

Idaho Panhandle Oral History Project
Interview with Maidell Clemets
October 26, 1979
Smelterville, Idaho
Interviewed by David Barton
Questionnaire Information

MC = Maidell Clemets
DB = David Barton

Tape 22; Side 1

- DB: Before then. Before the Depression, when you were in a boom period, what did people do for entertainment then?
- MC: Oh, that was a mining camp. That was wide open. I...up there, like Wardner, had ah, gambling games. And ah, they have...
- DB: What kind of gambling?
- MC: Oh, any kind of gambling you could think of. As long as you could bet a dollar. And ah,...
- DB: That was the minimum stakes?
- MC: Oh, no. They had various types of games. And ah, they had back room games there was no limit. Play whatever amount of money you had. And ah, they had other game house rules, you know; it would be limited in the amount that they could bet. And ah,...
- DB: Were these in saloons usually, the gambling?
- MC: Oh, yes. They were in regular saloons. Even though they had Prohibition, you could buy homebrew and moonshine. Card games. You look at a place and probably, see 10 or 15 guy standing at a bar drinking, and maybe 45/50 guys playing cards. Maybe about four, five pool tables were going. They had all kinds of card games. Card games which you don't see today. They played a lot of Fairbanks in those days, Faro. And ah, you bet you know. Like they deal out of a box. The cards are in a box. Pull cards out of a box, you bet on those cards coming up. Starting there you place your bets. You place your bets in various ways. You can cover you bets. Man keeping cases(?) his time a suit comes up, why, has a bead up there you know, for each, if a diamond, or if it's his suit, he moves a bead. And usually you get some old deformed guy, with good eyesight. He pretends that he never look up here but he would always be on the right bead and the right suit. But, then you had the mouse games. They bet on the hole the mouse would go down. Live mouse.
- DB: Who were some of the gambling characters, do you remember?
- MC: Oh yes. Yes. Well, there was a lot of people who...the town. Gambling, you know, they said the...you hadn't even heard of the game Pangingi. It was played with 11 decks of cards. And ah, they had a certain phase in the game, and they said that game of Pangingi was invented to keep the

tin horns and pimps off the streets. And ah, as a result of that they had a class of people in town...there always was, in a mining camp there always were just as many people there that tried to mine the miners. Get the money out of the miner's pocket as there was people working underground. See, the miner is pretty reckless with his money. He can blow it as fast as he gets it. And ah,...

DB: Was there a red light district in town?

MC: Oh, yes. They had a red light district. As a matter of fact, prostitution was legalized in the state of Idaho till 1915. Now, maybe some towns didn't have prostitution. Now Wardner, Idaho had prostitution. And ah, they had a section of town. They had it fenced off. They had a big gate around...

DB: Were was that in town?

MC: What?

DB: Where was that?

MC: That was up in Wardner district there...perhaps you saw the old tavern up there? That there old stone building. And on the other side of the creek up there, next to the hill. And ah, they had a gate there and a sign there, and red lights on it. Five dollars fine for leaving this gate open, you know. And ah, these prostitutes there were to stay right there in their place of business. They weren't to be out in town. And ah, they were found out in another part of town they'd be subject to heavy fines. They weren't supposed to be in any of the business establishments. Or any of the saloons. They were just supposed to stay in their place of business.

DB: Was there any law enforcement in town at that time?

MC: Oh yes. Oh yes. They had local law enforcement. And ah, the policeman at that time, like in Wardner's, they had one chief of police. And he could deputize anybody if he needed any help.

DB: Would they bother...

MC: Policeman, at that time, he was the king of the hill. When he went to arrest somebody he arrested. He'd gonna take you to jail, you'd go to jail. No question about that.

DB: Did they bother the prostitutes much?

MC: Oh no, no. The prostitutes they'd come to town. They'd come to town they'd have to get a license at city hall. They had to pay a certain fee each month. They were subject to medical inspection every week. Things like that. It was run at a very orderly fashion.

DB: Did the miners ever go to Wallace for the prostitutes there?

MC: Oh yes. Every once...Kellogg didn't have much prostitution, but Wallace did. Kellogg did, Mullan did. And ah, they ah, they had lot of prostitution there. That's right. It was wide open. Even held on through the '30s there were prostitutes in the community. Wallace...irregardless to what community you go to, why,

its the oldest profession, the oldest trade in the world. It still exists. I guess it always will be. Matter of fact, at that time find it boldly operating, any place you want to find it.

DB: So, it was an orderly type of operation.

MC: It is an orderly type of operation. Yes. Like I say, prostitutes were legalized until 1915. They had a legal system of operation. And ah, afterwards why then it became, more or less, a rakeoff system. Where they had to pay police protection, you know. It was an under-the-cover operations. This the same thing you have today. See, Idaho, they don't legalize prostitutes, they don't legalize gambling, they don't legalize some of the bars. These are your places that operate, this...places that sell liquor. And ah, you can take practically every place selling beer here, except the stores, what I mean, there are places that supposed to be licensed as to your relationship to the population, why, every one of these places you can buy a drink in it, or something like that. And ah, they have gambling. It's still wide open. Prostitution is the same way, as far as that goes. And ah, you know that those things are operating in a community, you also, you also know that they are paying protections. There is a handout somewheres. Because, ah, if they don't pay their, as they say grease the wheel, they won't operate.

DB: In the early '20s how many taverns were there in Wardner, can you remember?

MC: Yes. I can..., there were a great number of them. And ah, Wardner, I think at one time they had three undertaking parlors and 23 saloons.

DB: Three hundred what kind of parlor?

MC: Three undertaking parlors, and 23 saloons.

DB: I still didn't catch...

XM: Three undertaking...

DB: Oh, undertaking.

MC: Undertaking parlors, what they called them. You know, mortuaries. Mortuary works, was usually done by somebody who ran a furniture store. Something like that you know. And ah, so, yes, matter of, fact Wardner, many saloons. Oft time you have whole block, of nothing but saloons.

DB: Did they have ah, like dance halls?

MC: Oh, yes. Yes. They had the Fanny Chrysler Building, down there; it was a large dance hall. They had two dance halls there. Ah, ah, I have some old maps in here, I don't know exactly where they are now. But they ah, insurance maps from 1896...

DB: Sanborn maps?

MC: What?

DB: Sanborn maps? Sanborn insurance maps?

MC: Yea. I think they were. Yea. Defined the structures and the types of builds...or businesses that were in there.

And...enumerate quite a few of 'em. But ah, I can remember during the Prohibition, when I was a boy, that they had the prostitution then. And right above the red light district there was a fellow there..., his name was John Vokovich. He made wine. And he had some building up there and he took the partitions out of his buildings and made it into a dance floor. And, these people, it' was illegal for them to leave this here premises of prostitution, but they would. Well, the miners would go to the houses of prostitution, they would take the girls and they would go up there to John's and play the phonographs, and they could dance there and drink the wine, you know, see. They had the, quite a few bootleg joints. Gambling places. I remember one of them like Pops Ford, he was quite a gambler everybody called him Boots. And ah, Boots, he was also making a little moonshine. And Federal agents, county officers came. Destroyed his still, and his operation. An', Boots, he pulled a gun on 'em. He told, he wasn't going with them. He said that he broke the...than to come in this community. He wasn't going anywhere. Well, they had a pretty calm sheriff. He told 'im, well he said, "You're gonna have to come up to Wallace," he said, "and answer to the charges." You know, he told him he said, "You think this over now" He said, "and I'll be back," he says, "Monday," he says, "to get you. And take you up there." Well, after he left, why then Boots, he asked all his friends. Ah, "Should I go to Wallace?", you know. They all said, "Yes, you gotta go up there. If you don't, why, they'll come down and take you up there. If they have to carry you on a slab, they'll take you up there. You can't do nothing with that old hogleg you got there, that gun." So, he went up there. He got found guilty. But they had a Federal trial, it was a Federal offense. They impaneled a jury of farmers down around Plummer, Idaho. And this trial was in Coeur d'Alene Federal Court. Boots was very much disgusted with it. He hadn't got justice, all he got was law. He hadn't been tried by a group of his peers. He'd been tried by a bunch of stone trashers. Down here at Plummer. And he said he know that if had been tried in Wallace, Idaho, they'd turn him loose. He said he'd got justice in Wallace, but in Coeur d'Alene, all he got was law. And ah, that was the attitude oft times. Some of the district here. And ah, that district is still...that attitude is still, more or less, predominant to Coeur d'Alene mining district. They don't like to have people from the outside tell 'em what to do. A miner's sort of an independant person.

DB: Did they ever tell stories about Molly B'Damned from...?

MC: Oh, yes that, the story that was very stretched. That's not a really...that's just like any other story that got built up. Ah, this here Stoole who was...here in the early

days. He wrote a book called The Silver Strike. In this here book he brings out this character of Molly B'Damned or Bedam. And her name was really Maggie Hall, you know. Of course, it brings forth the old principle that every woman in a house of prostitution was not a dope addict, or diseased, or...she was a girl from a convent, or nurse, or something like that. She's an angel of mercy, you know and she wouldn't slip you a Mickey Finn, or hit you over the head, or roll you if you had a dime in your pocket. And ah, this here...it gives a false light on lot of subjects, it does. Which of course, which people like to hear. The story grows, you know.

DB: Do you think there was a Hall?

MC: Oh yes. Indeed. Yes. I knew people who knew her, real well, of course. Her, her uncle, he was in Murray in the early days. Yes. He appropriated his house, something like that, see? His house was the center of the community. Everybody in town used to come there, to his place.

XF: Something like a post office. He, he, he. It was that.

MC: Ha, ha. He was there all right. And ah, but ah, most of these here places are not run that way. That's a pretty far fetched story. And ah...

DB: But how does the story go?

MC: What?

DB: How does...?

MC: Well, she come to town. And, supposed to be when she came to town, that there she met a woman with a child. She was walking in over the trail over there, Thompson Falls. How she stopped the woman besides the trail, and let her warm up with her coat, you know. Things like that. How oft times some of these miners were sick, she would help them. You know, things like that. And also this here, place of prostitution in Murray was called Paradise Alley, you know. Well then, they had other stories how every Saturday night she would go out in this alley, and she'd have a tin tub. And, take a bath in public view, things like that, see. How she had to have so much gold dust poured in the bottom of the tub because she didn't like to sit on that tin. He, he. Oh, they have all kinds of goof stories, you know. Just what an imagination could build. Now there were characters in there. You hear many, many stories, like that. Things about people that build, you know. And one of them, that was...I knew her two brothers, older boys. Bill and Fred. Their pa was a saloon keeper and he came into Murray in the early days. Put up a little building, and later on he prospered more, he built..oh, ah, like he would there. He built a saloon. And ah, he had rooms up above, in the saloons--he could rent. And, his daughter Velma, she decided when she came in to Murray with her father, that...she was a very attractive young woman...she was gonna get a mining claim...time. Which she

did. She found out that there was a lot of hard work to it. It's not too profitable. And ah, she been sitting on the piano, years ago, before. Sat on the piano and sang. And she was soon back in the saloon sitting on the piano, singing again. Then she took up with another young man there. This young man had a good placer claim, he was making money. And, it wasn't long before she was over there cooking for 'im. Then she was doing his washing. Then she moved in with him. And ah, it wasn't long until he was in about the best part of his placer claim. He was making money, according to astronomical figures. But ah, he got pneumonia and died. Well, this young man's parents came there. And they became the sole heirs of these here placer claim. And ah, State of Idaho always recognized a common law marriage. Of course, she couldn't establish it--common law marriage. There was no proof that the marriage was consummated. They didn't have any children, or anything else. So she didn't have anything. And she was back in her father's saloon. She was sitting on the piano, singing again. And she soon found another young man. This time she wasn't gonna make any of the mistakes she made in the past. So, with this marriage, she invited the whole community in. And ah, there in her father's saloon. And, by George they had the marriage, and shortly after the marriage ceremony was performed, why she and her husband left the room and went to her room, which was directly above the bar. And, pretty soon the people saw a string coming down through the hole in the ceiling. And this here string come down, right over, exactly over the bar. And, the bartender he went and set a bucket up on the bar--of water. And ah, took an apple with the stem on it, and tied a string to it and he put it over the bucket. The other end of the string were tied to the springs of the bed. And now the whole community sat around and watched the bucket. And they knew that the marriage was consummated. Ha, ha, ha.

XF: He, ha, ha.

DB: Ha, ha, ha.

MC: But, ah those are some of the types of stories that come out of mining camps, and stuff like that. You don't wanna, you want to get to tell you the story of Maggie Hall, and all that kind of junk. Why, there are 100s of 'em.

DB: So, who's Maggie Hall?

MC: Well, Maggie Hall was this Molly B'Damned.

DB: Well, who was the woman that consummated her marriage, what was her name?

MC: That's Velma Wilbur.

DB: Velma Wilbur?

MC: Yea. So, ah...

DB: Well, keep going, those stories are good.

MC: Ha, ha, ha. But, you have many stories like that. They have various characters, you know. Some of these, things like that. One of 'em was a fellow that lived up there in Mullan. And, I knew the fellow, his name was Bill Zulek. And ah, well, he was a darn good miner. And he never changed his clothes. He's dirty all the time. Wore his diggers wherever he went. You never saw him cleaned up. And ah, he wasn't taking any chances, on those ah...banks going broke. So he took and put money in every bank in the Coeur d'Alenes. And ah, by George he had an old Chevrolet car, and he came down here to Kellogg. And the car broke down. And he went up to the Chevrolet car agency, and here they had a brand new Chevrolet sedan there, in the window. Wanting to sell. And, in he walks, his old dirty clothes. Rusty, muck on 'im, everything else. And he opened up the door of this here new car, and sit right in the front seat. Oh, the salesman just about had a fit. And ah, he asks him, "How much is this car?" And thought Bill was nuts, you know. And he wanted to get 'im out of there. And this fellow he says "Well, gimme a checkbook," he said "on the first State Bank." The fellow, he says, "we don't have any checkbooks on the First State Bank." "Well," the salesman said, "Allright." He thought it was a good way to get 'im out of there. So they went over to the bank, and while Bill was over there, writing out the check, why he went over and asked old Phil Weber, he was the president of the small, local bank. And he said to that guy, he said, "It that crazy dirty man's check any good?" The president of the bank, Weber, he says, "Yes," he said, "His check is good." And, he said, "You're crazier than he is too." He, he, he. So, couldn't tell by some characters like that, whether they are crazy or not crazy. And ah,...

DB: Were there any stories about people getting a little bit of money, or getting a thousand bucks, and just blowing it, in a night?

MC: Oh, yes. You hear many stories like that. Matter of fact, I worked with people like that. I worked with a fellow one time, in Alaska, that way. And ah, by George that ah...he had ah...there's a lot of people that way just regardless what their occupation is, they got the spirit to gamble. They can win, be satisfied; they can lose, be satisfied. And ah, the main thing is they can't retain any money. They're really never happy till they haven't got any, it seems like. And ah, by George, he could work every day...we only got paid once a month, we were contracting...and he'd earn a darn good check. And he'd get it too. And ah, I remember, one fellow, one time, he soon as pay day come about, why everything would just cease. The fellows just gather around. They start this Four, Five, Six Game, you know. With dice. Heck, he could lose his paycheck, just like that, with one turn of the

dice. And, just pick up his lunch bucket and go out of there, just as happy as could be. Didn't make any difference to him. And ah, one time he came over to my house. We didn't live there right in camp. And, we lived out west of camp. He came over, and he said to me. He said, "You got any change?" I says, "Well" I said, "About all I've got in change, I got this check." "Well, that will do." And I said, "Remember I want some change out of it too." "Well," he said, "I'll bring you back some." And ah, he left. Then I went, over about noon to camp, why, went over there and saw...Four, Five, Six Game. Well, there set my friend who was gonna bring me back the change. He was drunker than a million dollars. There is no need to talk to a drunk man, so I just went home. Came back in the evening to go to work. Everybody says to get out and see the game. So, went to watch the game. And, there is my friend he had a pile of checks about that high in front of 'im. And, big stack of currency. He broke up the game. And he told me, "I'm not gonna work tonight," he said. Well, I asked him, "Where are you going?" "Well, I am going down to Anchorage," he said. "I'm lucky" he said, "I want some money." I said, "You go to Anchorage all right," I said, "I say, "They got people sitting around, waiting for you to come to town." Well, he came back to work in about 10 days. Very sick...get him straightened up. Get him back to work. He was an excellent workman. By George...make a good gambler, 'cause it didn't make any difference to him. He had the spirit to gamble.

DB: Were there any other stories, when you were a boy, about, say 1890s, about some of the early timers who were here?

MC: Oh, yes. There was...there was a passle, of people here in mining, like I say--rugged individualists. They were. They were...they...you didn't want to ever cross them. And ah, they took care of their business and they expected you to take care of your business.

DB: Were there any other characters other than Molly Burdan, can you think of any names?

MC: Oh yes. There's, like old Jack Keating, now. Jack Keating, he was a...ahm...of the Caledonia Mining Company. An', had some claims that were near to Caledonia. And ah, in order for them to get a tunnel site, they had to go through his property. So, he became a very wealthy man of this stock he got out of the Caledonia. He lived in a little log house. Had, only a dirt floor in it. And ah, he didn't have electricity. Didn't have any water, in fact, he'd water out of a bucket, our of a little old spring. And ah, one little window in there. Wore high top boots. And, overalls and black overcoat. And, black hat. This is more or less reminiscent of the Civil...I mean of a Spanish American War hat. And ah, there's a peak on it. And ah, he lived very, very frugally. And here he was, he

was the wealthiest man in the county. At the time of the war bonds, Liberty Bonds, which they had in World War I. He offered to buy the full quota of the company. Which was 110,000 dollars. And ah, he never had anybody he associated with, except one fellow. And, that was a fellow that went with him to school--in England. And his name was Bozo Bishop. Billy Bishop, he was a little...everybody called him Bozo.

DB: How did he get the name?

MC: I don't know, where he picked up the name Bozo, but he had it. And ah, Bozo, he'd been around a whole lot. He'd served with the military when he was young, like many of 'em had to in England. He'd been in India, and places like that. Bozo, he had a habit of when he'd talk to you he'd squat down, and set like on his heels. Looked up at you. Just like the native people of India. He used to sit for hours like that, you know. He'd always be in this here squattin' position most of the time. You'd stand while he'd squat. And ah, he's about the only one he'd associate with. Well, then he got more infirm. An', kidneys, and he went to the Providence hospital, in Wallace. He was Catholic. It's Catholic hospital.

DB: He lived in Wardner?

MC: No, that was in Wallace, Idaho.

DB: No, what I mean, where did he live?

MC: He lived in Wardner.

DB: He lived in Wardner

MC: And ah, he'd only had about few friends that would come to see him. That was Bozo, an' he had a doctor...Doctor Mowery...an' he had a, banker--his name was Flory. At the First National Bank in Wallace. An', that was about the only people that would come to see 'im. And ah, then he died. And he died without a penny. Nobody knew where his money had went. Well, some people say, "Well, he buried it around there." But he didn't bury it around there. He was too smart man for that. And ah, I talked to Billy about it. About Bozo, afterwards, about the... Well, he said, the church got all his money. See. He said, "It is a good thing," he said, "Somebody got it that'd spend it and use it, you know. The way he was living, frugally there, like that, was a shame." He said that he got Jack Keating's watch. It was a big old turnip, an wasn't worth much. And ah, by George, he said, that when Jack died. He said, he was in the room with 'im. And, he said that Jack sent for 'im. And he came out. Said, he was standing at the foot of the bed. He said, with Doctor Mowery. He said his lawyer...I mean, his banker--Flory. He said, I was sitting on the other side of the bed, holding the other hand. He said, when he was dyin, he said, there came a big smile on Jack's face. He said, because he knew he was dying like Jesus Christ. He said, he was dying between two thieves.

DB: Ha, ha, ha, ha. That's great. That's funny.

MC: What?

DB: That's funny.

MC: And ah, you hear many stories about like that. I had one friend one time. His name was ah...Rupert. And ah, I worked with him. During the Depression period, prior to the Depression. And Rupert got laid off. An' we was working out of Page. And he moved up to Wallace. Couple of his other friends, they got together and they rented a small house. And ah, they bachelored together there. And, one of 'em was a fellow by the name of Beefsteak Busby....

(END OF TAPE 22; Side 1)