children.

Thus, the 1860 census clearly indicates that the roots of a family-based community on the Comstock were established early. Certainly, some women were living on the wild side, but they were relatively few. This observation concurs with that of J. S. Holliday, who, in his monumental study of the California gold rush, points out that single women tended to come West by ship, while women who traveled overland usually had husbands. In addition, he maintains that "the women who landed in San Francisco stayed in that metropolis or settled in Sacramento City, for there was little reason to go to the primitive mining towns and camps."[11] That tendency appears also to hold true for the early Comstock.

Two final observations regarding 1860 are appropriate here. Most of the youngest children—an overwhelming 83 percent of those no older than four years—were born in California or the Utah Territory. For children aged five to nine, this figure drops to 23 percent, replaced by a dominating 50 percent coming from the Midwest. It is apparent that the first families to come to the Comstock had usually been westerners for several years, and most arrived in the region from the Mississippi drainage basin. The pattern of their migration is etched in the records of their children's nativities. The men who brought women and children to the Comstock fit into a profile also worth mentioning. Although miners represented more than 70 percent of the work force, only 40 percent of the men with wives could be counted among their numbers. By contrast, teamsters, who represented only 4 percent of the male workers, made up 15 percent of the married men. Apparently, men with wagons were able to bring their families, and they either were or had the opportunity to become teamsters. The observation defies the statistical probability of most husbands being miners, and it contradicts any stereotype of the first wives of a mining boom town being married to the most prestigious men: There were, for example, eight lawyers in Gold Hill and Virginia City in 1860, but only one had a wife.[12]

The tenth United States Manuscript Census provides another useful snapshot of the Comstock, this one from 1880. Although mining was in decline at that time, there were still about ten thousand people in Virginia City, and much of society's structure remained intact. The 1880 document provides street ad-

dresses, and thus allows precise identification of locations. Information on parental nativity allows for a better definition of ethnicity.[13] In general, the 1880 census reveals a diverse community with women figuring into many aspects of the economy and society.[14] Tables 2, 3, and 4 are based on the 1880 document and provide statistical profiles of the women of Virginia City. They show that women's choices of occupation were influenced by marital status, age, and

TABLE 2
Occupations of Comstock Women by Number and Marital Status, 1880
(in percentage)

Occupation	*N*	*Total*	*Married*	*Widowed*	*Divorced*	*Single*
			(*N* = 1,443)	(*N* = 227)	(*N* = 34)	(*N* = 528)
Keeping house	1,422	63.5	89.0	6.5	0.6	3.9
Servant	156	6.9	5.1	1.0	1.3	92.6
Seamstress	91	4.0	4.4	20.9	9.9	64.8
Prostitution	77	3.4	16.9	7.8	7.8	67.5
Lodging house	64	2.9	37.5	42.9	6.3	13.3
Teacher	34	1.5	20.6	5.9	2.9	70.6
Nun	16	0.7	0	0	0	100.0
Health care	16	0.7	12.5	43.8	0	43.7
Laundry	15	0.7	33.3	60.0	6.7	0
Milliner	13	0.6	30.1	7.7	0	62.2
Restaurant work	13	0.6	23.1	15.4	0	61.5
Other	21	1.1	42.9	47.6	4.8	4.7
None	294	13.1	27.9	9.9	0.7	61.5
Totals	2,232	100.0				
Averages (total female population)			64.7	10.2	1.5	23.6

SOURCE: Tenth U.S. Manuscript Census (1880), Virginia City.
Note: Women are defined as those seventeen years of age or older with the exception of those at school (who are not included here) and of those who were younger but working (who are included here). *Keeping house* signifies a woman with an occupation listed as such or a woman with no occupation listed but who is the wife of the head of household or who is herself head of household with no occupation listed. *None* signifies the other women seventeen or older with no occupation listed and not attending school. *Single* is as identified by the census and indicates women who had never been married.

TABLE 3
Occupations of Comstock Women by Age and Household, 1880

		Averages			
Occupation	*N*	*Age*	*Months unemployed*	*Number in family*	*Number in house*
Other	21	40	0	2	9
Lodging house	64	39	0	3	9
Laundry	15	39	0	3	9
Health care	16	38	1	2	7
Keeping house	1,422	36	0	4	7
Nun	16	36	0	1	14
Seamstress	91	29	0	2	7
Milliner	13	29	0	4	9
None	294	28	0	4	12
Servant	156	28	1	1	10
Prostitution	77	28	0	1	6
Restaurant Work	13	28	1	3	14
Teacher	34	25	0	3	10
Total females	2,232				
Averages (total for women)		33	0	4	8
Total males in work force	3,954				
Averages (total for men)		37	2	2	10

SOURCE: Tenth U.S. Manuscript Census (1880), Virginia City.
Note: Women are defined as in Table 2. *Months unemployed* is the total from the previous twelve months and is as the census enumerator recorded it.

ethnicity.[15] For example, Table 2 demonstrates that a woman's marital status had an effect on the selection of occupation. Table 3 indicates the same for age. And Table 4 shows the relationship of occupation and ethnicity among women of Virginia City in 1880. A discussion of each occupational group and of each of these factors underscores the complexity of women's participation in a nineteenth-century mining community.

Occupation and Class: Prostitution

Prostitution raises several issues regarding the demography of Virginia City. Prostitutes were the group most likely to deceive a census enumerator regarding

TABLE 4
Occupations of Comstock Women by Ethnicity, 1880

	Ethnic group					
Occupation	*American*	*Irish*	*British*	*German*	*Canadian*	*Chinese*
Keep house	530	448	165	113	47	19
Servant	51	78	6	2	8	0
Seamstress	56	6	11	3	8	0
Prostitute	31	3	3	4	2	15
Lodging house	24	25	5	5	1	2
Teacher	28	2	1	0	2	0
Nun	8	6	1	0	0	0
Health care	7	6	1	2	0	0
Laundry	2	9	0	2	1	0
Milliner	6	3	0	0	0	0
Restaurant	2	8	0	1	2	0
Other	3	6	3	4	1	1
None	217	29	16	8	13	0
Total	965	629	212	144	85	37

Ethnic group						
Hispanic	*French*	*African American*	*Swiss*	*Jewish*	*Other*	*Total*
15	19	11	17	10	28	1422
0	0	6	1	0	4	156
0	2	3	1	0	1	91
12	4	3	0	0	0	77
0	1	0	1	0	0	64
0	0	0	0	1	0	34
0	1	0	0	0	0	16
0	0	0	0	0	0	16
0	0	1	0	0	0	15
0	1	0	0	2	1	13
0	0	0	0	0	0	13
0	0	1	0	0	2	21
4	2	1	1	2	1	294
31	30	26	21	15	37	2,232

SOURCES: Tenth U.S. Manuscript Census (1880), Virginia City; Storey County records.

Note: Ethnicity equals nativity, with the following exceptions: *African American* equals racial designation by the census enumerator as black or mulatto; *Jews* (although problematic as an ethnic group) are of diverse nativity and are identified by cemetery records and other primary sources dealing with Jewish organizations. *American* denotes Euro-Americans born in the United States and includes children of European immigrants; *British* includes those of English, Scottish, Welsh or Cornish nativity. All Asians are Chinese born in China.

occupation. Sociologist Marion Goldman discusses the resulting inaccuracies in the census in her *Gold Diggers and Silver Miners*, a crucial, pioneering study of the Comstock. The author's consideration of a varied body of primary data makes her contribution a useful reference for this line of research. Goldman's conclusions concerning exploitation and attitudes toward sexuality are theoretical and beyond the reach of this overview. Her methodology when dealing with the census, however, is seriously flawed and must be examined here. These shortcomings underscore the problem of approaching a subject in a doctrinaire fashion with the conclusion in hand before beginning the research. Goldman's apparent insistence on finding as much oppression as possible resulted in the inclusion of too many women as prostitutes. This is unfortunate because, besides calling into question her conclusions, she disregards the fact that there are ample examples of real oppression of all kinds in any society.

In evaluating the occupation claims of Virginia City women, Goldman considers age, marital status, household, and place of residence. Such an assessment is necessary not only to understand prostitutes, but also to discuss women truly involved in other occupations, and so it is crucial that this task be undertaken as carefully as possible. Unfortunately, evaluating women who claim other occupations for possible association with prostitution is difficult. Goldman reasonably assumes that a single or divorced woman in her twenties living with or near prostitutes but claiming another occupation was probably also involved in sexual commerce.[16] This seems likely, but there are several problems with the approach. First of all, women meeting this profile may have been nothing other than what they professed. In addition, a prostitute may also have worked at other occupations, and a seamstress, for example, may have occasionally worked as a prostitute.[17] And finally, prostitutes who may have been living away from the traditional red-light district, and claiming other professions, will remain unnoticed by the criteria established for reclassification. Still, a conservative reassessment of the 1880 census using these criteria increases the number of Virginia City women involved in prostitution from the forty-seven who reported it as their occupation to seventy-seven.

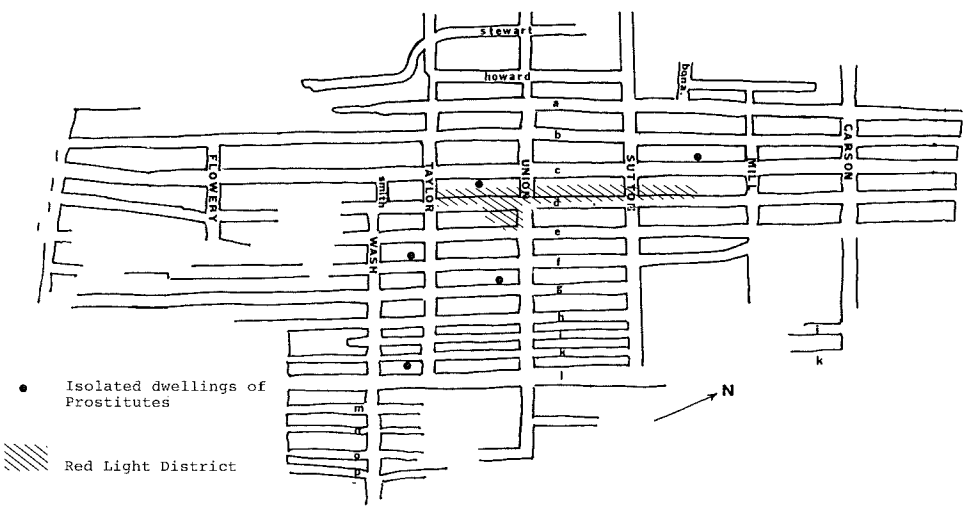
This number falls far short of the 134 women Goldman identifies as prostitutes in the 1880 Virginia City census. A careful examination of Goldman's methodology reveals several difficulties. Duplications of women on her list and the assertion that most of the Chinese women were prostitutes, even when other occupations were listed, are two obvious problems with her tally of prostitutes.[18] In addition, Goldman's essay is a tangle of confused addresses and directions. She repeatedly interchanges North and South D streets, and at several points she asserts that Chinatown was in the northwest part of town, when in fact it was to the east. In general, Goldman appears to have a misunderstanding of distances between addresses and of the over-all landscape of the Comstock. This creates general problems in ascertaining the relationship of women to prostitution. Moreover, Goldman's misreading of North C Street as South D Street on an entire manuscript page resulted in her identification of a lodging

house as one of Virginia City's "best brothels," an assertion based exclusively on a confused location and on the ages and nationalities of some of the residents.[19] Thus, Jane Robinson, a lodging-house operator on North C Street, becomes a madam on South D employing three young ladies, including her daughter, as prostitutes. Perhaps Goldman believed that her conclusion was supported by the fact that the Robinsons were French. A misread text applied to an ethnicity with a notorious, albeit unjustified, reputation caused an inaccurate conclusion.

Goldman's identification of brothels and prostitutes outside the red-light district is equally problematic. In several instances, she classifies women as prostitutes because they lived in boarding houses and because she regards their professed occupations as suspect, but she ignores women living next door who fit the same profile. This thinking appears to have been behind her identification of another of the supposed best brothels of Virginia City, this one on C Street, far removed from the red-light district and in the proximity of similar lodging houses, the inhabitants of which Goldman does not regard as prostitutes.[20]

Besides these issues, Goldman ignores nine women who are actually listed either as prostitutes or as living in brothels. Apparently the author missed them in her examination of the census records. This means, of course, that the difference between her list and the seventy-seven women here identified is even greater and that, in fact, it is possible to concur in fewer than half of her identifications of alleged prostitutes.

Use of the 1890 Sanborn-Perris Fire Insurance Map to assess associations with the red-light district more precisely (see Map 1) would have benefited Goldman's study. Her problematic approach to geography indicates that she did not use this important document, particularly with on-site work, which can go a



MAP 1. Red-light district and dwellings of prostitutes (not including Chinatown), Virginia City, 1880 U.S. Manuscript Census

long way toward clearing up misunderstandings of geographic relationships. Goldman's assertions about supposed prostitutes would also have been more convincing had she reinforced her identifications with citations from local court records, but she appears not to have used this rich source of information in this way. In view of the issues outlined above, Goldman's work with the census must be regarded as seriously flawed.[21]

However, a narrow set of criteria, strictly applied, can be used with census data to isolate a group of women more reliably associated with the profession. This method also reduces the likelihood that prostitution will affect the evaluation of other occupations. With this in mind, it is possible to use the 1880 manuscript census to arrive at conclusions regarding prostitution on the Comstock.

Prostitution was the fourth most common occupation reported for Comstock women, following those who kept house, servants, and seamstresses. Of course, it is not possible to identify all prostitutes from the census, but this ranking appears defensible.[22] The average prostitute was young, commonly divorced, and rarely widowed or married. She usually had no children and lived in a household smaller than those of other women.[23]

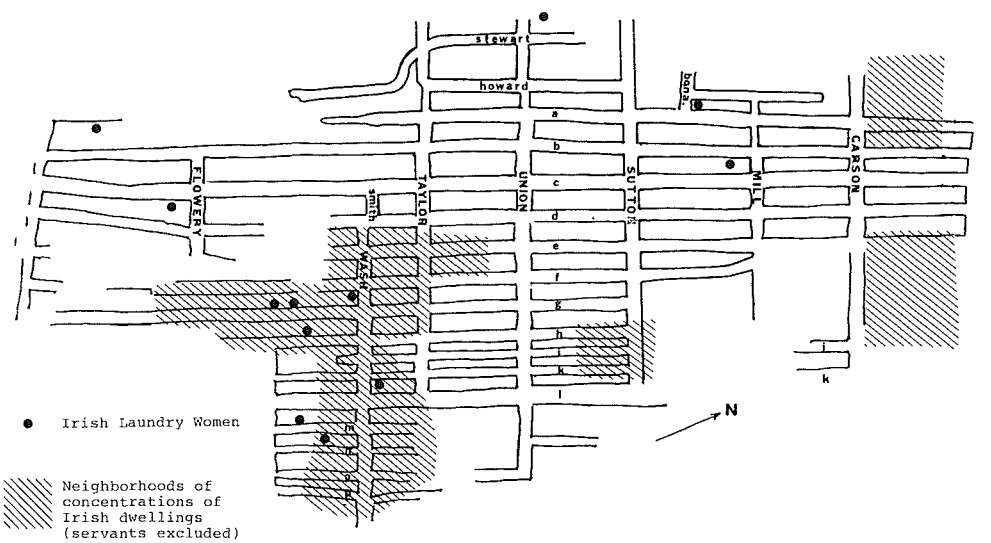
A few ethnic groups dominated Comstock prostitution. Although the census lists many Asians and Hispanics as prostitutes,[24] even more Asian and Hispanic women declared keeping house as an occupation, and in most cases there is no reason to believe, as Goldman did in an apparently arbitrary manner, that some of these housewives were also prostitutes.[25] Much has been written on the relative status of ethnic groups in red-light districts. This is particularly true for Asians, but also for Hispanics. Society generally restricted both to the lowest rungs of the socioeconomic ladder within the community of prostitutes.[26] It is clear that racial prejudice and the circumstance of immigration limited the choices of these women, and certainly they played an important role in the brothels and cribs. Nevertheless, sweeping conclusions about Asian and Hispanic women and prostitution are unfair. In spite of the limited options and opportunities available to these women, many apparently found work outside the brothel.

Although relatively few of the Comstock women born in the United States became prostitutes, the number of American-born women in Virginia City was sufficiently great that they also dominated the profession. Lacking the disadvantage of prejudice, these Euro-American prostitutes occupied the full range of available statuses. They appeared as everything from madams down to the most destitute of prostitutes and, because of their number, they dominated the rank and file of the red-light district. In general, Euro-Americans were the preferred prostitutes on the Comstock.[27] Of these, those who professed French nativity could most easily strive for higher status. Several prostitutes claimed to be French and, in fact, prostitution was the most common income-producing work for women of that nativity. French prostitutes were, however, relatively rare,

given the few French over-all on the Comstock, but their ethnically based prestige afforded them more attention and status than their number might indicate.[28]

Three African Americans of Virginia City can be identified as prostitutes in the 1880 census; given that there were only twenty-six African-American women in the city at the time, generalizations are problematic. Nevertheless, a few observations are possible. Two of the prostitutes claimed to be mulattos, an ethnicity that had the potential to increase the price commanded by an African-American prostitute. Of these three women, only one—a California native—was born in the United States; the others were born in Mexico and Panama. African-American women coming directly from the southern United States to the Comstock selected other occupations.[29]

Few Irish women served as prostitutes on the Comstock. Anne M. Butler's *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery* asserts that Irish women were drawn to the occupation. She credits this to a "social malaise" created by the "grinding poverty" experienced in Ireland and by the difficulties the immigrants faced in America.[30] While there is no reason to doubt Butler's observations about other states, the situation of Virginia City appears unique. Almost no Irish women lived in the red-light district there or claimed to be prostitutes during 1880. The Comstock had a large Irish population and, in fact, they were the only Euro-Americans to settle in distinct neighborhoods (see Map 2). Perhaps their number and sense of community served to discourage young Irish women from falling into the red-light district, an option pursued elsewhere in the West where pressure by their ethnic group and Catholic Church may have been less easily ex-



MAP 2. Distribution of Irish population and Irish laundries, Virginia City, 1880 U.S. Manuscript Census

erted. With these few observations regarding prostitution in mind, and the ranks of prostitutes carefully identified, it is possible to provide an overview of other occupations undertaken by Comstock women.

Occupation and Class: Domestic Work

Most women on the Comstock were involved in domestic work in one form or another. Three quarters of the women in 1880 claimed to be keeping house. This may be misleading because some may have earned money at a variety of tasks such as sewing, teaching, or washing clothes. In addition, the 1880 census clearly indicates that many of the women who claimed housekeeping as an occupation managed households that included some lodgers. Women listed with no occupation were usually young women, living with parents and apparently not required to contribute to the financial status of the household. It is reasonable to assume that most were expected to help their mothers and eventually marry and become housekeepers. They were, therefore, part of the cycle of domestic work and should also be considered here. For the most part, only Euro-American women born in the United States could afford this luxury. A few women reported that their occupation was maintaining a lodging house, and their work was probably dominated by domestic tasks such as cleaning, cooking, and otherwise caring for their families and tenants. Besides lodging-house operators, housekeepers, and those listing no occupations, there were also servants, of which there were more in 1880 than any other income-producing profession available to women.

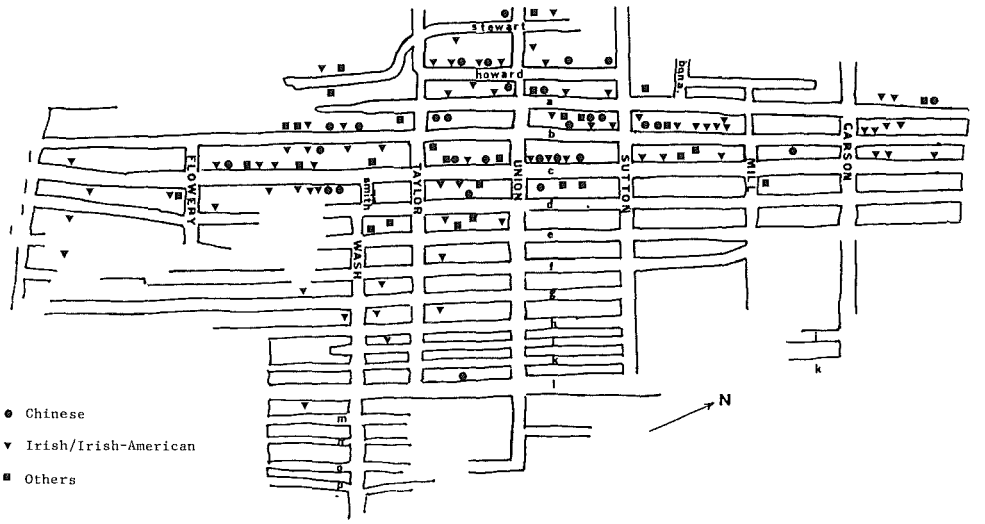
Not surprisingly, the majority of women keeping house were also married. Some widows maintained the title of housekeeper, but more of these were certainly engaged in money-making activities than were their married counterparts. Almost none of the women who kept house was divorced. Housekeepers also had, on average, the most people in their families and were the least likely to cohabit with large numbers of lodgers. This occupation is related to the enormous topic of child rearing, the history of which is also underresearched and has the potential to prove a fruitful avenue of study.[31]

Women who claimed to keep a lodging house tended to be older, and they were more likely to be widowed than married. The census listed many as married who in fact did not have husbands living on the premises. The percentage of women who were divorced and running a lodging house was well above the average for the population as a whole. The lodging houses run by women had an average of six paying residents, three more than the places maintained by the average housekeeper.[32]

The more affluent housekeepers on the Comstock frequently sought to hire servants to deal with the more tedious aspects of caring for a house and family, and also as an expression of wealth. Lodging-house operators, particularly those running larger establishments, employed servants as a necessity. The earliest

Comstock sources point to the difficulty of hiring servants. In 1860, only one woman from Virginia City or Gold Hill—twenty-two-year-old Bridget Deobin—appears to have been a servant. Although the enumerator lists her with no occupation, she was living in the same household with a machinist and his wife to whom she appears otherwise unrelated.[33] J. Ross Browne in his *A Peep at Washoe* comments on how difficult it was to hire a servant during his 1860 excursion to the Comstock.[34] A booming economy and diverse markets offering well-paid employment in many fields proved to be obstacles when attempting to lure women into domestic service. Nevertheless, many households eventually employed servants and, as mentioned above, they gradually became numerous on the Comstock. Mary McNair Mathews discusses the topic at length using her observations from the 1870s. She was largely concerned with competition between women and Chinese men among the ranks of servants, and, although her racism kept her guarded, the topic provided an occasion for perhaps her only positive comment about Asians. Mathews points out that the Chinese "will do things for us I would not like to ask a white person to do; besides, they never tell any family affairs like white girls do."[35] The cheap source of labor offered by the Chinese community was a constant threat to non-Asian women who wished to work as servants. To balance the economic efficiency and hard work of Asians, Euro-American women could count on the preference that their race afforded them: Although more costly and reputed to work less, a Euro-American servant provided an employer with more prestige than an Asian.[36] As a result, many of the wealthier households employed one of each, a Chinese cook, who was also responsible for the heavier and dirtier household tasks, and a woman (usually Irish) who cared for children, guests, and the more social activities.

The 1880 manuscript census for Virginia City reveals a community with ample opportunities for the employment of servants. There were 156 women and 43 men among their ranks in that year. A few generalizations concerning the women so occupied are appropriate here. Almost all were single and most were young.[37] Half of the female servants on the Comstock at the time were Irish, supporting the Victorian-era stereotype of Bridget the parlor maid. In general, the better homes up the hill from the commercial corridor were the ones most likely to employ servants. Businesses along C Street also provided a market for these workers. Residences and businesses outside this central core employed few servants and tended to limit opportunities to the Irish. This was particularly true of the Irish neighborhoods themselves (see Maps 2 and 3). By contrast, there are no Chinese, Hispanic, French, or Jewish women appearing in the 1880 census as servants.[38] Nevertheless, Chinese men were commonly employed in that capacity and represented a chief source of competition to the Irish servants. In fact, servants, restaurant workers, and laundresses, who together represent the vast majority of wage-earning women on the Comstock, all competed with Chinese men. Nevada historians cut their teeth on stories of railroad workers and miners who excluded the Chinese from their industries for fear of compe-



MAP 3. Distribution of servants, Virginia City, 1880 U.S. Manuscript Census

tition. And yet, most wage-earning Comstock women appear to have been in direct competition with the Chinese. In order to survive the threat of losing the marketplace to workers willing to survive on lower wages, women established themselves in specialized niches, but they were not able to exercise exclusive control of their industries in the way their male counterparts had.

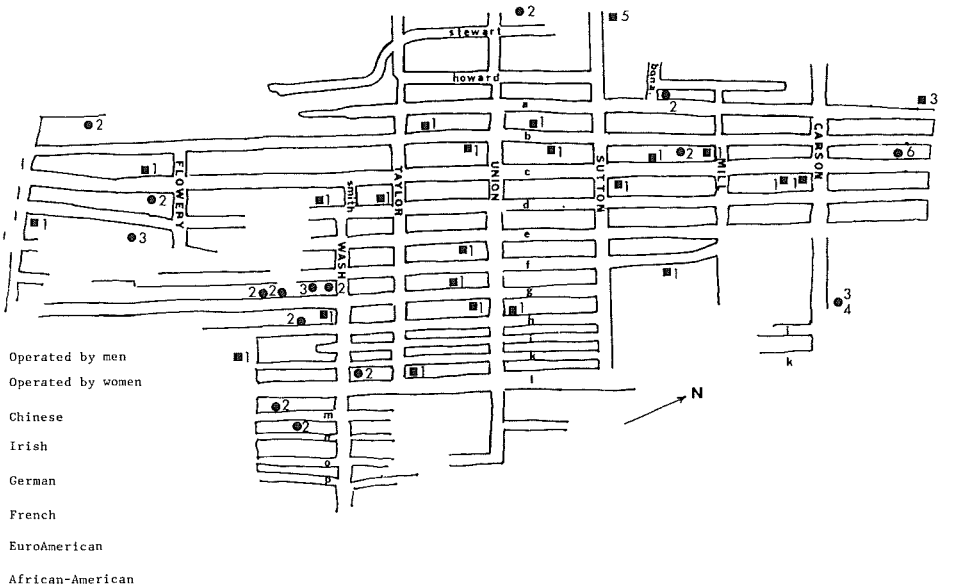
Occupation and Class: Clothing and Laundry Work

The absence of mass-produced clothing, the difficulty of home laundering, and a Victorian preference for elaborate attire created many jobs for women as seamstresses, milliners, and laundresses. Euro-American males who worked as tailors and wash-house owners and laborers provided some competition, but the vast majority of these workers were women. The many Chinese men who operated laundries, again, provide a remarkable exception.

Nearly a hundred seamstresses worked in Virginia City in 1880. Some of the more affluent households kept one on staff as they would a domestic servant.[39] Other seamstresses operated independently, depending on piece work. Most were young and single, although a few older widows returned to the occupation when faced with financial need. The thirteen milliners fall into much the same pattern except that the business attracted more married women. Few occupations were as dominated by women born in North America as was dressmaking. Women from Britain and France were involved in the trade as well. By contrast, Irish women working as seamstresses were rare.

Of the women involved in laundry work, the Irish were the most common. As in the case of the female servants, the prime competitors of the Irish women in

laundry work were the Chinese. This subject has been treated comprehensively elsewhere, but a few general observations bear repeating here.[40] Washing clothes was an arduous time-consuming process in the nineteenth century. One of the first luxuries purchased with disposable income was that of laundry service. Not surprisingly, most considered the profession to be one of the least desirable. Large mechanically run laundries owned by Euro-American males handled most of the commercial washing on the Comstock. An assortment of facilities owned and operated by women and by Euro-American or Chinese men satisfied the private market. Although back-breaking work, washing provided women a means of support when none other was possible. Competing with the Asians, however, appears to have been difficult: Mary McNair Mathews, who worked on the Comstock as a laundress for a brief time, bitterly railed against Chinese labor.[41] Nevertheless, some fifteen women in Virginia City found a niche in the industry during the 1880 census. Many other women, including those listed as keeping house and operating lodging houses, certainly did washing for money on occasion. It is impossible to identify such cases, but the few women listed as running laundries usually fit a well-defined profile. They were typically older than those involved in other occupations, and they were all widowed or living without a spouse because of divorce or separation. Most had children. The dominance of the Irish in the industry is clear and made all the more striking when the location of Irish neighborhoods is compared with that of Irish laundries (see maps 2 and 4). Irish laundresses appear to have taken advantage of their neighborhoods to protect them from Chinese competition.



MAP 4. Distribution of laundries by ethnicity, Virginia City, 1880 U.S. Manuscript Census

Occupation and Class: The Care Givers

Nuns, teachers, and nurses were relatively rare on the Comstock. In 1880, only sixty-six women of Virginia City claimed these three occupations. Because of the custom of employing single women as teachers, members of that group were predictably young. They also tended to be Euro-Americans of North American nativity. Although a prohibition against married teachers was customary for the time, it was not strictly followed on the Comstock: Several married women taught in Virginia City, perhaps revealing a necessity born out of the scarcity of women in the mining West and the unreasonable expectation that they remain single. In addition, there was considerable opportunity for private education in Virginia City. Mary McNair Mathews, a widow with a school-age child, also briefly ran a private school.[42] It appears that any literate woman could pursue such an option.

In contrast to the youth of the teachers, the nurses of the Comstock were usually older, and they were often widowed.[43] It appears, therefore, that nursing, like laundry work and operating a lodging house, was an occupation undertaken out of financial need later in life. Presenting a similarly older demographic profile, the Sisters of Charity had a thriving order in Virginia City. The sisters worked as teachers at their orphanage and convent between H and I streets and as nurses at St. Mary's Hospital down Six Mile Canyon. Clearly, their circumstance was unique since they were by definition single, but it is important to note that they represented an ethnic mix and that they were on average older than many of the other occupation groups. Most were of American or Irish nativity, but there was also one from France and one from England. All the sisters born in the New World, however, had European parents.

Occupation and Class: The Seldom-Sought Possibilities

Almost all women on the Comstock were involved in four generally defined lines of work. Nevertheless, about one percent of the women pursued uncommon options, and by their exception they help define the whole. They tended to be older and more likely to be widowed than other women. The 1880 manuscript census records such women as working as merchants, waitresses, and cooks and as operators of saloons and restaurants; it also lists a florist, an opium-den operator, a bookkeeper, a book folder, a fortune teller, a peddlar, an upholster, a hairdresser, a house painter, and a laborer. These women followed in the footsteps of Emma Rigg, the actress of 1860 mentioned above, who early pursued one of the less common employment opportunities. There are other examples throughout the history of the Comstock. In 1863, Madam Schroder conducted business as a diviner, astrologer, and folk healer.[44] Three years later, Susan Carroll and Mary Conway, two seamstresses, recognized an opportunity and opened a "Female Employment Office." According to the *Territorial Enter-*

prise, they could assist women "in search of respectable employment . . . and accommodations to families in the way of obtaining female 'help.' "[45]

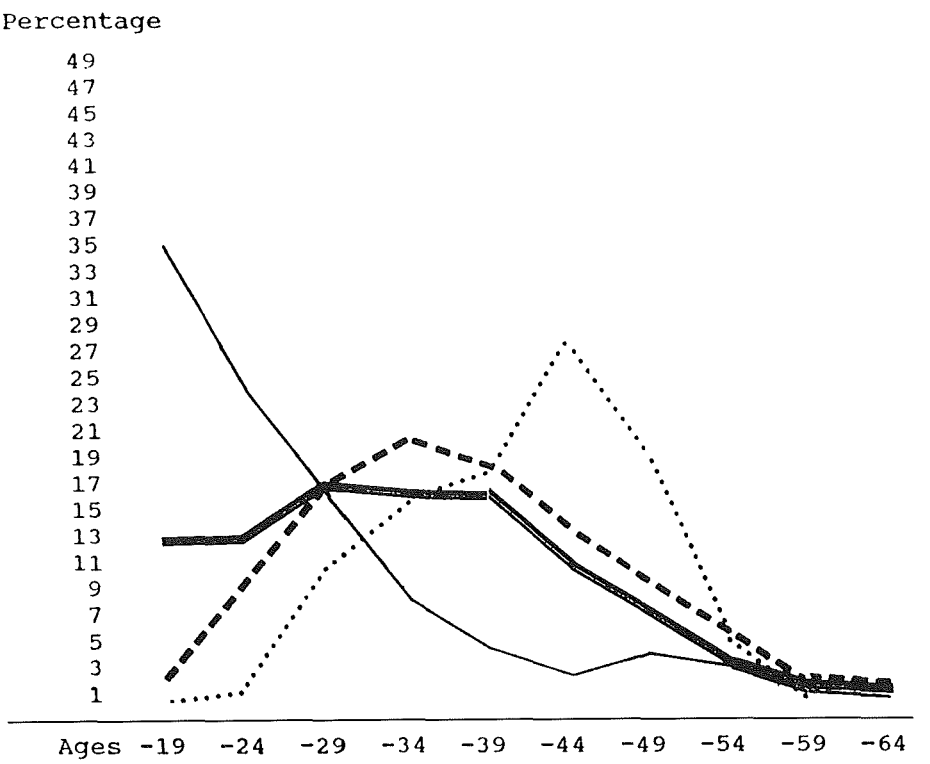
In spite of the diversity of occupations available to women on the Comstock, they were almost entirely excluded from mining and milling, the district's largest source of employment. The traditional prohibition against women entering a mine was frequently set aside for numerous visitors to the progressive industrial community, but convention was sufficiently strong to deter their employment there.[46] When a group of women opened a mine in 1871, the *Territorial Enterprise* felt it remarkable enough to justify at least two articles on the subject. One included the editorial comment that

> We do not see any reason why women should not engage in mining as well as men. If they can rock a cradle, they can run a car; if they can wash and scrub, they can pick and shovel. Although some gentlemen friends of the ladies are attempting to persuade them from continuing work, they are determined, and we are pleased to see it.[47]

Unfortunately for women as a whole, this enlightened sentiment appears to have been as rare as the mine that inspired it. On the other hand, additional research may reveal that women were in fact more frequently involved in mining, particularly with smaller, family-run operations. Insight into this possibility was gained by the Nevada Division of Historic Preservation and Archeology, which in 1990 recorded a small "rathole" mine on the Comstock. The mine had been sealed for at least seven decades and contained a large assortment of nineteenth-century artifacts. One of the most tantalizing of these was a woman's basque or close-fitting undergarment found beneath what was probably a man's vest. Perhaps it was only a rag used by men, but there is the possibility that it belonged to a woman who was helping out in a family enterprise.[48] Conclusive answers are impossible in this case, but clearly more research on the involvement of women in the mining industry is needed, and it may be with the assistance of archeologists that the topic is ultimately better understood. Eilley Bowers and Mary McNair Mathews serve as good examples of women trading in mining stocks and claims, but the extent of this activity, as with many others in women's studies, awaits further research.[49]

Overview

With the summaries of occupation groups in hand, it is possible to provide an overview of Comstock women through the perspectives of age, marital status, and ethnicity. Age was an important factor in selecting an occupation. Figures 2–4 demonstrate that distinct age groups dominated Virginia City occupations for women. Younger single women rarely pursued the kinds of employment that their seniors typically selected. The exception to this was seamstress work, which younger and older women pursued in nearly equal proportions.



- - - - - - - Keeping house (N = 1,422)

——— No occupation listed (N = 294)

..... Keeping lodging house (N = 64)

▬▬ Women in the Virginia City work force (N = 2,232). *Women* are defined as age seventeen or older with the exceptions of those at school and those who were younger but working.

FIGURE 2. Occupations of Comstock women, age distributions in percentage, 1880 U.S. Manuscript Census

Older women were most likely to take in lodgers, to work as laundresses, to resort to nursing, or to pursue a wide variety of "other" occupations, unique career choices for women having the experience to exploit specialized aspects of the society and economy. Women who kept house tended to be older. Clearly, these women, especially those like the widow Mathews who did not have husbands, were likely to employ several means to earn money, but they frequently preferred to retain the occupational title of Keeping House.

A woman's ethnicity could also affect her choice of occupation. The Irish, for example, dominated the ranks of servants, laundresses, and restaurant operators and workers but were less likely to be seamstresses or prostitutes than their

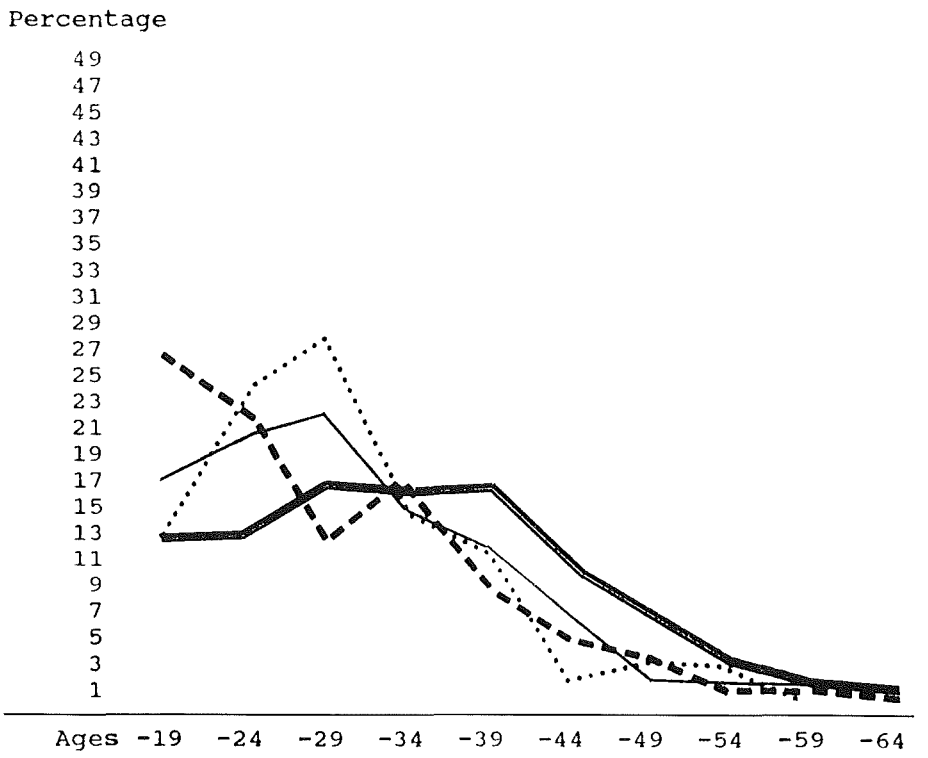


FIGURE 3. Occupations of Comstock women, age distributions in percentage, 1880 U.S. Manuscript Census

over-all number in the community might have dictated. The latter source of employment was common among Asian and Hispanic women, who do not appear in the 1880 census as servants or seamstresses. African-American women who declared occupations were most likely to be servants or seamstresses. Jewish women who claimed occupations worked as teachers or milliners.

Marital status also played a part in determining a woman's choice of occupation. Single women, for example, dominated a few occupations. Naturally, single status was a prerequisite for the Sisters of Charity, a group with a distinctive role, but unmarried women were also frequently servants, seamstresses, nurses, prostitutes, and teachers. Those involved in health care were either young single women or older women who had remained single or who were widowed.

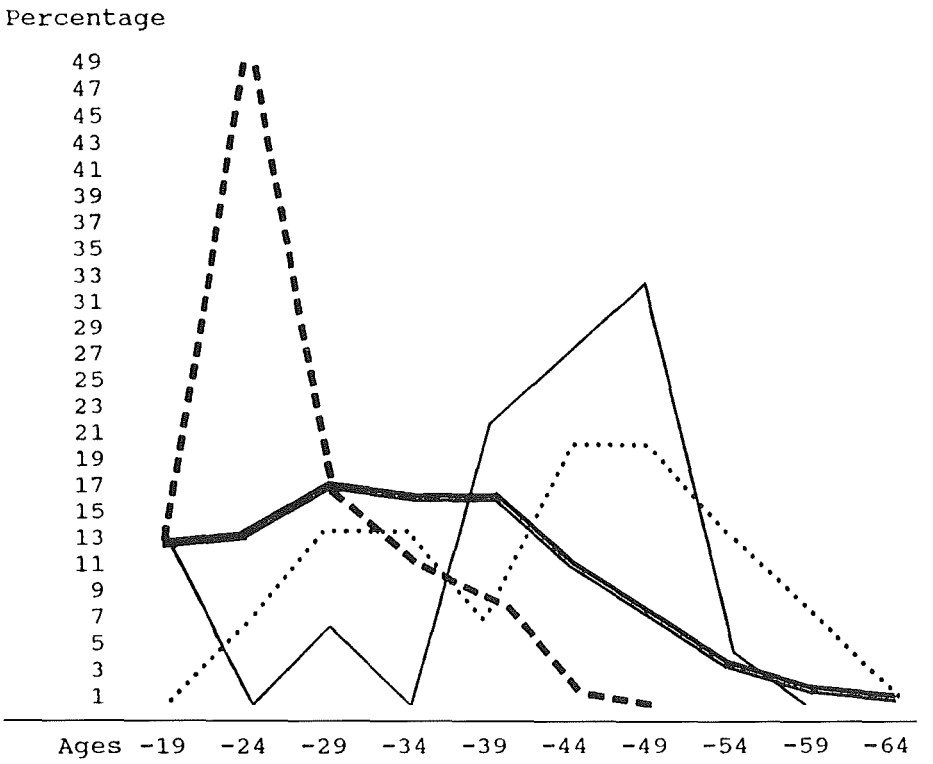


FIGURE 4. Occupations of Comstock women, age distributions in percentage, 1880 U.S. Manuscript Census

Married women were most likely to be keeping house, taking in lodgers, doing laundry, or pursing the miscellaneous specialized other sources of employment. Coincidentally, these occupations, except for house keeping, were also the only occupations in which widows outnumbered married women. These were, therefore, undertakings available at times of economic stress caused by a husband's unemployment or death. Similarly, most of the divorced women were seamstresses, prostitutes, laundry workers, or lodging-house keepers, or they followed one of the miscellaneous other occupations. Divorced women, in contrast to the other groups, almost never claimed to be keeping house or to have no occupation.

In spite of their value, summaries of groups are poor substitutes for histories featuring individuals. The definitive treatment of women on the Comstock will include both, and the one should never lose sight of the other. In his memoirs of Virginia City, the impresario David Belasco recalls a poignant incident involving a woman and her dying daughter:

> The mother was holding [her sick child], and I knew when I glanced at the flushed face that there was little hope. The faro men were calling outside the window, music came in from a dance hall near by, and rowdies were swearing in a saloon across the way. But here was a mother with the mother love in her eyes and all the tragedy of it too, watching the life ebb from the small body held close to her heart.[50]

Too often, the image of women of the mining West evokes only prostitutes and bonanza queens. It is important to remember that the experience of women in the region was diverse and complex; clearly, more research is needed to uncover its full dimension. While earlier histories of the Comstock have given attention to Eilley Bowers, Julia Bulette, Marie Louise Mackay, and a few others, the broad cross-section of women must be understood in the context of their communities, occupations, and ethnicities, as they lived their lives, experiencing happiness, achievement, and mother love, as well as sadness and tragedy. We may never know much about individuals such as Augusta Ackhert, Ty Gung, and Emma Earl, described at the beginning of this essay, but we can come to understand their circumstances and something of their motivations.

This overview of women in nineteenth-century Virginia City is merely a beginning. The subject has rarely been addressed, but the importance of the Comstock in western history dictates that additional research be undertaken on its women. Avenues for future study include specific occupations and their relationships to ethnicity, marital status, and age, in all possible combinations. In addition, more information is needed on women of specific ethnic groups, including the large Irish population and the Hispanic, Chinese, and native American women. Many of these groups, and particularly the last, are poorly documented, and yet need to be better understood.[51] Women's contributions to civic institutions and local politics also warrant research and a better understanding. Diverse sources remain to be explored, including church and county records, and—although rarely considered by historians—archeological resources and material culture.[52] Ultimately, a complete understanding of Comstock women must make use of all available information.

Notes

[1]Women's studies enjoys an excellent regional treatment in the form of Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, *The Women's West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987).

[2]Henry DeGroot, *The Comstock Papers* (Reno: The Grace Dangberg Foundation, 1985), 45. See also Alice B. Addenbrooke, *The Mistress of the Mansion* (Palo Alto: Pacific Books, n.d.); Ellin Berlin, *The Silver Platter* (London: Hammond, 1958).

[3]Zeke Daniels [Effie Mona Mack], *The Life and Death of Julia C. Bulette* (Virginia City, Nevada: Lamp Post, 1958); Hillyer Best, *Julia Bulette and Other Red Light Ladies: An Altogether Stimulating Treatise on the Madams of the Far West* (Sparks, Nevada: Western Printing and Publishing Co., 1959); Susan James, "Queen of Tarts," *Nevada Magazine* (September/October, 1984).

[4]Marion Goldman, *Gold Diggers and Silver Miners: Prostitution and Social Life on the Comstock Lode* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1981).

[5]Census reports frequently deviate from the manuscript census records. Although their statistics can be flawed, the reports indicate trends.

[6]Mary McNair Mathews, *Ten Years in Nevada or Life on the Pacific Coast* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985); John Waldorf, *Kid on the Comstock: Reminiscences of a Virginia City Childhood* (1970; rpt. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991). For a bibliography of Comstock sources, see Ronald M. James, "A Plan for the Archeological Investigation of the Virginia City Landmark District," addendum to the *Nevada Comprehensive Preservation Plan: Addendum* (Carson City: Nevada Division of Historic Preservation and Archeology, 1992).

[7]The archivist of Saint Mary's in the Mountains Catholic Church has been organizing that institution's records, providing a valuable research tool for the future. The Nevada Historical Society has an extensive collection of records dealing with the Episcopal Church in the state. In addition, the Storey County recorder has made considerable headway in recent years. Much remains to be done, however.

[8]Samuel Clemens, *Mark Twain's Autobiography* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1924), 326–27.

[9]Nineteenth-century censuses do not record more than the number of native American women.

[10]One can only surmise location from the 1860 manuscript census, placing sites on the assumption that the enumerator went from house to house, a pattern probably not followed consistently. A computerized version of this document was provided to the author by Kenneth Fliess of the University of Nevada, Reno, Anthropology Department. Adult women are defined here as age sixteen or older.

[11]J. S. Holliday, *The World Rushed In: The California Gold Rush Experience* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), 354. Jacqueline Baker Barnhart seems to verify this in her *The Fair but Frail: Prostitution in San Francisco, 1849–1900* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1986).

[12]Other men with wives include an assortment of merchants, men in the construction trades, and hotel, saloon, and restaurant keepers.

[13]See Mary Ellen Glass, "Nevada's Census Taker: A Vignette," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 19:4 (Winter 1966).

[14]In order to understand aspects of Comstock society and demography, the Nevada Division of Historic Preservation and Archeology entered the 1880 manuscript census for Virginia City into a computer, a project completed by Richard Adkins and Rachel Hartigan. Providing excellent information on ethnicity, occupation, and place of residence, the census makes it possible to locate dwellings in a geographic context by using the nearly contemporary 1890 Sanborn-Perris Fire Insurance Map.

[15]Association with a particular social class is not possible to determine accurately from the census.

[16]Goldman, *Gold Diggers*, 172.

[17]The ambiguity of the line dividing prostitution and other occupations is addressed by Anne M. Butler, *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery: Prostitutes in the American West, 1865–90* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), and by Elliott West in *The Saloon on the Rocky Mountain Mining Frontier* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 49.

[18]Goldman, *Gold Diggers*, 174–78.

[19]*Ibid.*, 68.

[20]Goldman apparently believed that this location was close enough to Virginia City's once notorious Barbary Coast, but in fact the address of her "brothel" was far removed from the Coast, which had in any event been cleaned up a few years before. Careful consideration of the people living at Barbary Coast addresses in 1880 suggests that an earlier clean-up was successful and that it no longer justified consideration as a smaller red-light district.

[21]The data to verify this conclusion are on file at the Division of Historic Preservation and Archeology, Carson City, Nevada.

[22]Goldman claims that prostitution was the most common occupation for women. *Gold Diggers*, 159.

[23]These generalizations contradict Goldman's statistical overview, which is based on her flawed data. *Gold Diggers*, 71.

[24]The term *Hispanic* denotes representatives from throughout the Spanish-speaking world. Although immigrants from Mexico were the majority of the group, the Comstock also served as home to Central and South Americans and to people from Spain.

[25]See Goldman, *Gold Diggers*, 69–70, 177–78.

[26]*Ibid.*, 67ff. See also Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Twayne, 1991); Shih-shan Henry Tsai, *The Chinese Experience in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Judy Yung, *Chinese Women of America: A Political History* (San Francisco: Chinese Cultural Foundation of San Francisco, 1986).

[27]Goldman, *Gold Diggers*, 67ff.

[28]*Ibid.*, 67–69.

[29]Goldman claims to have found three African-American prostitutes in the 1880 census. She missed the Panamanian altogether, and apparently overlooked the mulatto designation for two other women whom she includes as white prostitutes. There is no reason to conclude that her three African Americans designated as prostitutes were in fact employed as such. The forty-two-year-old African-American servant at the prestigious Bow Windows brothel was the only servant in an otherwise all-Euro-American brothel, and it is reasonable to assume that she was what the enumerator recorded. The other two women lived on C Street far from the red-light district and had no obvious association with prostitution. See *Gold Diggers*, 70.

[30]Butler, *Daughters of Joy*, 14.

[31]See, for example, Elliott West, *Growing up with the Country: Childhood on the Far-Western Frontier* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1989); *idem*, "Beyond Baby Doe: Child Rearing on the Mining Frontier," in Armitage and Jameson, *Women's West*, 179–92. See also Waldorf, *Kid on the Comstock*.

[32]This assumes that those judged to be lodgers were unrelated to the primary families and were paying rent. Although deviations from this would affect generalizations, one assumes that such exceptions would have been evenly distributed between lodging houses and residences, and so the conclusion expressed here remains defensible.

[33]Eighth United States Manuscript Census (1860). See also J. Wells Kelly, *First Directory of the Nevada Territory* (1862; rpt. Los Gatos, California: The Talisman Press, 1962), 162, for a rare citation of a servant in the directory two years later.

[34]J. Ross Browne, *A Peep at Washoe and Washoe Revisited* (Balboa Island, California: Paisano Press, 1959), 105–6. See also Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (1871; rpt. New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1913), 106.

[35]See Mathews, *Ten Years*, 251–56.

[36]See *Territorial Enterprise*, 28 April 1876, 2:1; 24 June 1876, 2:3. And see Mathews, *Ten Years*, 132, 135.

[37]Domestic service discouraged courting and postponed marriage, making it undesirable for most women. Many Irish women may have regarded this as a positive attribute of the profession, however, according to Hasia R. Diner. See her *Erin's Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1982), 20–22.

[38]Jews on the Comstock were not identified by the 1880 manuscript census. Identification has been possible only by use of Storey County records (including those related to the Jewish cemetery) and citations from local newspapers that identified Jewish families. Many are missed through this process, however.

[39]Mathews, *Ten Years*, 36, 39ff., 130. Mathews, throughout her memoirs, offers considerable insight into the occupation of seamstress.

[40]Ronald M. James, Richard D. Adkins, and Rachel J. Hartigan, "Competition and Coexistence in the Laundry: A View of the Comstock," *Western Historical Quarterly* (forthcoming May 1994).

[41]Mathews, *Ten Years*, 92, 252–58, 287.

[42]*Ibid.*, 98–99, 104, 137. Mathews gave up her school for a while to take up nursing. See 117ff.

[43]One woman involved in health care was listed as a "doctress," but for statistical purposes, she is included here.

[44]*Virginia Evening Bulletin*, 7 July 1863, 2:4.

[45]*Territorial Enterprise*, 6 April 1866, 3:2, 3:5.

[46]Cedric E. Gregory, *A Concise History of Mining* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1980), 221–22.

[47]*Territorial Enterprise*, 8 April 1871, 3:2; 14 April 1871, 3:2.

[48]William G. White and Ronald M. James, "Little Rathole on the Big Bonanza: Historical and Archeological Assessment of an Underground Resource" (Carson City: Nevada Division of Historic Preservation and Archeology, 1991). Special thanks to Jan Loverin of the Nevada State Museum for identification of the clothing.

[49]Addenbrooke, *Mistress;* Mathews, *Ten Years*, 121.

[50]David Belasco, *Gala Days of Piper's Opera House and the California Theater* (Sparks, Nevada: Falcon Hill Press, 1991), 30.

[51]See Eugene M. Hattori, *Northern Paiutes on the Comstock: Archaeology and Ethnohistory of an American Indian Population in Virginia City, Nevada* (Carson City: Nevada State Museum, 1975); *idem*, "Chinese and Japanese" in William G. White and Ronald M. James, eds. *Nevada Comprehensive Preservation Plan*, (Carson City: Nevada Division of Historic Preservation and Archeology, 1989 and 1991); and see Michael S. Coray, "Blacks in the Pacific West, 1850–1860: A View from the Census," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 28:2 (Summer 1985); *idem*, "Blacks in Nevada," also from *Nevada Comprehensive Preservation Plan*.

[52]See Donald Hardesty, Valerie Firby, and Gretchen Siegler, "An Archaeological Survey of the Virginia City National Landmark," a report for the Nevada Division of Historic Preservation and Archeology (1982); and see Ronald L. Reno, "Sensitivity Study of the Storey County Portion of the Comstock Historic District," prepared for the Storey County Commission (1990). James, "Plan for Archeological Investigation of Virginia City," identifies a means to evaluate and interpret material culture and its relation to gender issues.

PIPE DREAMS AND REALITY
Opium in Comstock Society, 1860–1887

Sharon Lowe

When Comstock prostitute Nellie Davis took her own life with an overdose of morphine in the spring of 1863, few were surprised. As the saying goes, "she had nothing to live for."[1] The manner of this woman's death indicates the easy access to and frequent use of the "demon" drug, opium, and its derivatives by marginal groups in Comstock society.

The stereotypical image of drug use in nineteenth-century America is predominantly one of men and women in eastern cities, most often from the lower echelons of society, ensnared in a dark, downward spiral toward oblivion. Such was not always the case. Western cities, with their promise of boundless opportunity built on individual effort, were just as likely to have their share of problems stemming from opium. The use and eventual abuse of opiates in patent medicines became a socially acceptable form of addiction. Conversely, recreational use of opium, usually by smoking it in a pipe (a practice first introduced in the West by Chinese labor in the 1840s[2]) was markedly less acceptable. Even so, this application of the drug was almost unrestricted because of its wide availability.

Virginia City, Nevada, was an inviting microcosm in which opium use flourished on the fringes of society. Miners and their camp followers, fresh from the California gold fields, rushed to the burgeoning Comstock towns that came into being almost overnight. Virginia City became the pre-eminent town that was synonymous with the development of the great Comstock lode. The initial social structure was as haphazard and chaotic as its physical structure. Innovative entrepreneurs full of new ideas arrived at this Queen of the Comstock hoping for instant prosperity. What they found in many instances was disappointment.

Formed following the 1859 discovery of one of the largest and most substantial silver deposits in North America, Virginia City and its character were the products of many forces. After the Rush of '63, the dynamics of urban growth began

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as the city's population reached fifteen thousand people. Modernization in the form of mining technology created an industrial town that one historian characterizes as a "spontaneous industrial complex."[3] Seen as a city complete with industrial capitalism, great opportunity in its money-based economy, a relatively fluid labor force, and "a showplace of western mining," it is accurately described in the 1881 United States Geological Survey as representing "the most highly organized phase of technical development that had been reached west of the Mississippi."[4]

Not only a prominent industrial center, Virginia City also had the façade of a Victorian city. It had the "dimensions and character of a cosmopolitan city, with diversified interests and varied social features of a large and important center."[5]

The underlying weakness of this cosmopolitan city was its boom-and-bust mining economy, which created the pervasive social disorder expressed in its haphazard infrastructures, inadequate health care, and high mortality rates from deadly disease and industrial accident. Virginia City thus presented ample opportunity for the introduction of drug use, especially of opium, in a society undergoing rapid industrialization.

By the seventeenth century, opium was used throughout Europe and Asia for its therapeutic properties. Opium is a derivative of the poppy plant grown throughout the Orient. Arabs introduced it into China in the seventh century and two hundred years later were actively importing opium from India. The late seventeenth century gave rise to the recreational use of opium among the Chinese upper classes, who smoked it combined with tobacco. It later spread to all levels of Chinese society. In wars related to the opium trade during 1839–42, the Chinese were forced to cede Hong Kong to the British. Five other Chinese ports were opened to western trade, which further increased the opium flow out of China. Cultivation of the drug had become more widespread, increasing supplies to users. When opium trade was legalized by the Treaty of Tientsin in 1858,[6] the drug became more accessible in foreign trade.

Evidence suggests that opium had been used for therapeutic reasons in the eastern United States as early as the eighteenth century; recreational use, however, seems to have come much later, and arrived in the West primarily via Chinese immigration.

Chinese laborers came to California in 1849 during the Gold Rush to work as laundrymen, cooks, and servants, and eventually to work on the railroads and in the mines. Among the Chinese was also an entrepreneurial class of merchants and contractors. Many came from Canton, which was closely associated with opium traffic and opium smoking. The laborers secured their passages using a credit-ticket system by which a Chinese merchant provided passage to California on credit. The contract took years for the immigrant to pay back.

Though many spoke out against debt bondage in California, there were ways for Chinese merchants to control immigration to the West:

> Chinese merchants successfully adjusted the pattern by extending the social structure of the Chinese world of the Pearl River Delta into the West, employing district companies and kinship organizations as instruments of extra-legal control. The sojourners' loyalty to their families, left behind in the Pearl River Delta, enforced the creditors' hold over the indentured emigrants. Under merchant leadership the control system pervaded the entire West, spreading into isolated mining camps and crowded Chinese quarters. It ensured the newcomers work in gangs of miners and railroad construction crews, where regimented labor guaranteed the merchant-creditors a constant return on their investment in indentured emigrants.[7]

Not only were the Chinese indentured in a foreign country, they were trapped in a hopeless system that reinforced the need for an escape outside the work place. As Gunther Barth suggests in his *Bitter Strength: A History of the Chinese in the United States, 1850–1870,* the release was to be found in the early Chinatowns of the West; there opportunities to indulge in gambling, prostitution, and smoking opium were provided, often all in the same establishment. Opium became a form of escape in a hostile environment.[8]

The debt-bondage system was reinforced by the cost of opium use, for the laborer, in his desire to alleviate the pressure and stress of his situation, spent half of his wages on his addiction. Compounding this problem was the time wasted in the opium den, time that could have been more productively utilized.

Most Chinese workers had left their families in China with the promise of getting rich and returning. Their anxiety increased when it became obvious that they could not afford to go back because of low wages and the cost of opium. Because the Chinese laborer earned only approximately a dollar a day, the opium habit was a costly one: Fifty cents or more per day went to buy the opium ingested via the pipe.[9] The drug's chemical properties led to addiction and physical dependence.[10] The Chinese laborer came to America to make money for his family, and often to get away from the demon, but here the oppressive conditions followed him.

The Chinese influx into Nevada was similar to that in California. The first Chinese had been in Nevada since 1851, when the Mormon, John Reese, hired Chinese to build water ditches for irrigation and mining purposes in the Carson Valley.[11] With the building of the Central Pacific Railroad in 1863, thousands of Chinese workers came to labor in its construction.[12] Though some Chinese had worked in the mines in California and Nevada, they eventually found their way into the "great army laying siege to Nature in her strongest citadel, the construction crews of the Central Pacific building the western section of the Transcontinental Railroad."[13] After the passage of the railroad through western Nevada in 1868, a thousand "obedient Chinese toiled like ants from morning to night" constructing the Virginia and Truckee Railroad to the Comstock in 1869.[14]

A man caning a chair in Virginia City's Chinatown in the 1870s. *(Watkins New Series, Nevada Historical Society)*

There was considerable anti-Chinese resentment on the Comstock because of their employment in the building of this railroad from 1869 to 1872. By 1871, the Nevada legislature enacted a resolution that "guarded against the use of Chinese labor on the public grounds in the state."[15]

Adding to anti-Chinese sentiment was the increased frequency of opium smoking on the Comstock and the beginnings of a pattern of recreational use of drugs. Though some citizens ignored the Chinese, others believed that they perpetuated vice and threatened community values. Opium dens exemplified the lack of social conscience and offended the Victorian model of propriety. As one upright citizen suggested, "Chinatown of Virginia City is like Chinatown of every other city of the Coast, a loathsome, filthy den. It is enough to breed cholera or any other pestilential disease."[16]

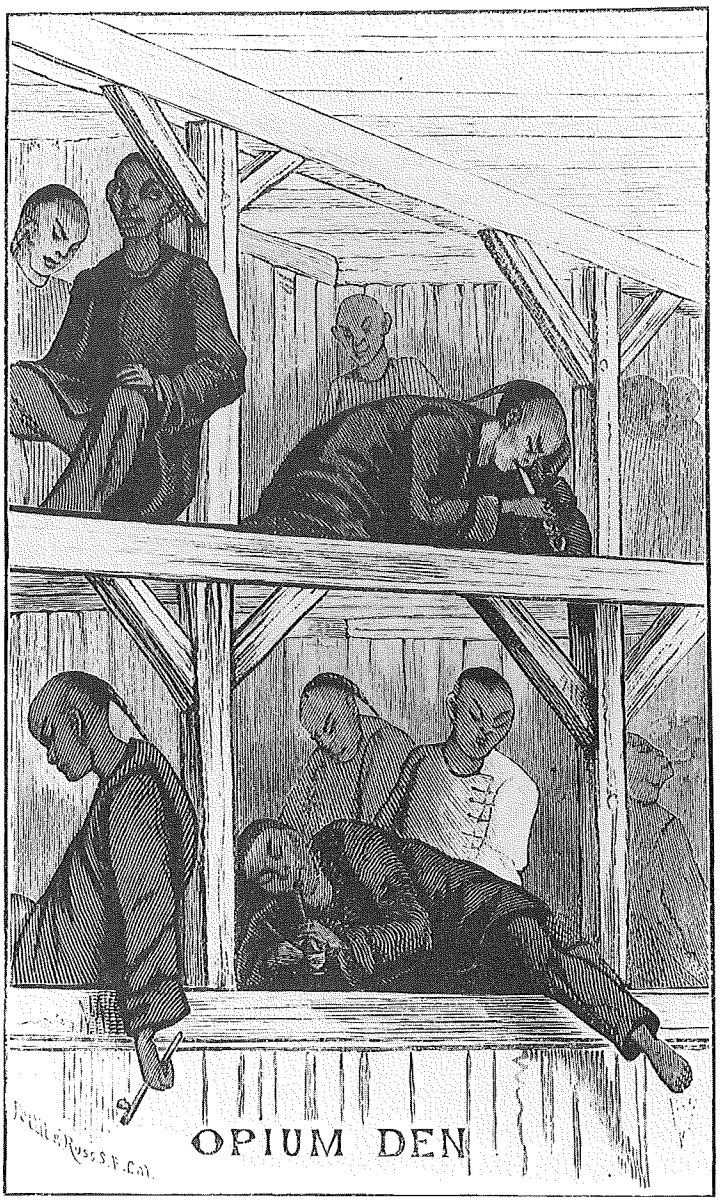
To many citizens, Chinatown and its opium dens were part of a culture that they considered impossible to assimilate because the Chinese engaged in vices and barbaric customs. The ideal of egalitarianism and the melting pot in the West simply did not apply in the case of the Chinese, and the opium connection

This man was called "Holley" or "Hulley" (after his former employer, Jim Hulley). Daily he walked from Dayton to Virginia City to sell his baskets of fresh vegetables. On the return trip he carried manufactured items that had come in on the Virginia & Truckee Railroad. *(Irene V. Cooper Stoddard Collection, Nevada Historical Society)*

only solidified those beliefs. Mary McNair Mathews offers a contemporary insight into the problem of the opium den when she observes:

> their opium dens, which seem to defy all police power to break up, are a nuisance, and are also ruining our people, for many have become slaves to this most destructive habit. But not only men and women visit the opium dens but I am informed, by good authority, that girls and boys visit them and often have to be helped home by their companions. Girls and boys, from twelve to twenty, are daily being ruined by this opium smoking. I never visited one of these dens, but have had them described to me. A table sets in the center of the room, a dish of opium upon that, and long pipes for each smoker is [are] dipped in this, and they lie on bunks around the table and smoke till they become unconscious. After a person once smokes, he has created an appetite for a vice that he has no power or wish to refrain from. You who are so far from these scenes of vice have no idea of the baneful effects of this pernicious habit. It is utter ruin to smoke the first pipe, for there is but one way to keep them from it afterwards, and that is the walls of an asylum.[17]

Mathews may exaggerate the connection between occasional smoking of opium and addiction. Some sources suggest that between 15 and 30 percent of the Chinese community in California were addicted,[18] and, although there are



A nineteenth-century lithographic depiction of an opium den. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

no records to substantiate a statistic in Nevada, one could assume that the figure was similar. The statistics do suggest, however, that not all Chinese were addicted to opium and that the majority were simply social opium users, and not the hard-core addicts that Mary McNair Mathews describes. The extent of non-Chinese addiction is not statistically ascertainable. Whether there were elements

of society that were willing to integrate with the Chinese and other fringe elements such as prostitutes, pimps, and gamblers in frequenting the dens is questionable. Although the extent of their addiction, if they were addicted, is conjecture, one point is clear: Members of the underworld "would have the fewest scruples about associating with Orientals or experimenting with their vices."[19]

There seems to have been a symbiotic relationship between drugs and various marginal groups, including prostitutes. Recreational use of opium and the technique of smoking it in a social atmosphere such as a den became part of the irregular marketplace that included gambling establishments, brothels, and dance halls. As Marion S. Goldman suggests in *Gold Diggers and Silver Miners,*

> The irregular marketplace was not a building or geographical area, although it was easy to associate it with fleshpots, dives, and faro parlors lining C and D Streets. Instead, the marketplace was a set of economic relationships involving the creation and exchange of goods and services which were either formally or informally condemned. While prostitutes, faro dealers, and dubious stock speculators were not automatically defined as criminals on the Comstock, they lived outside of the respectable communities' moral boundaries, participating in routine economic relationships with opium peddlers, stage robbers, and other obvious criminals.[20]

Thus, the use of opium as a recreational activity among marginal groups developed as part of the economic system that characterized the instant city or industrial urban center that Virginia City had become. It provided the prostitute with a synthetic euphoria that made the misery of the job less extreme. The social atmosphere of the Chinese opium den was also a factor that influenced prostitutes. After working all night they would often drink with their customers at various saloons or dance halls. They would then go to the dens, which served the dual function of meeting place and sanctuary from the real world. Prostitutes often stopped by in the early hours of the morning after their last trick and relaxed with a pipe. One historian suggests that "within the den a rigid code of honor prevailed: smokers would not take advantage of other smokers, or tolerate those who did."[21]

Another characteristic of the opium den that made it attractive to prostitutes and others at the fringe of society was its ubiquity: Dens were common in almost every major city in the West. One nineteenth-century western smoker said, "its a poor town now-a-days, that has not a Chinese laundry, and nearly every one of these has its lay-out. You get the first ticket [letter of introduction written in Chinese] and you're booked straight through. I tell you its a great system for the fiend that travels."[22]

Thus, on the Comstock as in other mining camps, the accessibility of opium, the camaraderie, and the belief that drugs offered a refuge from the real world combined as a catalyst that promoted institutionalization of the opium den, especially at the margins of society. The Comstock created an industrial mining society, marked by "rapid in and out migration." Furthermore, demographic

studies suggest that there was "an imbalance in terms of age and gender," which was characteristic of industrial mining complexes of the West. By the 1860s, "nine tenths of the population were males and three fourths of the sector of the population were aged between twenty and forty."[23] As one historian notes, "populated in response to the discovery of the Comstock Lode, land locked, surrounded by desert and mountains; and—with the significant exception of gold and silver—devoid of resources easily exploited with nineteenth century technology . . . Nevada is a mining community exclusively, and can never be anything else."[24] This type of community welcomed the availability of opium. Its transient population, urban-industrial environment, and the expanded personal freedoms of a modern city encouraged experimentation and ensured that drug use would occur.[25]

Though hypodermic injection of drugs had been introduced in New York as early as 1856, it never became as popular as opium smoking for recreational use on the Comstock, even though it was less expensive, took less time, and was much stronger. One of the main attractions of opium smoking was that it was a social, almost ceremonial, procedure. In his early study of opium smoking in America, Dr. Harry Hubbell Kane, writing in 1882, relates that he had "never seen a smoker who found pleasure in using the drug [smoking] at home and alone, no matter how complete his outfit, or how excellent his opium."[26] He further suggests that the allure of smoking opium was the fascination of a vice that was worth "moral ruin, the charring and obliteration of every honest impulse and honorable sentiment, the sweeping away of every vestment of modesty, by such associations and such surroundings."[27]

For many, opium smoking proved a vicious cycle. The addict's daily supply cost from fifty cents to three dollars a day, more than a day's work at unskilled labor. The loss of work from impaired ability and perhaps loss of a job made it an even more expensive habit. The addictive nature of opium induced the user to consume more as the habit continued.[28] For the prostitute, the price was often the highest of all—suicide or overdose.

One authority argues that Comstock prostitutes were major opium users as shown in their frequent presence in the dens of Virginia City.[29] Though there are no statistics relating to recreational opium use, sources such as the Storey County District Court indictment records indicate that use was quite extensive among prostitutes, and that many were prosecuted.[30]

The Journals of Alfred Doten, 1849–1903, diaries of a Comstock newspaperman, refer several times to opium overdose among prostitutes. Doten's February 6, 1868, entry reports:

> Little Ida, that I used to [erasure] some 2 years ago was found dead in her bed at the "Bow Windows" (Jenny Tyler's) this morning. She had been rather dissipated for some time past and latterly had taken to opium—Ida Vernon was her name—about 32 years old—a man was sleeping with her and found her cold in the morning—rest in peace Ida—She was her worst enemy—[31]

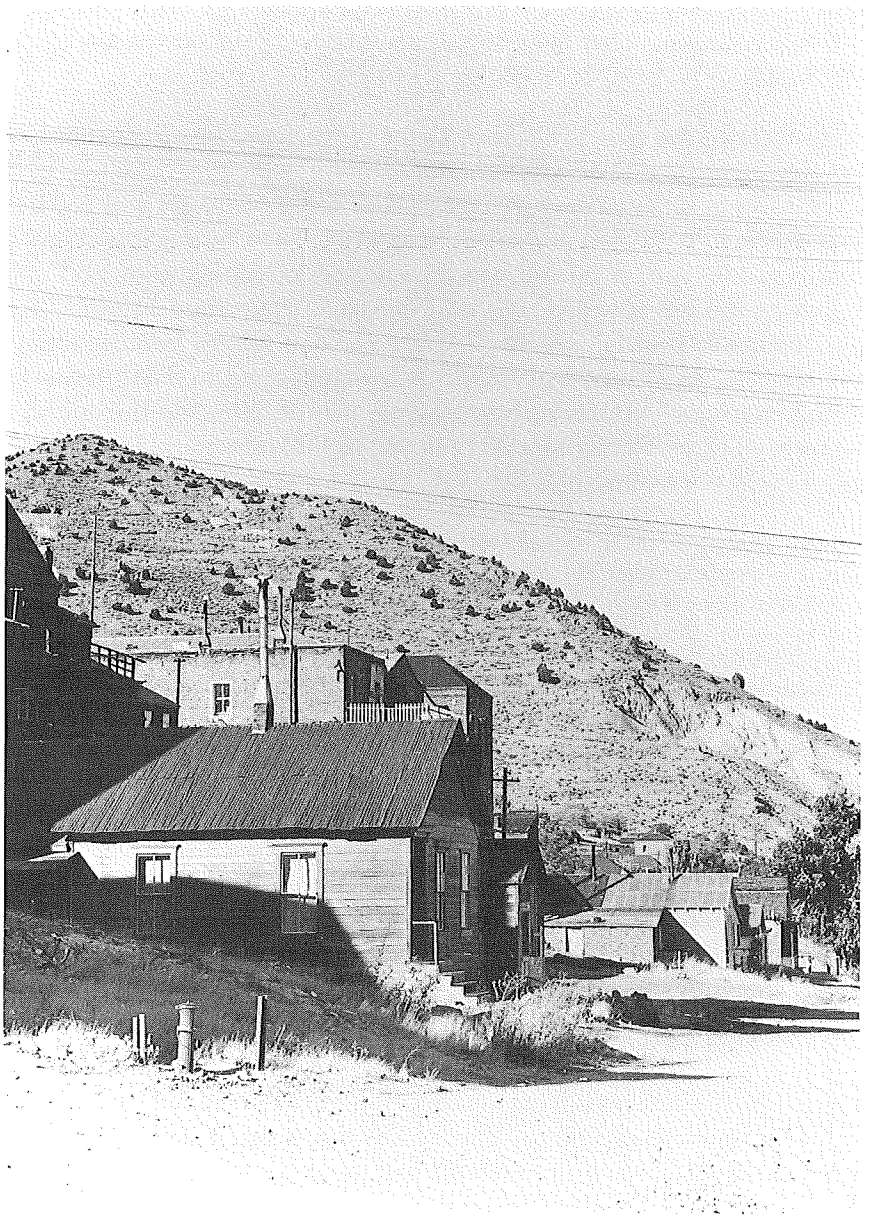
It is difficult to obtain an exact number for suicides caused by smoking opium because the records often lump all opium use together either as prescription medicine or as patent drugs, which often contained opium and its derivatives. In the Storey County Hospital records of deaths and causes between 1865 and 1880, death from opium is not listed nor is suicide. Causes that are acknowledged include mania, *mania à potu* (defined as delirium from either alcohol or drugs), and other conditions whose direct cause could have been opium intake, implying that the drug was indeed a cause of death. In addition, the death category *unclassified* may well have included suicide or drug overdose.[32]

Another entry in Doten's diary, dated August 16, 1872, is suggestive of the extent of opium overdose and suicide on the Comstock among prostitutes: "2 whores at Rose Benjamin's corner of D St. and Sutton Avenue, committed suicide by taking laudanum this PM—I went to see them, one not quite dead, but died about 11.[33]

These are but a few of the instances of suicide among prostitutes. Between 1876 and 1880 there were at least twenty recorded deaths by suicide, not to mention the attempts using some form of opium. Again, these numbers do not represent the true statistics both because of the transient nature of the prostitute population and because the cause of death was not always mentioned.[34] As Goldman points out,

> Prostitutes of almost every age, nationality, race, and status within the irregular marketplace killed themselves. At age twenty-two, Laura Steele, a beautiful black-haired Scotswoman, took lethal laudanum at Rose's fancy brothel; Nellie Davis, down-and-out thirty-three-year-old prostitute, overdosed on morphine in her solitary room at Mrs. Gray's B Street lodging house; and an anonymous Chinawoman who had cost her owner $800 suicided by means of laudanum in the back of Stern's store in Gold Hill. She was one of the six Chinese women who chose death over a life of hopeless slavery.[35]

The patterns of opium use in other segments of society were different from that of the prostitute, but the results were often similar. A miner might be introduced to opium by a friend who was experienced in its use, or by a prostitute. He would probably get sick from his first puff, but the euphoria would induce him to keep trying, and eventually he would become addicted. Gamblers used the drug to relax after a hard night of playing cards. One "sporting character" even bragged that he was the first white man to have smoked opium in Nevada. "You may use my name in your paper. I am known in all the large cities of the U.S. by most all OPIUM SMOKERS as I was one of the first who started using the drug in the way of smoking it. That was in 1871, in the State of Nevada."[36] This is an obvious fabrication since newspaper articles cite smoking of opium much earlier than his account suggests. What his bravado does indicate, however, is that gamblers and others were apparently smoking opium quite openly on the Comstock. In the March 28, 1878, issue of the *Territorial Enterprise*, an article entitled "Died in an Opium Den" states that Larry Smith, a former pan-mill operator from California,



A later twentieth-century view of D Street in Virginia City, the site of many of the cribs and brothels of the previous century. *(Ed Strong photo, Nevada Historical Society)*

had been found dead in an opium den. The body was lying on one of the low couches provided in such places for the accommodations of smokers and near at hand was a lamp, still dimly burning, with such other apparatus as is used by smokers. The supposition is that the man smoked himself out of his life, either on purpose or accidently [sic].

Those acquainted with Smith say that they never heard of his being addicted to the habit of opium smoking. They think he must have taken to it within two or three weeks or that his first attempt may have proved to be fatal.[37]

The article concludes that the case of Larry Smith should be a "warning to the opium smokers of the town who are not few."

By the 1870s opium smoking had reached all levels of society and had become a social problem that could no longer be ignored. The Chinese migration, prostitution, and the ready availability of the drug added momentum, and ushered other levels of society into recreational drug use. Furthermore, Virginia City was a male-dominated society, with few legal or social restraints. Because there were so few families, most residents found their nights open to many forms of unrestricted recreation—drinking, card playing, prostitution, and the opium dens. These were all conveniently located in close physical proximity. Doten speaks of a typical night out in Virginia City:

The same—passed as usual—after I got through I went with Sam Glessner down to Chinatown—drank at Tom Poo's—went to Mary's house—we were in her room with her—she gave us each a cake left from the holiday of yesterday—filled with nuts & sweet meats—we laid on the bed with her and smoked opium with her—a little boy some 2 yrs. old sleeping there, belonging to one of her women. . . . On my way home I stopped in at the Great Republic saloon—big whore ball going on.[38]

Aside from smoking for entertainment, workers began to use opium as a way of dealing with the pressures of their jobs in industrial mining. Men lived in constant danger of accident, fire, explosion, falls, and other terrible mishaps. As Dan DeQuille states in *The Big Bonanza,*

Accidents are of constant occurrence in mines in every part of the world, and the mines of the Comstock lode enjoy no immunity from what appears to be the common lot or prevalent fatality, in this respect. Accidents of every imaginable kind have occurred since the opening of the first mine on the Comstock, still occur, and will continue to occur so long as a mine on the lode is worked.[39]

Because these conditions were an integral part of the mining frontier, citizens lived life for the here and now. Miners could die at any moment because of the dangerous nature of their occupation, and smoking opium relaxed them and made their reality a little less harsh. Though few incidents are recorded, it is reasonable to assume that some accidents must have occurred because doped-up miners were suffering from the aftereffects of having smoked opium the previous night. Apparently many of Virginia City's proper citizenry, both men and women, had also begun to smoke opium freely by the beginning of the 1870s.

Not a few men in Virginia City—and a few women—are opium smokers. They visit the Chinese opium dens two or three times a week. They say that the effect is exhilarating—that it is the same intoxication produced by drinking liquor except that under the influ-

ence of opium a man has all his senses, and his brain is almost supernaturally bright and clear. An American told me that he had been an opium-smoker for eighteen years, and said there were about fifty persons in Virginia City who were of the initiated. In San Francisco he says there are over five hundred white opium smokers, many women among them.[40]

It is difficult to determine whether all the women referred to were prostitutes. Clearly opium smoking was no longer restricted to the lower levels of society.

Though the monetary cost was somewhat affordable, the cost in human suffering became one that had to be addressed. Opium smoking was accepted until the sons and daughters of mainstream Comstock society began to engage in the practice. In the *Virginia Evening Chronicle,* dated July 9, 1877, an article entitled "In the Cradle of Hell" shocked citizens as to the extent of opium abuse in their community.

An extraordinary scene was enacted on D street last night, the villainous aspect of which casts a shadow even over the contaminated locality. It appears that about four days ago a laboring man living near the C and C shaft sent his daughter to the grocery store for some soap and she did not return that night. . . . She was in the house of Rose Benjamin, a den which is ranked as the most notorious dead-fall in the place and the father demanded admittance. Mrs. Benjamin, the harridan who runs the establishment, refused him admittance and slammed the door in his face. . . . A crowd of over 100 men collected in the street.

When the gathering crowd took in the situation the excitement became intense and cries of "Pull down the House!" "Gut the den!" "Clean out the dead-fall!" and similar expressions were heard on all sides.[41]

The young girl was finally rescued from the house, but it was rumored that another thirteen-year-old was held there as well. When interviewed with her mother present the young girl explained how she entered into the den of iniquity.

I was four days in the house, and was induced to go there by a girl named Frankie Norton. . . . We smoked opium together. Reporter—How long have you smoked opium? Girl—About seven months. Here the mother threw up her hands in astonishment and burst into tears. . . . The reporter continued: I smoked in Chinatown and Gold Hill. The places are open every night.

Reporter—How many pipes did you smoke in a day? About thirty-five, but sometimes not more than twelve. If I don't smoke I feel sick; I want some now.[42]

The reporter went on to question the girl and found out that the other girl was named Brinton, and was from Gold Hill. She was apparently still in the den and seemed "stupefied with the drug and utterly indifferent to her situation."[43] The reporter also discovered that many men went to this establishment to smoke opium and engaged in commercial sex there with young girls.[44]

After it was recognized that opium smoking was no longer restricted to the

fringes, and thus threatened middle-class propriety, action by local authorities was swift. Harry Hubbell Kane quotes a letter he received when investigating opium smoking in America. Though the name of the doctor who wrote the letter is not known, he apparently wrote it in Virginia City.

> Opium smoking had been entirely confined to the Chinese up to and before the autumn of 1876, when the practice was introduced by a sporting character who had lived in China, where he had contracted the habit. He spread the practice amongst his class, and his mistress, a woman of the town, introduced it among her demi-monde acquaintances, and it was not long before it had widely spread amongst the people mentioned and then amongst the younger class of boys and girls, many of the latter of the more respected class of families. The habit grew very rapidly until it reached young women of more mature age, when the necessity for stringent measures became apparent, and was met by the passing of a city ordinance.[45]

Though this source is mistaken as to the date that smoking by non-Chinese began, he does provide insight into the size of the problem and the evolution of reform in Virginia City. Reform was also beginning in other cities in the West such as San Francisco. The *San Francisco Chronicle* of July 25, 1881, reports that the "habit in past years, so far as whites are concerned, was confined to hoodlums and prostitutes mostly. . . . Now that there are scores of places where the habit can be contracted in clean rooms in respectable portions of the city, the practice will gradually extend up in the social grade.[46] Other sources indicate that opium smoking was rapidly becoming a form of recreation in other cities in the West.[47]

By the mid 1870s the menace of opium had become a public controversy. Newspapers regularly described its dangers, reporting its growing spread outside the narrowly circumscribed lower classes. The reality evoked public outrage once it was known that innocent young girls and middle-class women had begun to find their way into Chinatown. Where Caucasian smokers once came from the criminal class, now the rich frequented the dens as well. However, it was not "just the prospect of upper class addiction that aroused concern, but also the fear that respectable women were being seduced in the dens."[48] Inflamed public opinion prompted the passage of restrictive laws. In September of 1876, the Board of Aldermen of Virginia City passed a law that abolished opium dens and fined those who smoked opium.[49] By 1877, the Nevada legislature had also restricted opium to medical use by prescription only. The Statutes of the State of Nevada (1877) state:

> From and after the last day of March, A.D. eighteen hundred and seventy-seven, it shall be unlawful for any person or persons, as principals or agents, to sell, give away, or otherwise dispose of opium in this State except druggists and apothecaries; and druggists and apothecaries shall sell it only on the prescription of legally practicing physicians.[50]

Not only was it a crime to possess opium, but also to possess pipes or other dope apparatus. The statute also made landlords responsible for anyone who

used the drug on their premises. The problem, as always, was that these substance-abuse prevention laws were difficult to enforce and rarely solved the problem. A few weeks after passage of the state law prohibiting the sale of opium, the *Virginia Evening Chronicle* commented:

> Some months ago the Chronicle made a thorough exposure of the prevalence of opium smoking in Chinatown. Public sentiment became so strong upon the subject that the Board of Aldermen passed an ordinance prohibiting the sale of the drug and imposing a heavy fine upon all persons having it in their possession. The passage of this ordinance resulted in a temporary scare to the opium smokers, and a few poor Chinamen were arrested and fined for keeping dens for smokers. In a few weeks however the resorts were again in full blast, and the traffic in the drug was carried on under the very noses of the police. . . . The place is a plague-spot, which should be eradicated at once. Young girls are introduced to the dens, seduced while under the influence of the drug, and then they drift rapidly down into some crib on D Street.[51]

The article goes on to state that the police were not doing their job and that the dens were still in operation. The implication is that if Chinese were smoking among themselves, they were left alone. (There is no evidence to indicate that law enforcers were being paid off but, curiously, many dens remained in full operation.) If Chinese and whites were smoking together, however, sporadic enforcement of the laws would occur for a month or so. This laxity may indicate collusion between the police and "vice elements." White smokers simply transferred their habit to new quarters, while continuing to obtain their opium from "a network of Chinese dealers." Later, once the heat was off a particular den, the whites would "drift back to the Chinese den or to a den run by a Chinese but largely patronized by white customers. Then there would be another crackdown, and the white smokers would disperse again."[52] In San Francisco, police found it nearly impossible to infiltrate the dens because they were

> generally in rooms to reach which is necessary to pass through dark, winding passages and doors fastened and guarded, sometimes requiring a guide; and when the den is reached all is dark, the inmates having escaped over roofs and by underground passages. No wonder that so many young girls fall from virtue. From the best evidence I have, there are about 500–600 white males and females who visit these dens in this city.[53]

Like police in San Francisco, Portland, and other urban areas of the period, Virginia City's officers may have had a difficult time finding the habitués of the opium dens.

There was no stereotypical utilization of opium, and its widespread availability, at least for recreational use, was made possible by the spontaneous development of the western city. Consumption of narcotics for medical use was propelled by readily available patent medicines and freely dispensed prescription drugs. For many women, opium provided a temporary escape from the restraints of the Victorian world, without the stigma associated with alcohol. Its

use in the nineteenth century became not only a problem for individuals, but a problem for society as well. The "secret friend" was no longer a secret as pipe dreams obscured reality and brought public measures to curb its use.

NOTES

[1]*Territorial Enterprise*, 24 September 1873.

[2]*Nevada Appeal*, 1 February 1987.

[3]Gunther Barth, *Instant Cities: Urbanization and the Rise of San Francisco and Denver* (New York, 1975).

[4]Rodman Paul, *Mining Frontiers of the Far West, 1848–1880* (Albuquerque, 1963), 68.

[5]*Ibid.*, 72.

[6]Charles E. Terry, M.D., *The Opium Problem* (New York, 1922), 53.

[7]Howard R. Lamar, *The Reader's Encyclopedia of The American West* (New York, 1977), 207.

[8]Gunther Barth, *Bitter Strength: A History of the Chinese in the United States, 1850–1870* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), 1–108.

[9]David Courtwright, *Dark Paradise* (Cambridge, Mass., 1922), 28.

[10]Dolores Peters, "The British Medical Response to Opiate Addiction in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 36 (October 1981), 438–55. Many physicians believed that smoked opium was less addictive than other forms of consumption. By 1882, the assumption was proven incorrect.

[11]Russell R. Elliott, *History of Nevada* (Lincoln, Neb., 1973), 166.

[12]*Ibid.*, 112.

[13]Barth, *Bitter Strength*, 117.

[14]Eliot Lord, *Comstock Mining and Miners* (1883; rpt., Berkeley, 1959), 253, 355.

[15]Elliott, *History of Nevada*, 166. The anti-Chinese sentiment increased on the Comstock in 1878 with the decrease of mineral products. Several acts were passed aimed against the Chinese, one of which attempted to prohibit Chinese who had entered Nevada under labor contracts "which were tantamount to slavery and involuntary servitude, contrary to state laws." By 1882 the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed by the United States Congress, with pressure coming from California, Nevada, and other western states.

[16]Mary McNair Mathews, *Ten Years in Nevada* (Lincoln, Neb., 1985), 250.

[17]*Ibid.*, 259–60; Mark Twain, *Mark Twain in Virginia City, Nevada* [chapters from *Roughing It*] (Las Vegas, 1985), 179.

[18]David Courtland, "Opiate Addiction in the American West, 1850–1920," (in *Journal of the West*, 21:3 (1982), 25.

[19]*Ibid.*, 260.

[20]Marion S. Goldman, *Gold Diggers and Silver Miners* (Ann Arbor, 1981), 30.

[21]Courtland, *Opiate Addiction*, 27.

[22]*Ibid.* The quotation is from Allen S. Williams, "The Demon of the Orient and His Satellite Friends of the Joints: Our Opium Smokers as They Are in Farther Hills and American Paradises (New York, 1883), 60.

[23]David Alan Johnson, *Founding the Far West: California, Oregon, and Nevada, 1840–1890* (Berkeley, 1992), 75.

[24]*Ibid.*

[25]*Ibid.*

[26]Harry Hubbell Kane, *Opium-Smoking in America and China* (New York, 1881), 3.

[27]*Ibid.*, 2.

[28]*Ibid.*, 71.

[29]Goldman, *Gold Diggers and Silver Miners*, 133.

[30]Storey County District Court indictment records from 1861–85 show that there were several arrests made for violations of opium laws. Statute 4726 Section 4 states: "It shall not be lawful for any person to resort to any house, room, apartment, or other place kept for any of the purposes forbidden by this Act, for the purpose of indulging in the use of opium, or any preparation containing opium, by smoking or otherwise, and any person who shall violate the provisions of this

section, shall on legal conviction thereof, be punished." In case of the *State of Nevada vs. Miss Becky*, 1 March 1880, the Grand Jury of Storey County indicated her for the crime of "unlawfully resorting to a room or apartment used as a place of resort—by persons for the purpose of indulging in the use of opium." One could assume that because Miss Becky was in the home of Hop Sing and because the connection between the Chinese and opium trafficking had served to fuel anti-Chinese sentiment, Miss Becky was prosecuted as a warning to others who might consider breaking the law.

[31]Walter Van Tilburg Clark, ed., *The Journals of Alfred Doten, 1849–1903* (Reno, 1973), 976.

[32]George Gould, *Illustrated Dictionary of Medicine, Biology, and Allied Sciences* (Philadelphia, 1894), 1214; Lord, *Comstock Mining and Miners*, appendix, 436.

[33]Clark, *Journals of Alfred Doten*, 1172.

[34]A fire in 1875 destroyed many of the records at the Storey County Court House in Virginia City. After this date the coroner's reports indicate when the cause of death was an overdose of opium and or its derivatives. Whether these cases were all planned suicides is not known. One woman who appears to be a prostitute, aged thirty-five, was said to have died of an overdose of laudanum, yet the coroner's report is inconclusive as to whether the death was planned or accidental. Rose Barker's death certificate, 17 December 1884, Storey County Court Records, Virginia City, State of Nevada, Box 1.

[35]Goldman, *Gold Diggers and Silver Miners*, 134.

[36]Kane, *Opium-Smoking*, 3.

[37]*Territorial Enterprise*, 28 March 1879.

[38]Clark, *Journals of Alfred Doten*, 867.

[39]Dan DeQuille, *The Big Bonanza* (Las Vegas, 1974), 146.

[40]*Ibid.*, 296.

[41]*Virginia Evening Chronicle*, 9 July 1877.

[42]*Ibid.*

[43]*Ibid.*

[44]*Ibid.*

[45]Kane, *Opium-Smoking*, 3.

[46]*San Francisco Chronicle*, 25 July 1881.

[47]Alfred Lindesmith, *Opiate Addiction* (Evanston, Ill.: 1957). In 1888, in Deadwood, South Dakota opium smoking, introduced by the Chinese and spread to the white inhabitants, had caused the legislature to consider making opium smoking illegal at that time. In other cities, such as New York, similar patterns were occurring as well.

[48]Courtland, *Opiate Addiction*, 28.

[49]Appendix to the Senate and Assembly, 8th Session of 1877, "Recapitulation of Inhabitants of Storey County, State of Nevada," Vol. 3, Carson City, 1876.

[50]The Statutes of the State of Nevada, 8th Session of 1877, Section 1. Redefined "dispense" in Nevada Revised Statutes, Volume 27, Section 453, 056. "Dispense" means the furnishing of a controlled substance in any amount greater than which is necessary for the present and immediate needs of the ultimate user. This term does not include the furnishing of a controlled substance by a hospital pharmacy for inpatients.

[51]*Virginia Evening Chronicle*, 30 July 1877.

[52]Courtland, *Opiate Addiction*, 29.

[53]Robert V. Percival, "Municipal Justice in the Melting Pot: Arrest and Prosecution in Oakland 1872–1910," at "A Conference on Historical Perspectives on American Criminal Justice" (in Laurence Larsen, *The Urban West at the End of the Frontier* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1978), 89).

IMAGES OF WOMEN IN THE MINING-CAMP PRESS

Barbara Cloud

"Not sewing, only read 'Enterprises.' "

"Came home about eight o'clock, read Enterprizes [*sic*] aloud."

"Read the Enterprises and continuation of Clark-Rees breach of promise case."[1]

Thus does Rachel Haskell's diary describe one of the principal evening activities in her Aurora, Nevada, home: reading the newspaper. What Haskell thought about the Enterprises—issues of the *Territorial Enterprise,* published in Virginia City and Nevada's leading newspaper of that day—she does not say. While we sense that the paper provided diversion from her daily routine—the breach-of-promise case—and even inspired her to action—she writes of being "struck with an insane idea" that apparently moved her to write a letter—we can only guess at the role the *Enterprise* played in the life of this nineteenth-century Nevada woman.

Newspapers are said to mirror their communities, and for many people reading the local newspaper helps them gauge the tenor of a town. Critics of modern media argue, however, that media content underrepresents women and minorities in a community, a position confirmed by research that shows a disproportionately low number of women as sources and subjects, as well as media managers and reporters. Research also shows that the media portray women in stereotypical ways inconsistent with reality.[2] It is assumed that the results of these studies simply reflect the tradition of male-dominated media, but, in fact, few researchers have looked systematically at media of the past to discover the extent to which they included content for and about women.

Research on women in the history of journalism has largely focused on discovering their contributions as journalists, although historians have noted developments in big city papers, such as the addition of social, fashion, and family

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news that male editors, seeking to expand readership, determined to be of interest to women.[3] However, it was the small-town press that dominated journalism in this country until relatively recently, and of its content related to women's interests we know very little.[4] Nor have we evidence as to how newspapers might have mirrored their communities' attitudes toward the "fairer sex." Indeed, if a nineteenth-century reader like Rachel Haskell had sought to use the local newspaper to discover how a community looked upon women, what might she have found? Were women ignored, invisible? Did they have a clear place in the functioning of the town and, if so, what kind of a place?

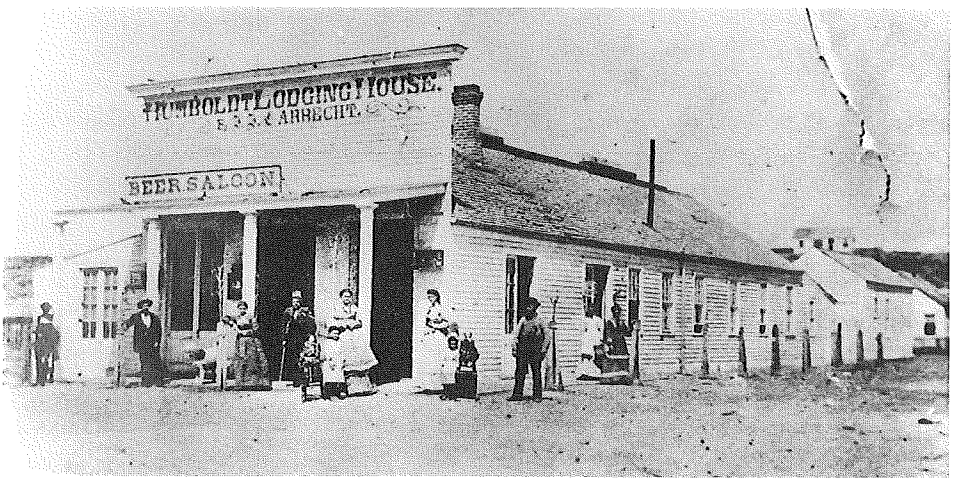
And what of service to the women living in that town? What would Rachel have gained, other then diversion, from reading her local paper?[5] Was any content designed to appeal to women or to assist them in their daily lives?

This study sought answers to these questions for a particular kind of town in a particular period of time—Nevada towns, specifically the mining camps of the mid 1870s. Other places and times could have been selected, perhaps with different results, but the Nevada towns offered the opportunity to examine some special relationships. Western mining camps, including those in Nevada, have the reputation of being lawless, immoral communities of men in a fever for gold and silver. The only women in town supposedly worked as prostitutes. The stereotypic mining camp was not a place for "nice" women, for "ladies."

Reputations do not necessarily reflect reality. To be sure, statistics show mining camp populations as predominantly male. In the 1870 and 1880 United States censuses, less than 30 percent of Nevada's population was female. The figure for women in the West as a whole was about 39 percent, the sparse female population in the mining regions balanced by that of states and territories settled by families primarily for agricultural purposes. Oregon and Utah, for example, were about half women, similar to the over-all United States population ratio. But in locations like Eureka County or Nye County in central Nevada, the female population hovered closer to 20 percent.[6]

Of the relatively few women living in mining camps, some certainly engaged in prostitution, but, at the most generous count, prostitutes constituted only a fraction of the female population. A Nevada special census in 1875 showed 3,572 adult women (over age eighteen) in Virginia City and nearby Gold Hill, the heart of the Comstock mining country.[7] Of these, 487 women (about 13 percent) were described as prostitutes or as living with a man without benefit of marriage, the latter certainly not the same as prostitution, even in the nineteenth century. Almost as many (10 percent) were businesswomen, teachers, or domestic workers (one nun was also listed among the employed), and the remaining 77 percent were married, widowed, or related in some way to a male head of household. Clearly, a mining camp could shelter ladies as well as ladies of the night.

Recent studies of western women have done much to show that women did, in fact, participate in the western experience.[8] That many of these women were literate and articulate is evidenced by their private diaries and published writ-

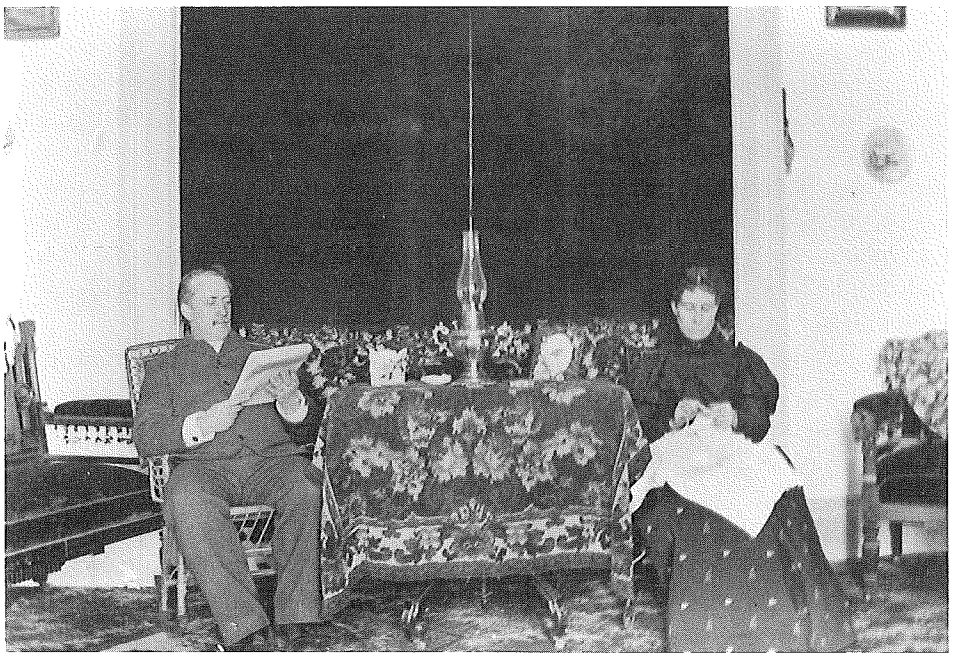


This photograph of the Humboldt House in Elko taken in the 1870s shows a number of women gathered on the street in front of the hotel, a rarity for images of that period. Nothing is known about these individuals. The Humboldt House was on the corner of Fourth and Railroad streets, the present site of the Commercial Hotel. *(Elko Free Press photo, Nevada Historical Society)*

ings.[9] In the surviving fragment of her 1867 diary, Aurora resident Rachel Haskell mentions reading at home in almost every entry. Novels figure prominently, but so does the *Territorial Enterprise.* Haskell makes no reference to her local newspaper, the *Esmeralda Daily Union,* although she records that J. W. Avard, who published the paper, called at her home one evening.[10] Women writers were also in evidence in letters to editors, such as the woman who complained to the *Enterprise* about smoking. "I think," she said, "as a child of God, I ought to have the right to breathe pure air; but I do not have it, . . . What can be done?" The editor replied sympathetically, but suggested the only remedy was for ladies to learn to smoke. "After doing so, there will be nothing offensive to them thereafter in the smell of tobacco—or anything else."[11]

Newspapers were thus provided with a varied female audience. The question remains, however: To what degree did editors acknowledge and/or cater to their female constituencies?

In looking at the Nevada mining-camp press, we examined more than a dozen newspapers, each for a year—give or take a few issues because of the often interrupted publication schedules of pioneer newspapers. We focused on the mid 1870s, considered the heyday of the Big Bonanza in the Nevada mines.[12] Newspapers ranged from the highly successful daily *Territorial Enterprise* in Vir-



George and Nellie Morgan at home in Virginia City. Note that it was Mr. Morgan who chose to have his picture taken reading the newspaper. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

ginia City to lesser-known weekly newspapers in places like Columbus and Eureka.[13]

The objective was to locate newspaper items that reflect a nineteenth-century woman's world. These include stories about women or by women or on subjects traditionally considered women's topics—children, education, culture, society, religion—whether or not they specifically referred to women. The study also looked at advertising in which the advertiser was female or the product or service was used by women (toiletries, jewelry, women's clothing, etcetera). We did not assume either that women ignored other content in the newspaper or that men were uninterested in the items we identified, and, indeed, content was selected on the basis of stereotypical notions of the "women's sphere."

Examination of hundreds of issues of Nevada mining-camp newspapers shows first of all that women were not invisible; editors recognized them in varying degrees. For example, approximately one fourth of the items in the inaugural issue of the *Elko Weekly Post* had to do with women.[14] The *Gold Hill News* devoted a similar proportion of its space to women, and almost every copy of almost every newspaper could be counted on to have something related to women, although most were not as generous as the two aforementioned.

The typical four-page western newspaper of this period had four basic kinds of content: local news (which filled approximately one of the paper's four

pages), the exchanges, stories clipped from other newspapers or magazines (another page), advertising (the other two pages), and fillers (a few lines of type inserted as needed to ensure that a column was filled tightly). Some newspapers also carried short or serialized stories or poetry, sometimes locally written, usually clipped from the exchanges or borrowed from books in the editor's library.[15] Beginning in the mid 1870s, some western newspapers relied upon preprinted pages, called patent insides or patent outsides, to provide half of their content. The patent 'sides tended to carry more fiction because of the need for content that would remain fresh no matter how long it took for the preprints to reach subscribers.

Local news consisted of articles a few paragraphs long—stories about progress in the mines, booster stories about the community, and political news—as well as the locals column, one-paragraph items about events and people in the community. Most local content relating to women appeared in the locals column, not in multiparagraph articles.

Stories about women also came from other parts of the country. Editors exchanged copies of their newspapers, and this process served as a news service until the telegraph became available. Even then, because of the high cost of telegraphing messages, the exchanges continued to be important sources of stories for editors outside the major centers. For stories about women, the mining-camp editor thus depended not only on his own inclinations about what stories might appeal to his readers but also on those of editors with whom he exchanged newspapers.

The most commonly published subjects dealing with women fell into several categories. A large number of stories had to do with marriage or divorce. These ranged from simple announcements of marriage licenses to commentary on the state of "wedded bliss" to legal notices of divorce. A typical marriage announcement might read: "SEARS–HURT—In Elko, December 31, S. S. Sears to Libbie Hurt."[16] Including the newspaper staff in the festivities could result in expansion of the announcement into a local. After naming a pair of newlyweds, the *Reese River Reveille* notes: "The numerous friends of the couple in Austin wish them a long and happy life, not the least of their well-wishers being the printers in the Reveille office, who drank their healths in sparkling wine and other bibulants generously presented by the happy bridegroom."[17] Couples with celebrity, whether local, national, or international, earned still more space. Newspapers detailed virtually every ruffle of the bridal gown when reporting the wedding of Nevada Senator John P. Jones.[18]

Even more common were articles about married life, almost always taken from the exchanges. Under the heading "Early Love Never Dies," the *Territorial Enterprise* told about an elderly couple reuniting after many years and rekindling their love.[19] The *Belmont Courier* discussed superstitions related to marriage,[20] and listed the "Husband Commandments," which included "I am your husband who you will love, honor and obey because I saved you from old maid-

ism. . . . Purchase cigars for thy husband rather than candy for thine self. . . . Don't go through thy husband's pockets for money while he is asleep."[21]

The *Elko Weekly Post* described a two-week-old marriage doomed after the bride dreamed that the man she had married was nearly worthless.[22] The *Post* also clipped an item from the *Reese River Reveille* about a woman who advertised that she had left her husband and would not be responsible for his debts. When he countered by advertising that he was not responsible for her debts, she retorted that he was not even responsible for his own.[23] Going further afield, the *Sutro Independent* reported that a new divorce law in Turkey required that a man buy his wife a railroad ticket and give her enough time to pack her trunk before he threw her out of the house.[24]

Stories of unfaithful spouses were frequent, and more than one told of a woman who searched for her cheating husband with intent to shoot him. Similarly, violence by husbands against their wives figured prominently, and one man inserted a public notice warning that if a man was seen on the porch of a certain lady one more time, he would be shot.[25]

The Henry Ward Beecher-Theodore Tilton trial attracted great interest during the mid 1870s, and most Nevada papers clipped stories about it from the eastern exchanges. The *Territorial Enterprise* provided extended coverage transmitted by telegraph, enabling readers to savor the testimony the day after it was given.[26]

Behavior, by women and toward women, formed another major classification of items. The *Elko Weekly Post* explained that a man takes a woman for granted and forgets all his anger when she kisses him.[27] In the unusual behavior category, a paper recorded that a woman had held a hot buckwheat cake over her husband's face because he disapproved of the doctrine of free love.[28]

The *Belmont Courier* published an exchange item about a sixteen-year-old girl who advertised that she would be at the disposal of any man who would pay for her education.[29] An item about a female blackmailer noted, "It is becoming hard work to get a man in a car with a woman he doesn't know."[30]

The *Reese River Reveille* expressed concern about a local woman who "is old and half demented, and has an inordinate appetite for whisky." After the woman was released from jail, having been acquitted on a charge of burglary, she got "blind, roaring drunk." Because Austin had no poor house, she promised to be "a great annoyance."[31] Virginia City had its Irish Mary, arrested for vagrancy, and Fighting Mag, in jail for assault and battery.[32]

Reinforcing popular standards of behavior, some articles praised women for their gentleness, others warned them against unwomanly behavior. The *Sutro Independent* counseled its female readers about "The Right Kind of Lady" and in an article on "Women in the Garden" assured them that they "shouldn't be afraid the labor [of gardening] will hurt them."[33] On the other hand, cautioned the *White Pine News*, women should not work too hard because of their ultra-sensitive nerves.[34] The *News* also praised a man for hauling a rude woman back to where she got on his wagon.[35] Another newspaper observed disapprovingly

that a young woman who had no time to work on clothing for the poor had spent three weeks on a blanket for her poodle.[36]

Violence *by* women particularly intrigued editors, probably because violent women ran counter to the stereotype of gentleness. An angry woman who threw a shoe through a judge's window,[37] a girl who killed her seducer,[38] and a variety of slayers of husbands were among the many women whose violent actions were noted.

Violence *to* women drew considerable notice as well. Men attempted to "outrage" and satisfy "their brutal greed" or women were "brutally outraged" in cases of rape.[39] Sometimes the women were named.

Editors, then as now, looked to stories about celebrities, and a notable woman, famous either in her own right or by association with a man, attracted attention. Actresses, whether performing locally or far away, were of interest. Victoria Woodhull and free love, Mary Todd Lincoln and her mental problems, European royalty, Brigham Young's wives, and Nevada's Sarah Winnemucca were among others about whom stories were written.

Stories about fashion served to both inform and to ridicule women. "She Stoops to Conquer" was written before pinback skirts,[40] said one writer, and Amelia Bloomer was mentioned in a short item.[41] Editors twitted women in general for their supposed preoccupation with style, but also complimented local women who "were gorgeously attired and looked charming and captivating."[42]

Women clearly had a certain level of visibility in these mining-camp newspapers, but items concerning them rarely suggested that woman's place was anywhere but in the home, tending to the needs of husband and children. Although by the mid 1870s the women's movement was well under way—Susan B. Anthony had already toured the West—Nevada's papers paid little attention to women's rights. In a subgroup of some two-hundred issues of the Nevada newspapers, only sixteen items dealt with suffrage or women's rights generally, compared to sixty-seven about the antics of famous women. One suffrage article was "Mrs. Hamlet's soliloquy," a poem about "To vote or not to vote."[43]

Women's employment outside the home fared somewhat better than women's rights—usually the references were to teachers, but also to the occasional female doctor or some other occupation.[44] And editors seemed to have no objection to women's employment, generally inserting stories of a positive nature and without the barbed comments that sometimes accompanied news of unusual activity by women. One newspaper reported that a woman had established a pistol gallery,[45] and another that a woman lawyer in Chicago did not accept divorce cases.[46] Close reading of the newspapers verifies, as a number of historians have recently noted, that western women ran businesses and worked outside the home at occupations other than prostitution.[47] Mrs. Nick Millich operated the Parker House Restaurant in Eureka, where she set the "best table in town"; fellow businesswomen Mrs. M. Baum and Mrs. M. A. Gallagher were

Mrs. H. Arend's Millinery Store in Virginia City in 1884. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

proprietors of the Depot Hotel and the Cosmopolitan Hotel, respectively, Mrs. H. D. Brooks was a piano teacher,[48] and Mrs. Putney advertised her lodging house in Columbus.[49] The *Nevada Tribune* in Carson City had praise for a Mrs. Jaqua: "We wish her success because she is an energetic business lady, desirous of doing all in her power to assist her husband in the support of a growing family."[50] Women advertised that they operated businesses as dressmakers, milliners, and stationers as well.

The *Territorial Enterprise* reprinted an item from the *San Francisco Chronicle* about the growing number of women who were buying and selling mining stock. The crux of the item was that the women kept changing their minds, but the writer admitted that they were successful in making money.[51] Reports of shareholders in Nevada mining companies sometimes listed women.[52]

The Nevada newspaper editors that we studied—all male—tended to be particularly accepting of journalism as an occupation for women. Sherilyn Cox Bennion found four woman editors in Nevada in the 1870s, but only one was associated with a general circulation newspaper. Mary Atchison at Gold Hill published the *Golden Echo,* a four-page literary paper issued on one occasion, as a church benefit. Vienna Dollarhide produced the monthly *Spark of Genius* for children in Austin, and Nancy Hill and her friends hand wrote a few issues of the weekly *Mottsville Star.* Only Nellis Verrill Mighels, who took over the *Carson*

Daily Appeal after her husband died in 1879, was involved in journalism directed at the wider community, but her tenure postdates the newspapers here studied.[53]

Women writers and editors drew positive mentions from male editors. One newspaper reported without detraction that Susan B. Anthony edited her brother's paper when he was ill,[54] Mrs. Laura de Force's journalism career was duly noted,[55] and a report that four women edited newspapers in California concluded, "And why not?"[56]

Still, approved women's roles had their limits. A correspondent to the *Reese River Reveille* found it amusing that a woman had persuaded the state senate to approve a bill allowing women to hold educational offices. "I hope it will become a law," he wrote, "because then Maria [presumably the writer's spouse] may be elected a school trustee, which will give her an opportunity to work off some of her surplus language on some unlucky school marm, and save its infliction on my own devoted head."[57] When a man nominated by a woman to be committee clerk in the state assembly failed to get the post, the *Humboldt Register* jibed, "So much for Mrs. Buckner [*sic*] influence."[58] The Battle Mountain newspaper reported with barely concealed pleasure that the legislature had refused to reconsider the vote against a bill barring women from holding certain offices.[59]

According to an Elko newspaper, men were upset because wives had so little knowledge about history or the welfare of the country—until one wife took it upon herself to remedy that shortcoming. When she did not make supper or "tend the fire" because she was too busy studying, her husband and his friends decided they preferred uneducated women.[60] And a Carson City paper editorialized about a group of women who planned to march on Congress, saying they should instead stay home and wash their husbands' clothes; those who had no husband should go look for one.[61]

Nevada newspapers of the 1870s followed the established pattern of giving women little identity of their own after they married. An unmarried woman was identified by her given and family names—Miss Sallie Hart, for example; there is no indication that a widowed or divorced woman returned to using her maiden name, although she was referred to by her own first name—Mrs. Laura Hall. The married woman was Mrs. John Jones, if, indeed, she was more than "the wife of." Children were invariably born to the "wife of" John Doe; when women died, they were again usually the "wife of," and their given names commonly omitted. A Reno newspaper informed women readers that they could check out books from the library under the names of their husbands or of male family members.[62]

At the same time, male editors showed keen awareness of the sparseness of their towns' female populations, lavishing praise on local women while poking fun at unseen, anonymous females. While it is overstatement to say, as one early Nevada woman did, that the "entire religious and social life of Nevada is con-

ducted by ladies," women featured prominently and sympathetically in the local news.[63] Local women and girls attending social events were ever charming and lovely, their gowns outstanding, and local men overwhelmed by their beauty.[64] More than one newspaper noted the changing times, however. "The fact that twenty-seven men are wanted by the San Francisco police for deserting their wives," said the *Gold Hill News*, "indicates a change of sentiment from the time the first white woman was received in California with a procession."[65]

Humorous stories used as fillers were a staple in many small newspapers, and these frequently were at the expense of women. A paragraph in the *Humboldt Register* about suffrage quoted the Detroit Press: "It is said that lack of money defeated the women's movement in Michigan, . . . several persons said it wasn't lack of cheek." Another paragraph noted that the ladies in Indiana who had invented a new game, "kiss me quick and let me go," did well kissing but forgot to let go;[66] a toast offered at a printers' festival was to the "ladies, second only to the press in the dissemination of news."[67]

The idea that a woman was single only because she couldn't find a man to marry her formed the core of a number of comments. Poking fun at the women's rights movement, a "lively lady" remarked that "women's rights people are invariably men's lefts." Another writer, responding to a comment that old maids are the best judges of men, claimed that they are also the best judges of vinegar. The writer continued, "A spirited girl observes that to her mind the women who want female suffrage because it will cause a division in families must be a precious meek lot. A woman of any pluck can pick a quarrel with her husband without waiting to split on votes.[68]

Editors, who liked puns about the newspaper business, found double duty in this play on words about the printer's devil or apprentice:

"Good morning," said a compositor to the head of a flourishing family; "have you any daughters who would make good typesetters?"

"No, but I have a wife that would make a very good devil."[69]

Punning editors also liked "Some ladies use paint as fiddlers do resin, to aid them in drawing a beau,"[70] and an item about confusion over powder—he thought of cannon powder and she of face powder.

Although laughter aimed at women was at times particularly cutting, the attempts at humor in fact spared neither sex. Women may have been schemers, but men were bumblers. For example, a filler in the *Sutro Independent* cautioned: "Remember, dear child, that woman is made to endure and man to be endured,"[71] and "Young women often keep their lovers by tears. . . . love, like beef, is preserved by brine."[72]

Content that appeared to have been selected with women's traditional needs and interests in mind was rare. The weekly *Humboldt Register* in Winnemucca was one of the few newspapers that seemed aware of the homemakers in its audience. Over a year's time, the *Register* printed a weekly average of six items concerning women, including a regular column of household hints that ranged

from recipes to house-and-child care to behavior. One could learn how to make molasses candy or how to make mischief from this column. The *Register* also paid attention to women's health, warning, for example, against poisons in dyes used in fabrics for women's apparel.[73] The *Sutro Independent* was similarly generous with helpful hints for homemakers and other news of interest to women, and on one occasion published a lengthy essay by a woman about the influence of women.[74] Meanwhile, the *Belmont Courier* published only half as many items related to women.

One might speculate that editors who were married were more generous in giving space to women's interests, but there is little evidence that either the *Gold Hill News* or the *Reese River Reveille* under the married Alf Doten catered especially to women readers.[75]

Relatively little advertising was aimed specifically at women, if advertisements for general merchandise and groceries are not considered. Pharmacy advertising often included a line about perfume, and general stores sometimes specified that they had women's clothing. Drygoods store operator E. Wallach had an item in the locals column of the *Reese River Reveille* addressed specifically "to the ladies," urging them to take advantage of markdowns.[76] A number of women managed hotels and included their names in the advertisements, but the

A Sunday school class gathered in front of a Christmas tree in the Presbyterian church in Eureka in the 1880s. Teaching Sunday school was an activity approved for women by Nevada's newspaper editors. *(Nevada Historical Society)*

principal products advertised regularly for women were sewing machines and patent medicines. The latter could cure all ailments of women, at least according to the testimonials: One woman praised the effectiveness of Radway's Sarsaparilian Resolvent (advertised as bringing about "astonishing cures") in fixing ovarian tumors, and Dr. Walker's Vinegar Bitters was claimed to cure all female complaints.[77] A "Pathologist and Physiologist" who addressed the ladies in an advertisement felt "no hesitancy in assuring them that" he could "afford them immediate relief" for—and here was listed a great variety of complaints—"that almost invariably have their origin in the uterine region."[78] Another advertiser touted his "Favorite Prescription" and quoted a man who declared that the potion "has done my wife a world of good," as well as a woman's confirmation that "your medicine has been of more benefit to me than all others and hundreds of doctors bills." Another female testimonial called the results "almost a miracle."[79]

Over-all, the picture that emerges from the Nevada press shows that even in the West, where women filled many nontraditional roles, newspapers perpetuated the nineteenth century's limited, stereotypical view of women's lives and potential, only hinting at the diversity of their activities even within the "woman's sphere." While evidence of the nature and scope of newspaper coverage of women and their interests softens the stereotype of the sin-filled, hell-raising mining camp that welcomed a woman only if her body was for sale by the hour, it also affirms miners'—or at least editors'—respect and preference for the traditional male-centered culture they knew in the East.

Notes

[1]"A Literate Woman in the Mines: The Diary of Rachel Haskell," Richard G. Lillard, ed., *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 31 (June 1944), 85, 98.

[2]See, for example, "Women, Men and Media," report published by the Communications Consortium, April 1989; Rosalind Silver and Ann Sears, "The Many Faces of Media Women," *Media and Values*, 49 (Winter 1989), 2–5; Pamela J. Creedon, ed., *Women in Mass Communication: Challenging Gender Values* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publishing, 1989); Ramona R. Rush and Donna Allen, eds., *Communication at the Crossroads: The Gender Gap Connection* (Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corp., 1989).

[3]See, for example, Marion Marzolf, *Up from the Footnote: A History of Women Journalists* (New York: Hastings House, 1977); Sherilyn Cox Bennion, *Equal to the Occasion: Women Editors of the Nineteenth-Century West* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1990); Maurine Bealey and Sheila Gibbons, *Taking Their Place* (Washington, D.C.: American University Press, 1993)); Barbara Belford, *Brilliant Bylines: A Biographical Anthology of Notable Newspaper Women in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), among others.

[4]For one of the few historical studies that have sought to determine what difference it made to have women as editors, see Julie Hedgepeth, "A Quiet Revolution, 1739–1748: How America's First Three Women Newspaper Editors Treated the Topic of Women" (paper presented to the convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Minneapolis, August 1990).

[5]Technically, the *Territorial Enterprise* was not Rachel Haskell's local paper. The *Esmeralda Daily Union* was Aurora's hometown newspaper in 1867, but such was the influence of the *Enterprise* that it was widely read.

[6]United States Census, Ninth and Tenth Censuses, Volumes on Population, 1870, 1880.

[7]Marion S. Goldman, *Gold Diggers and Silver Miners: Prostitution and Social Life on the Comstock Lode* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981), 26–27.

[8]See, for example, Lillian Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*, (New York: Schocken Press, 1982); Joann Levy, *They Saw the Elephant: Women in the California Gold Rush* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1990); Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, eds., *The Women's West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987); Susan H. Armitage, "The Frontier Through Women's Eyes," *Halcyon*, 13 (1991), 105–13. A number of individual diaries have also been published in recent years.

[9]See, for example, Louise Palmer, "How We Live in Nevada," *Overland Monthly*, 2 (May 1869), 457–62; "Literate Woman in the Mines," Lillard, ed., 81–98.

[10]"Literate Woman in the Mines," 93.

[11]*Territorial Enterprise*, 14 February 1875. This probably was not the woman doctor who went to Elko the following August. Of her, an Elko editor noted that he had expected a masculine type but that she was, in fact, "mild, affable and communicative." She had a "horror of tobacco smoke," but was otherwise a "perfect gentleman." *Daily Elko Independent*, 28 August 1875.

[12]Russell R. Elliott, *History of Nevada* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), 151.

[13]This study originated as a group project in a class, Women and Media, taught by the author at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Each student read a year's worth of newspapers; dailies like the *Territorial Enterprise* were sampled to equal the load. Usable results were aggregated and supplemented the research conducted by the author, who acknowledges the following students for their careful work: John Shields, Lisa Licausi, Yvonne Tyrrell, Tracie Blankenship, El Requa, Kathy Clark, Karlene Edwards, Susanne Scheppmann, Dolores DeSimone, Cynthia Shelly, Melanie McEvoy, Monica Ricci, Karen Splawn, Linda Cross, Sylke Neal, Steve Hong, Jacqueline Smith, Kathleen Patrick, and Patsy Borngesser.

[14]*Elko Weekly Post*, 11 September 1875. Although numbers are offered, the data for this article are not based on formal content analysis. We counted stories but we were more interested in the atmosphere created by newspaper content than in trying to pinpoint precise proportions or in struggling to decide whether a passing reference to "working men and women" should be counted equally with a story about a drunken woman at the police station.

[15]For an example of this practice, see Kenneth Leonard Robison, "Idaho Territorial Newspapers" (M.S. thesis, University of Oregon, 1966), 35.

[16]*Gold Hill News*, 5 January 1875.

[17]*Reese River Reveille*, 23 July 1875.

[18]The *Gold Hill News*, 4 January 1875, clipped its story from a San Francisco paper.

[19]*Territorial Enterprise*, 1 January 1875.

[20]*Belmont Courier*, 19 June 1875.

[21]*Ibid.*, 26 November 1875.

[22]*Elko Weekly Post*, 16 October 1875.

[23]*Ibid.*, 11 September 1875.

[24]*Sutro Independent*, 25 March 1876.

[25]*Ibid.*, 18 March 1876.

[26]See the *Territorial Enterprise* throughout late winter and early spring of 1875.

[27]*Elko Weekly Post*, 16 October 1875.

[28]*White Pine News*, 27 February 1875.

[29]*Belmont Courier*, 27 February 1875.

[30]*Borax Miner*, 2 October 1875.

[31]*Reese River Reveille*, 18 June 1875.

[32]*Gold Hill News*, 5 January 1875.

[33]*Sutro Independent*, 25 September 1875.

[34]*White Pine News*, 17 April 1875.

[35]*Ibid.*, 27 March 1875.

[36]*Humboldt Register*, 10 September 1875.

[37]*Territorial Enterprise*, 21 September 1875.

[38]*Reese River Reveille*, 24 September 1875.

[39]*Elko Independent*, 17 August 1875; *Nevada Tribune*, 23 July 1875.

[40]*Borax Miner*, 8 January 1876.
[41]*White Pine News*, 1 October 1875.
[42]*Nevada Tribune*, 7 July 1875.
[43]*Ibid.*, 2 January 1875.
[44]"Literate Women in the Mines," 93.
[45]*Nevada Tribune*, 29 April 1876.
[46]*Belmont Courier*, 12 November 1875.
[47]See, for example, Levy, *They Saw The Elephant*, ch. 5.
[48]*Eureka Daily Leader*, 25 March 1879.
[49]*Borax Miner*, 27 February 1875.
[50]*Nevada Tribune*, 12 June 1875.
[51]*Territorial Enterprise*, 9 January 1875.
[52]For example, *Reno Evening Gazette*, 26 June 1875, lists fourteen female shareholders in a local company.
[53]Bennion, *Equal to the Occasion*, 174; Richard E. Lingenfelter and Karen Rix Gash, *The Newspapers of Nevada: A History and Bibliography, 1854–1979* (Reno, University of Nevada Press, 1984), 9, 35, 100, 156.
[54]*White Pine News*, 4 September 1875.
[55]*Belmont Courier*, 15 October 1875.
[56]*Nevada Tribune*, 2 January 1875.
[57]*Reese River Reveille*, 5 March 1875.
[58]*Humboldt Register*, 8 January 1875.
[59]*Measure for Measure* (Battle Mountain), 6 March 1875.
[60]*Elko Evening Post*, 11 December 1875.
[61]*Nevada Tribune*, 22 December 1875.
[62]*Reno Evening Gazette*, 5 April 1876.
[63]Palmer, "How We Live in Nevada," 462. Local items sometimes list all-male committees as planning balls and other social functions.
[64]See, for example, the *White Pine News*, 27 February 1875.
[65]*Gold Hill News*, 4 January 1875. The *Nevada Tribune* picked up the item two weeks later, 19 January 1875.
[66]*Humboldt Register*, 5 March 1875.
[67]*Ibid.*, 16 April 1875.
[68]*Eureka Sentinel*, 20 May 1871.
[69]*Belmont Courier*, 28 February 1874.
[70]*Eureka Sentinel*, 20 May 1871.
[71]*Sutro Independent*, 6 November 1875.
[72]*Eureka Sentinel*, 20 May 1871.
[73]Several newspapers warned of the problem of poisonous dye.
[74]*Sutro Independent*, 25 September 1875.
[75]Even when married, Doten often lived a bachelor's life, his wife only visiting him or living her own life in Reno. In the 1880s, when Doten's career was in decline and he worked in Austin for the *Reveille*, his wife sought a teaching position in Reno that, in fact, paid better than his editor's job. *The Journals of Alfred Doten*, Walter Van Tilburg Clark, ed., 3 vols. (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1983), II:1487.
[76]*Reese River Reveille*, 23 July 1875. These advertising paragraphs were known as "reading notices." Sometimes the advertiser paid for them, sometimes the space was given as a bonus to those who purchased other space. E. Wallach was a steady advertiser in the *Reveille*.
[77]*Measure for Measure*, 6 March 1875.
[78]*Gold Hill News*, 4 January 1875.
[79]*Reese River Reveille*, 15 January, 30 April 1875.

BOOK REVIEWS

Welcome to the Pleasuredome: Inside Las Vegas. By David Spanier. (Reno and Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 1993. 264 pp., illustrations, source notes, index. First published as *All Right, Okay, You Win: Inside Las Vegas* [London: Martin Secker & Warburg Limited, 1992].)

Sex sells. An audience will remember a personal story far longer than a lecture laden with statistics. Tales about the rich and famous hold more interest than somber recountings about the poor and anonymous. Whether they are selling a bar of soap or a presidential candidate, the men and women in the executive suites on Madison Avenue know this. David Spanier, author of *Welcome to the Pleasuredome,* knows it equally well. His 275-page book about Las Vegas, or at least about that part of Las Vegas that fascinates past and prospective visitors, gives the reader a feeling for the sights, sounds, and tempo of the city. Biographical sketches of movers and shakers, somewhat prurient glances at prostitution from several angles, a brief but fairly balanced discussion of organized crime and the casinos, and a surprisingly interesting discussion of casino finances capture the spirit of the Strip and, to a lesser extent, Glitter Gulch.

While Spanier did not undertake to write a scholarly work, he did some library research and a good deal of listening. Drawing as well upon his several visits to Las Vegas over the past twenty years, he has written a book that is difficult to put down. Readers who have visited the casinos will be reminded of the vitality and excitement of Las Vegas; those who have not will make a stay in this unique city a high priority in their vacation plans.

Spanier uses Steve Wynn's career to illustrate how receptive Las Vegas has been to energetic, creative men (Spanier does not worry about being sexist—he labeled one of the two sections of his work "Men and Casinos"), and especially to those, like the young Steve Wynn, who can convince bank presidents, particularly Valley Bank's Perry Thomas, to lend more than a million dollars to consummate a real estate deal. Clearly, the author was impressed by Steve Wynn—his brashness, his financial acumen, his track record, and his views on the future of Las Vegas. He treats Wynn gently, admitting that he is a difficult boss, but not focusing on the allegations of at least one of his former executives that he was subject to unpredictable and intense bouts of rage. He passes quickly over Wynn's divorce and remarriage to his wife, suggesting that they might have done so for financial reasons.

The author captures the flavor of most of the Strip properties and gives a balanced assessment of the always evolving corporate strategies to generate even more income. His discussion of Glitter Gulch properties is less extensive, with a focus on Binion's Horseshoe and, as expected, Steve Wynn's Golden Nugget. Quite appropriately, Bob Stupak, owner of Vegas World, located north of the Strip, is presented as the best example of how many a fortune was made by the effective use of smoke and mirrors.

Spanier devotes the second half of his work to "Sex and Money." While he does not push forward the frontiers of knowledge in these two areas, he does respond to questions often posed by past and potential visitors. His paid interviews with prostitutes working in two Nye County brothels hold the reader's attention but produce no startling revelations. More informative is Spanier's conversation with one of Las Vegas's thousands of escort-service employees. Normandie, who calls herself a hostess, is described as a "gift-wrapped version of a football cheerleader: shiny, pretty, pliant, immaculately made-up, with long silver earrings dangling over bare shoulders, aged about twenty-four (p. 155)." She provides a realistic overview of the trials and triumphs of a high-class hooker: the fear of arrest by Metro undercover agents, the unofficial requirement to spend only a limited amount of time in a particular hotel each evening, earning $500 for an hour's effort, and spending $700 for a dress and make-up at the Fashion Show Mall.

More novel, and perhaps even more appealing to prurient interest is the author's interview with Tony, a young man whom Normandie might call a host. As Tony usually provided sex for money to women, but sometimes to men, the reader is not surprised to learn that he is somewhat confused about his life and future.

The chapter dealing with casino operations, boxing, and organized crime easily holds the reader's attention and provides solid information about those three somewhat interrelated topics. The author discusses both the probabilities underlying traditional table games and the more intangible aspects that attract particular clienteles to games such as baccarat. He reminds the reader that slot machines are the real basis of the financial success of casinos. They do not skim, call in sick, or threaten to go out on strike. Don King's prefight hype, the Steve Wynn-Donald Trump rivalry over who would stage the fight of the decade, high rollers nationwide flying to Las Vegas to be part of the fight scene, the huge postfight drop at the casinos—in just a few pages Spanier portrays well the relationship between title fights and the Las Vegas economy.

Spanier's assessment of the past, present, and future role of organized crime in Las Vegas gaming is substantially based on newspaper and television reporter Ned Day's two-hour tape, "Mob on the Run." His conclusions are that the mob was vital to Las Vegas's growth in the fifties, was active in both casino ownership and skimming for almost three decades thereafter, and now operates only

on the fringes of gaming. He could be faulted for using the terms Mafia, mob, and organized crime interchangeably, but he has a lot of company in this regard.

Neither a scholarly historical study as Eugene Moehring's *Resort City in the Sunbelt* nor a coffee-table pictorial like Ralph Roske's *Las Vegas: A Desert Paradise*, Spanier's book is a worthwhile addition to the literature on Las Vegas.

Alan Balboni
Community College of Southern Nevada

Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900–1954. By Albert S. Broussard. (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1993. 323 pp., maps, index.)

Albert Broussard's *Black San Francisco* is a very informative history of San Francisco blacks. The author provides a solid background on San Francisco's race relations before 1900, but devotes most of his space to a discussion of the first half of history's most important century. Broussard's most consistent themes are housing, class, politics, economic pursuits, and, of course, racial discrimination. The last is by far the most important motif, running through, and often subordinating, the other topics.

Broussard's work is one of the most meticulously researched histories of African Americans this reviewer has read and one of the most careful. His judgments are always balanced and fair, and his emphasis is too. The first half of the book covers the initial forty years of this century, plus some of the nineteenth, and the last half concentrates upon the events surrounding World War II. Although he does not stress the importance of the Korean War, the book ends just after that conflict. The emphasis is entirely appropriate. San Francisco's black population did not rise above four thousand until the 1940 census, so the earlier chapters constitute a detailed discussion of a very small community.

The Second World War drastically altered the demography of the black community, which by that time had come to concentrate in the Fillmore District. It had not developed a ghetto pattern as yet and had only small, outlying secondary settlements. Demographically, World War II comes close to validating the transformation hypothesis of Gerald Nash and others, but only in a demographic sense.

Blacks made significant progress in employment, although not many advances in other areas during the war. At one point they made up one third of San Francisco's longshoremen's union and represented a disproportionate share of shipbuilders. However, their concentration in this trade and in government

employment made them highly vulnerable to the postwar reconversion process, which boosted their unemployment figure to about 20 percent. Thus, the war did not result in large permanent gains, and the postwar period bears out Charles Wollenberg's claim that the decline of shipbuilding was one of the key events in the history of blacks in the San Francisco Bay area. However, African Americans did achieve some successes during the conflict, especially in jobs and unions, and some thereafter, although they remained modest throughout. Whether in housing or employment, discrimination in San Francisco proved a tenacious opponent.

There is not much to fault in this study. The author set out to write a history of San Francisco blacks within the tradition of black history and did this job very well. My only complaint is minor. He is not as fair to the city of San Francisco during the World War II period as in his earlier discussions, primarily because he continually faults others for the plight of wartime blacks. However, it must eventually be admitted that migrants to the arsenals of democracy, whether white or black, caused enormous problems for their host cities. Bias there was in abundance, but San Francisco could not have coped satisfactorily with the enormous influx and then the eventual departure of hundreds of thousands of war workers even if the city had been entirely free of prejudice. San Francisco did not have money to devote to problems of the majority, much less the minority. It could not get government consent to build sewers or to construct housing, even temporary war housing. It faced a significantly heightened fire and police problem at the same time that the draft had reduced the strength of these departments by some 20 percent. Moreover, neither Broussard nor any other of the recent critics of cities has suggested a viable political strategy that would have allowed either the city or the federal government to cut definitively at the roots of the racial problems without alienating the white voters whose support was necessary for maintaining the war effort itself.

Admittedly, this criticism is in an area where interpretations can differ. The book's other strengths will ensure that Broussard's history of San Francisco's African Americans will remain indispensable to our understanding of San Francisco history.

Roger W. Lotchin
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Camp Floyd and the Mormons: The Utah War. By Donald R. Moorman, with Gene A. Sessions; foreword by Charles S. Petersen. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1992. 332 pp., illustrations, map, index.)

By the mid 1850s, the debates over slavery and the Mormons' practice of polygamy, which the Republicans called the "twin relics of barbarism," had

captured the nation's attention. Demands had increased, particularly among Gentile federal judges in Utah Territory, whose courts were shunned by Mormons, for President James Buchanan to replace territorial governor Brigham Young with a non-Mormon and establish separation of church and state. But the Latter-day Saints were determined to resist any move that would jeopardize control of their utopian society. Moreover, they were convinced that the federal government's real goal was to destroy their kingdom. Consequently, when Buchanan sent the United States Army to Utah in 1857 to force changes, the Saints were armed and ready to fight to the last man. However, neither Buchanan nor Young welcomed hostilities, and the Utah War was settled by negotiation and compromise. That disappointed the several thousand troops, who had endured considerable hardship in getting to Utah and had their hearts set on killing Mormons.

However, the military presence, under the command of General Albert Sidney Johnston, provided formidable support for a new secular government controlled by Gentiles and ended forever the Mormons' dream of shaping the development of society in the Great Basin. The symbol of the federal authority was Camp Floyd, the Army's lonely outpost in Cedar Valley, south of Salt Lake City. It was, write the authors of *Camp Floyd and the Mormons,* "like an unsheathed sword piercing the very heart of Mormonism" (p. 81). The story of the impact of that camp and of military activities on life in the Great Basin during the tempestuous years 1857–61 is the subject of this book. It is part of the multivolume Utah Centennial Series of the University of Utah Press. It breaks new ground with a solidly researched study of a neglected topic and will be of interest to students of Mormon and military history, Great Basin exploration, and federal-territorial and Indian relations before the Civil War.

In clear and graceful prose, the late Donald R. Moorman, the principal author, and Gene A. Sessions, who completed the work after Moorman's death, present a detailed but lively analysis of the Utah War with colorful descriptions of life at Camp Floyd and Fairfield, the hell-raising town of ten thousand inhabitants that sprang up nearby to provide goods and services to the army. The text is rich with anecdotes, which Moorman gleaned from prodigious research over eighteen years. Although sympathetic to the Mormons, he seems determined to leave no stone unturned, and the work includes materials from the Mormon Church archives that are no longer available to scholars.

Although the army and the unsavory people attracted to Fairfield were thorns in Brigham Young's side, the army unwittingly helped his cause in Indian relations. With a military force in their midst, the Saints were able to convince Utah Indians to part with their lands to satisfy the land-hungry settlers. Also, the army's quest for new wagon roads to their Pacific Coast installations led to several expeditions, including Captain James Simpson's 1859 trek from Camp Floyd to discover a Nevada passage to California shorter than the Humboldt River route. Simpson found the alternatives too forbidding for wagons, but his

exploration cleared the way for the Pony Express and helped point the path for part of the first transcontinental telegraph line. Simpson's findings also laid the foundation for Nevada's early livestock industry.

Did the Mormons benefit financially from the army's presence? The authors think not significantly. There was an initial economic windfall, but commerce went by default to non-Mormon businessmen while the Saints concentrated on agriculture and home industries in their quest for self-sufficiency and economic freedom from the outside, alien world. As one observer put it, "The Government is said to have expended forty millions in bringing that army to Utah and in establishing Camp Floyd, yet most of it went into the hands of speculators, and very little into the hands of the actual settlers of this country" (p. 271).

Camp Floyd and the Mormons makes a significant contribution and undoubtedly will be the standard work on this topic for years to come.

Robert W. Davenport
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Child of the Holy Ghost. By Robert Laxalt. (Reno and Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 1992. 153 pp.)

This book is the second volume of Robert Laxalt's Basque family trilogy. The first volume, *The Basque Hotel,* gave vignettes of Peter's youth in Carson City. This volume, written in the first person, has Peter searching out his mother's past in the Basque country. The book also picks up on themes from *Sweet Promised Land* where the narrator accompanies his father, Dominique Laxalt, back to his homeland, and where the father realizes his true home is in America.

Most of the story belongs to Peter's mother, Maitia, who was born a "Child of the Holy Ghost," that is, she was illegitimate. She had guarded that secret from Peter until his adulthood, when she tells him at the book's beginning. Because of her transgression, Maitia's mother had been driven out of the village, by both community and family ostracism. "It was Middle Ages stuff as surely and as horribly as witchcraft" (p. 5). The Basque village is too self-contained, too small, too harsh and unforgiving. When things finally begin looking better for Maitia, after inheriting the family farmstead, she is cheated out of her birthright with the connivance of the village mayor. Maitia then flees to America. Another seemingly unrelated story concerns Peter's father, Petya. He too has to flee his Basque homeland when he witnesses a murder and realizes that the murderer, a smuggler, will be coming after him. His story, for the most part, takes place in Nevada where, after a hard struggle sheepherding, and coming to terms with

and controlling his own internal demons, he proves successful and enters into a partnership with the individual who owns the sheep.

In the end, of course, Petya and Maita meet each other, whereupon the story darts to a much later time when Peter's brother Leon becomes Governor of Nevada and upon a trip to France, exacts a form of public revenge against the now-aged village mayor. Ultimately *Child of the Holy Ghost* is much more pro-American in its viewpoint than it is pro-Basque. America is where the characters make it, although only after much hard work. America is where an individual can be renewed and escape from his/her past. Basque ways are depicted as constraining and superstitious as compared with the "straightforward," open American ways.

Child of the Holy Ghost is an intense, exceedingly moving book. The author's writing is spare but beautifully descriptive. His words, like his characters, are strong and definite. The book is quite short and its ending rather too quick and too neat, as if the author were tired of the story, or rather did not want to write any more about it. Perhaps there's another volume out there. Is it autobiography? Perhaps not in all its details, but the book's major theme is obviously close to the author's heart. This question is most likely irrelevant as the artist-writer applies his creative imagination upon occurences from the past and builds upon them. As Maitia says to Peter at the very end, "Oh, no. You are imagining that from all that I have told you" (p. 153). It is a wonderful book and one which is to be highly recommended.

Jerome E. Edwards
University of Nevada, Reno

The Jazz Exiles: American Musicians Abroad. By Bill Moody. (Reno and Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 1993. xxvi + 193 pp.)

When I was asked to review Bill Moody's *Jazz Exiles: American Musicians Abroad,* I jumped at the chance. As a jazz fanatic who survived graduate school by savoring the Chicago club scene, I looked forward to learning more about the lives of some of my favorite musicians. As an historian trained in European cultural history, I was attracted to the broad historical issues suggested by the title. Why it is that so many American jazz musicians have felt forced to live elsewhere in order to practice their art? Why it is that jazz has seemingly been more appreciated in Europe and Japan than in the country that produced it?

Moody brings to his task many of the right qualifications. A jazz drummer, disc jockey, writer, and English instructor at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, he was a jazz exile himself, playing in Europe on several occasions and

living there for a number of years. As his own prelude to the book makes clear, his stints included playing with some of the best musicians around—including Jon Hendrix, Red Mitchell, Hank Mobley, and others.

The author's experience and connections give the book its shape and form. While it is part historical analysis, its core is oral history: interviews with leading jazz exiles, many of whom the author knows personally. There are extensive interviews with jazz greats like Art Farmer, Bud Freeman, Mark Murphy, Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis, Phil Woods, Jon Hendrix, and Red Mitchell. Other key jazz exiles—such as Stan Getz, Johnny Griffin, and Dexter Gordon—are discussed, but the source material here consists of already published interviews.

The phenomenon of American jazz musicians moving to Europe is almost as old as jazz itself. It began with the French love affair with Sidney Bechet in the 1920s, and became something of an exodus in the 1960s when a generation of bebop and older swing players departed for Paris, Stockholm, Copenhagen, and London. This, of course, has been immortalized in Bertrand Travernier's award-winning *After Midnight*, a film as much about the French infatuation with jazz as about the lives of American jazz musicians in Paris.

Given its status as oral history, it is not surprising that what *The Jazz Exiles* does best is to represent the life of the jazz exiles as they see it. The book vividly captures both the multiplicity of personal reasons why musicians have left the United States to live in Europe and Japan and the deeper, underlying causes for expatriation—the peripheral status of jazz in American life, the vast commercial pressures of the American music industry, the overwhelming presence of rock music (particularly in the sixties), and the endemic racism of American society. What the jazz exiles were to find in Europe was certainly not a utopian paradise—and many of them discovered that the longer that they stayed, the more their star status diminished—but they were accorded a respect both as artists and as people that they had never known. One of the most memorable aspects of *The Jazz Exiles* is its recording of how the musicians basked in this recognition, while at the same time being acutely aware of their status as foreigners, a status that tended to reinforce their cultural self-identities as Americans.

The book is less satisfying when it comes to dissecting the reasons why Europeans have been so enthusiastic about jazz. Many of the jazz musicians interviewed offer their own explanations—the fact that blacks were never slaves in Europe, the greater appreciation of art in European society, and so on—but there is no real analysis. Perhaps the most important reason for the European enthusiasm is, as Johnny Griffin observes, that jazz is so "foreign." This comment suggests an avenue of inquiry that links the European love of jazz with a much longer tradition of attraction toward what is foreign, exotic, and primitive, from Michel de Montaigne's sixteenth-century essay "On Cannibals" to the Cubists' infatuation with African primitivism. This tradition, as Edward Said argues in his now classic *Orientalism*, is inseparable from European colonialism and imperialism.

Such a criticism, however, returns us to my preface to this review—my dual identity as historian and jazz fan. If I would have preferred to see a more analytical treatment of historical trends in *The Jazz Exiles*, I thoroughly enjoyed the recovery of an important dimension of jazz history. In the end, it is as a jazz fan that I will most fondly remember this book.

Dennis Dworkin
University of Nevada, Reno

NEW RESOURCE MATERIALS

Nevada Historical Society

Chapman Family Collection

From the middle 1870s to 1915, members of the Chapman family provided much of the professional dental care available to residents of Virginia City and the Comstock. Allen Chapman and his sons, Sargent Allen and Chester Warren, all had dental practices in Virginia City. The first two were Comstock residents, and the last was apparently a regular visitor from Nevada City, California, where he had his main office. (Nellie E. Pooler Chapman, Allen's wife, was also a dentist, but seems to have limited her practice to Nevada City.)

Allen came from Nevada City to Virginia City in 1875 and opened a dentist's office on South C Street. He maintained this until 1895, when ill health forced him to return to Nevada City. Sargent continued his father's practice in Virginia

The Chapman dentist's office in Virginia City. *(Chapman Family Collection, Nevada Historical Society)*

Members of a Paiute family in Virginia City. *(Chapman Family Collection, Nevada Historical Society)*

C Street in Virginia City decorated for a parade. *(Chapman Family Collection, Nevada Historical Society)*

City until his own death in 1908. From that year until 1915, Chester appears to have made frequent trips to the Comstock to see his late brother's patients.

We are pleased to have received from Debora A. Luckinbill, a descendant of the Chapman dentists, a collection of family materials relating to the Comstock. Included are over a hundred photographs (probably taken about 1900 by Sargent or Chester) which depict Virginia City street scenes, parades and buildings, mines and mills, Paiute residents of the Comstock, and the interior of the Chapman dentist's office. Accompanying these are four panoramic views of Virginia City taken by Charles R. Savage in the 1870s, original copies of various Comstock newspapers from 1864 to 1888, and a substantial group of records from the family dental practice, indicating the services provided to hundreds of Comstock residents during the period 1908–1915.

United Parent-Teachers' Association Past Presidents' Records

As the result of a gift by Mrs. Gene M. H. Mack, the Society has acquired records of this important Reno civic organization for the years 1951 to 1971. Its membership composed of former presidents of the United Parent-Teachers' Association of the Reno Schools, the association was involved in various activities aimed at improving the schools and conditions in the community that affected children. Much of the material pertains to community efforts, spearheaded by the Parent-Teachers' Association, to raise money for a "ditch fund" that would pay for covering or fencing in the many open irrigation ditches in Reno and the Truckee Meadows. Included among the records, most of which date from the 1950s, are minutes of meetings, bylaws, membership lists, correspondence, and a scrapbook of newspaper clippings devoted to chronicling a number of safe ditch campaigns.

Photograph Collection Additions

The following are among notable recent additions to the Society's photograph collections: a dozen pictures taken at Reno Hot Springs, 1930s–1950s (donated by Jani Skeels of Vancouver, Washington); photographs of Nevada National Guard companies in Virginia City, c. 1890 (donated by Walter C. Wilson of Reno); images of Floriston, California, and Verdi taken about 1915 (donated by Betty Lemue of Los Molinos, California); photographs of the Daniels and Potts family ranches in central Nevada, and of various family members, 1878–1915 (donated by William E. Daniels of Olympia, Washington); several views of the aftermath of the 1983 Ophir Creek flood and landslide in Washoe Valley (donated by Anna Louise Perry of Virginia City); portraits, taken in the 1860s, of Colonel Charles F. McDermit and his wife, Hannah Davidson McDermit; and numerous snapshots of the Reno National Championship Air Races, 1969 and

1970, which were transferred to the Society from the Nevada State Museum and Historical Society in Las Vegas.

Eric N. Moody
Manuscript Curator

University of Nevada, Reno

The Special Collections Department is pleased to announce the following recent acquisitions:

Virginia and Truckee Railroad. Original deeds, leases, patents, rights-of-way, indentures and survey maps, dating from approximately 1860–1955 for property acquired by the V&T, and for property and rights-of-way leased, rented, or sold by the company to local and state governments, public utilities, and businesses. Four cubic feet.

National Women's Political Caucus (U.S.), Nevada; also known as the Nevada Women's Political Caucus. Records of various Nevada branches of the NWPC were received from Maggie Tracey, Tracy Owen, Delia Martinez, and Jill Derby. These records date from about 1978–1992 and consist of two cubic feet of reports, correspondence, minutes, and newsletters.

Nancy Gomes papers. The late Washoe County School Board member and Nevada State Assemblywoman's papers consist of campaign materials, correspondence, reports, minutes, speeches, resumes, clippings and an audio tape. Two cubic feet, 1965–1979, donated by John Gomes.

Henry R. and Nellie Verrill Mighels. Correspondence, 1863–1879, between Henry and Nellie documents their courtship while Henry was serving in the Union Army during the Civil War, and later when he was editor of the *Carson Appeal.* Donated by Harry Mighels, grandson of the Mighels.

Eleanor Busnell. Audio tapes of two radio programs: "Nevada Decisions in '76" about the 1976 Nevada elections, and "Nevada, One in Fifty," a U.S. Bicentennial presentation. Nineteen tapes, donated by Eleanor Bushnell.

Benjamin J. Crumley. Correspondence, photograph, and shoulder epaulets, 1861–1865. Crumley's letters to his wife provide a view of his opinions as a southerner serving as a chaplain in the Union Army. Donated by Frances Crumley.

League of Women Voters of Nevada. These records, 1964–1990, donated by Susan Petz, include correspondence, minutes, reports, newletters, and photographs. Fourteen cubic feet. This is a continuation of a previous accession group of LWV records.

Geneva S. Douglas. Mrs. Douglas served as a local, state, national, and international officer in Soroptimist International. Her papers consist of records of SI at those levels and also document her career with the U.S. Public Health

Service, where her expertise was in the field of radiation biology. Thirty-four cubic feet, donated by Richard Douglas.

Jean Ford. This addition, 1964–1993, complements a previous accession donated by Ms. Ford. Included are records of her businesses and teaching materials for her "Women in Nevada History" classes. Three cubic feet.

Nevadans for ERA. Vivian Freeman has donated three cubic feet of ERA materials, 1972–1982 and political papers documenting her political life and interests in women's organizations.

Nevada Press Women. Records of this organization include minutes, correspondence, reports, and newsletters. One cubic foot, 1971–1986, donated by Shayne Del Cohen on behalf of the NPW.

Sutro Tunnel Company. Several items were purchased at a recent auction to augment this collection. They include deeds, manuscript report on "cost of running branch tunnels," report on the Comstock vein by mining engineer C. A. Luckhardt, manuscript report to the House Committee on Mines and Mining on the Sutro Tunnel, correspondence, and an unpublished manuscript Sutro biography.

O.A.U. A small collection of records, 1876, of this fraternal organization with political interests was also acquired at auction. O.A.U. appears to have been based in Gold Hill with chapters in Eureka and other locations, but we have been unable to determine the full name of this organization. Assistance in discovering the full name would be appreciated.

Susan Searcy
Manuscript Curator

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