

# CHAPTER FOURTEEN

## MONTANA IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

*The twentieth century brought many changes to Montana. Each cycle of war, peace, economic prosperity, depression, rainfall, and drought changed the state in some way. As the twentieth century progressed, the issues of concern to the state became different, so that Montanans of the twenty-first century will have to make very different kinds of decisions than those of their predecessors.*

### Vocabulary

labor union  
flourish  
campaign  
infiltrate  
strike  
implement  
disastrous  
martial law

radical  
promote  
capitalist  
faction  
lynch  
moderate--  
benefits

direct democracy  
repeal  
synonymous  
quest  
traitor  
civil liberties  
sweeping

### The Labor Movement and the Anaconda Company

Early attempts at labor unions in Butte flourished because the three Copper Kings tried to outdo each other by providing benefits to their own workers. Beginning in 1893, the miners had a local of the Western Federation of Miners' Union, called the Butte Miners' Union. To take votes away from Daly, for example, Clark and Heinz initiated the eight-hour work day in their mines. After Clark and Daly were out of the copper mining business, the union gave Heinze its full support in his campaign against the Anaconda Company. Finally, in 1903, Anaconda proved how powerful it was. It shut down all of its operations, putting at least 15,000 workers out of work, and defeated Heinze in the legislature with the passage of the "fair trial bill."

As Anaconda gained control of all aspects of Montana's economy, it also began to infiltrate the Butte Miners' Union to keep it from becoming too powerful. When some of the members of the Union asked for a pay raise in 1906, the Company threatened to again shut down its operations, and the Union immediately called off plans for a strike. In 1912 the Company implemented the "Rustling Card System." Only miners approved by the Company could get a card to work in the mines, so the Company had control

over who could work. Anyone who spoke against Company policies could not get a card and therefore could not work.

At this time, members of a very radical organization called the Industrial Workers of the World, or "Wobblies," started to arrive in Montana. They not only promoted the labor movement to help workers get better pay and conditions, but were against the capitalist system altogether. Obviously, the Anaconda Company was against any activity by the "Wobblies." Soon the Butte Miners' Union had two factions - one controlled by the Company and one controlled by the Wobblies. In 1914, a riot broke out between these two factions, and someone, probably from the anti-Anaconda faction, destroyed the Union Hall in Butte with dynamite. The governor placed Butte under martial law, and Anaconda declared that would no longer recognize the Miners' Union. The miners' labor movement was now dead for the time being.

When a terrible mine disaster in the Speculator Mine in Butte killed 164 miners in 1917, due in part to not following safety regulations, the union sprang up again. At this time World War I was going on and union activity was branded by the Anaconda Company as unpatriotic. A Wobbler named Frank Little came to Butte and spoke not only in support of the Union but also against the war, the Anaconda Company, and the whole capitalist system. Six men kidnapped Little during the night and lynched him from a railroad trestle west of Butte. As a result, the federal government sent troops to Butte, and unionism was again defeated. The Company recognized no union in Butte until 1934.

## **The Progressive Era**

The Progressive Era refers to a historical period in the United States during the first years of the 20th century, prior to the entry of the United States into World War I. The Progressives were political moderates who believed that a direct democracy would solve most social ills. More and more, the citizens of the United States wanted increased political power in the hands of the people and less in the hands of large corporations and political "bosses." This was especially true in Montana, where the Anaconda Copper Mining Company controlled the politics and the economy of the state.

As the homestead movement brought more and more people into the agricultural community up until 1920, it created a new political interest group. As with the labor movement, it had its radical wing, call the Nonpartisan League. These farmers protested receiving low prices for their products while being charged high prices by the railroads. They also protested the unfair taxing policies of the state, by which the large mining interests, especially the Anaconda Company, paid less than their fair share of taxes and the agricultural interests had to pay more than their fair share.

Several important pieces of Progressive legislation were passed during this time. One of the most important was the Initiative and Referendum Act which voters approved as an amendment to the Montana Constitution in 1906. An initiative allowed voters to pass laws by a direct vote of the people, instead of by the Legislature, and a referendum allowed voters to repeal unpopular laws passed by the state Legislature. The Initiative and Referendum Act was especially important in Montana during this period, allowing voters to bypass the state Legislature which was controlled by the powerful Anaconda Copper Company.

Using the Initiative and Referendum Law, Montana voters were able to enact important Progressive legislation, including the following:

1. Candidates for public office could be elected by the direct primary vote of the people, instead of being chosen by political bosses.
2. United States Senators from Montana were elected directly by the people, rather than by the state legislators. The direct election of senators became the law of the United States when the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution was enacted in 1913.
3. Women were given the right to vote by a suffrage amendment to the State Constitution passed in 1913, and narrowly passed by the voters in 1914. One of the leaders in the movement for women's suffrage was Jeannette Rankin who was twice elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from Montana and the first woman to be elected to the United States Congress. Women's suffrage had its main support in the new homestead counties, where women were more of a political force than in the older mining and ranching counties. Suffrage was not given to women in the whole United States until the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was enacted in 1920.

Other Progressive legislation enacted during the Progressive Era addressed the issues of child labor, compulsory school attendance, workmen's compensation and other worker-protection laws, railroad regulation, and health protection laws such as the inspection of milk and meat. Montanans also supported Prohibition which passed by referendum in 1918 and became federal law when the 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution passed in 1919. Prohibition failed miserably in Montana, however, and "whiskey roads" across the Canadian border were commonplace.

## World War I

The years of World War I had both positive and negative effects on Montana. Jeannette Rankin, one of Montana's two representatives to Congress, voted against entering the war in 1917. Most of Montana's citizens, however, disagreed with her, and actively supported the war effort. T

On the negative side, the war caused a great deal of tension between different groups of Montanans. Disputes between union and Company activists were heightened during the War. The Wobblies and union activity became synonymous in the eyes of some with anti-war, unpatriotic sentiment. The Montana Council of Defense, which had been created in response to President Woodrow Wilson's request to further the war effort, got carried away in its quest to search for traitors to the United States. It pressured government officials and politicians to prosecute any antiwar sentiment. The legislature then enacted the **Montana Sedition Law**, which made it a crime to criticize the government in war time. Those who spoke out against the war were punished, the use of the German language was banned in the state, and any who questioned the war or conservative politics were under suspicion of being traitors. The **Federal Sedition Act**, which many consider to be the most sweeping violation of civil liberties in modern American history, was patterned after the Montana Sedition Act.

On the positive side, two things happened. The war kept the demand for agricultural products very strong which caused the prices to stay high. Also, the weather conditions were favorable and crop yields were good. The agricultural community prospered and many new farmers entered the state to share in the prosperity. When World War I ended in 1918, however, it had disastrous results for

Montana farmers. Prices went down and farmers had trouble paying their bills. Drought hit between 1917 and 1920. From 1921 to 1925, 20,000 farmers left their land. Those who stayed, however, improved farming efficiency by investing in better machinery, increasing the size of their farms, and diversifying their crops.

## **The Great Depression**

The Great Depression years beginning in 1929 were devastating for Montana as well as for the rest of the country. Prices for agricultural products declined again. At the same time, the severe droughts of 1929-1930 and 1934-1937 lessened production. Since the farmers were in debt from their heavy investment into machinery and more land, they had more and more trouble paying their bills. Conditions in the cities and towns were even worse, as more and more people lost their jobs.

The state had very little money to help people, so the federal government stepped in with relief programs. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected in 1932 and immediately implemented his "New Deal," a series of federal programs to help the unemployed.

Montana farmers were helped by the **Domestic Allotment Program (DAP)**, which paid farmers to hold certain amounts of land out of crop production to help stabilize prices and improve the soil.

The **Public Works Administration Project (PWA)** built Fort Peck Dam during the years 1933 and 1939, putting over 10,000 workers to work. This gigantic dam made the town of Glasgow a prosperous center of activity, and created the Fort Peck Reservoir.

The **Works Progress Administration (WPA)**, another New Deal program, built courthouses, schools, roads and bridges. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) hired young men to work on federal lands, building pack bridges, fighting fires, and building trails.

In 1936 the **Rural Electrification Administration (REA)** formed non-profit corporations to provide electricity to rural farms and ranches, changing life in the agricultural community.

## **World War II and the 1950's**

In 1941 the United States entered World War II. Jeanette Rankin, who had been reelected in 1940, was the only member of Congress to vote against war.

During and after World War II, economic prosperity returned to the country and to Montana. The demand for agricultural products, coal, oil, copper and lumber increased, and the prices went up. The drought ended. Farmers continued to specialize, with the two main products being wheat and cattle. As the number of small family farms continued to decline, large commercial farms began more numerous.

Demand for copper increased and the Berkeley Pit was opened in Butte in the 1950's, using the open-pit method of copper mining.

During the 1950's, as people had more time and money to travel, tourism became a major industry in the state.

## **Contemporary Issues**

As Montana entered into the latter years of the 20th century, new issues faced it. As population increased, land for agriculture declined. Economic recessions during the 1970's forced more and more people from small family farms, concentrating control of the large ranches in the hands of a small number of larger farming corporations. The timber industry faced more and more opposition from environmental groups over the amount and methods of timber harvest. Controversy arose over the amount of land which should be allocated to wilderness. Coal mining and the development of other natural resources near national parks became a source of dispute. These are the issues which face Montana today.

## Bibliography

- Abbot, N.C., Montana in the Making, Gazette Printing Co., Billings, MT., 1931
- Blumberg, Rhoda, What's the Deal? Jefferson, Napoleon, and the Louisiana Purchase, National Geographic Society, Washington, D.C. 1998
- Callaway, Lew L., Montana's Righteous Hangman, the Vigilantes in Action, Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1982
- Cheney, Roberta Carkeek, Names on the Face of Montana, Mountain Press Publishing Co., 1983
- DeVoto, Bernard, Ed., The Journals of Lewis and Clark, Houghton-Mifflin Co. 1953
- Dimsdale, Thomas J., The Vigilantes of Montana: or Popular Justice in the Rocky Mountains, McKee Printing, Butte, MT., 1945
- Fisher, Ronald K., West to the Pacific, the Story of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, Alpha Omega, Coeur d'Alene, ID., 1989
- Frazer, Robert W., Forts of the West, Univ. of Okla., 1977
- Fritz, Harry W., Montana, Land of Contrasts, Windsor Publications, 1984
- Hafen, LeRoy R., Mountain Men and Fur Traders of the Far West, Univ. of Nebr. Press, 1982.
- Hafen, LeRoy R., Trappers of the Far West, Univ. of Nebr. Press, 1972
- Haines, Madge, Lewis and Clark, Explorers to the West, Abington, 1959
- Hamilton, Wt. My Sixty Years on the Plains, Univ. of Oklahome, 1960. (would be good read aloud)
- Hart, Herbert M., Old Forts of the Northwest, Superior Publishing Co., 1963
- Howard, Joseph Kinsey, Montana, High, Wide and Handsome, Yale Univ. Press, 1959
- Johnson, Dorothy, The Bloody Bozeman, McGraw-Hill, 1971
- Lang, William L. & Myers, Rex. C., Montana, Our Land and People, Pruett Publishing Co., Boulder, CO., 1989
- Langford, Nathaniel P., Vigilante Days and Ways, Univ. Press, Missoula, MT., 1957
- Linderman, Frank Bird, Wolf and the Winds, Univ. of Okla. Press, Norman, 1986
- Malone, Michael P., Montana: A History of Two Centuries, Univ. of Wash. Press, Seattle, 1991
- Reinfeld, Fred, Trappers of the Far West, Crowell, 1967
- Ross, Alexander, The Fur Hunters of the Far West, Univ. of Okla. Press, Norman, 1956

- Russell, Carl P., Firearms, traps, and tools of the Mountain Men, Univ. of NM Press, 1968
- Satterfield, Archie, The Lewis and Clark Trail, 1978
- Spence, Clark C., Montana, a bicentennial history, W.W. Norton, 1978
- Stewart, Elinor Pruitt, Letters of a Woman Homesteader, Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1982
- Stuart, Granville, Pioneering in Montana, the making of a state, 1864-1887
- Stuart, Granville, Prospecting for Gold
- Toole, K. Ross, Montana: an uncommon land, Univ. of Okla. Press, Norman, 1959
- Toole, K. Ross, Twentieth Century Montana, a state of extremes, Univ. of Okla. Press, Norman, 1972
- Wellman, Paul I., Gold in California, Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1958
- Willard, John, Adventure Trails in Montana, John Willard, 1971
- Wishart, David J., The Fur Trade of the American West, 1807-1840, Lincoln, Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1979