

## CLARA McADOW - THE AMAZING LADY MINE OWNER

The Judith Mountains of central Montana are well east of the major mining districts and not as well-known or documented. However, they were once part of making Fergus County the largest gold producer in the state. The Spotted Horse mine near Maiden was famous in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, producing some 200,000 ounces of gold from spectacular high-grade ore, but was only successful under the management of a woman.

Clara Tomlinson came to Montana from Detroit, the wife of Dr. C. E. Tomlinson, who set up a practice in Coulson as it developed into Billings with the arrival of the railroad. Clara was an extremely bright young lady, far more than a bit of a tomboy, with a natural inclination toward the practical side of things. Shortly after arriving, she talked the Northern Pacific railroad into hiring her as a menial clerk. In a very short time was able to demonstrate an aptitude for engineering that moved her into more responsible work, extremely rare for a woman of the time.

Her husband was an invalid who became seriously ill within a few months and was forced to return to Detroit, where he died. The widow remained in Billings, taking the money she had earned with the NP to start successfully speculating in real estate as Billings became a reality. She met Perry W. McAdow, one of the earliest Montana pioneers and a founder of Coulson, with business interests across the state. They were apparently involved in several business dealings and got married in 1884. Interestingly, like her first husband, he was also an invalid and confined to a wheelchair.

One of Perry's ventures was a store in Andersonville, east of Maiden, where he not only sold his wares but provided grubstakes to the area prospectors. One of those was "Skookum" Joe Anderson (the town's namesake) who had found a nearby limestone outcrop with good showings of gold, less than half a mile from the store. He and his partner set up a stone arrastre, grinding and amalgamating the ore for a decent return in spite of the crude operation. However, the work and humdrum of mining wasn't to Joe's liking. He was a true prospector, so he approached Perry about buying him out, since the storekeep already owned a grubstake interest.

P. W., or "Bud" as he was known, already had a lot of irons in the fire and running a mine from his wheelchair wasn't appealing. He turned it down. However, when he told Clara about the proposition she was intrigued and looked the mine over carefully. She liked what she saw and bought the property from the prospectors for \$11,000, a lot of money at the time.

Well, that's one version of the story from contemporary newspaper accounts.

Alternatively (and more romantically), she was still a single widow doing very well in Billings when she heard about the mine. In this version Bud had already taken over the property for what was owed him, but was doing nothing with it. Clara had broken her leg

and was doing her real-estate business from her bed. She “sent for McAdow and offered him \$11,000 for it. He was touched by her lack of business sagacity and chivalrously told her it wasn’t worth it. She persisted in buying it and within six months took out \$90,000 in gold. Mr. McAdow subsequently married her.” The article, written in 1892, continues, “She is now the treasurer of the Billings Board of Trade and is worth several millions. She does all business in her own name and her husband is only her connubial partner.”

Whichever way it went, the 1883 \$11,000 would be \$440,000 today if converted by inflation, or a whopping \$935,000 based on the relative gold prices. \$90,000 would really be a lot of money!

Once she had the mine, she took charge of all aspects of its development, going underground every day to direct the work. She bought a stamp mill located two miles away in a steep canyon and relocated it to the Spotted Horse, with a pump station at the original location and buried a pipeline to the new mill.



Clara McAdow (dark dress) at the Spotted Horse mill ca 1888

Within two years the mine was a steady producer of direct-shipping high-grade ore running as high as 750 ounces per ton, plus the mill production of around 75 ounces a day. The mine and its owner-operator became famous and attracted the attention of Helena merchants and mine developers, Hauser and Holter. Clara sold them the property for \$500,000, with half down, around 1890. She took her money and returned to her home town of Detroit to erect a fine mansion (still standing as the parish house for the First Universalist church) and live life easily.

The new owners built a new 20-stamp mill, installed an air compressor and a larger hoist, and made many improvements to facilitate increased production.



Clara's mill in the foreground, Hauser & Holter's new mill above – ca. 1890

However, without her nose for ore, the mine did not fare well under “professional” management. The new owners could not meet their payment schedule. You can almost see her shaking her head in disgust and resignation as she left her comfortable city mansion and returned to remote Maiden, Montana to salvage her mine in 1891 or so. Less than six months later she displayed a \$48,000 gold bar in the Hotel Helena, just to rub Hauser & Holter's nose in it.

By this time, along with her mine, Mrs. McAdow was famous for her business savvy and hard work ethic. Her independence and intelligence made her a rare standout in the man's world of the day. She had a reputation as a no-nonsense, abrupt, and often impatient person with a deep soft spot for the less fortunate.

In 1892 the talk of the country was the Columbian Exposition being planned in Chicago to celebrate the voyage of Columbus. Montana decided to participate in a big way and Clara McAdow was involved in the planning from the start. When the governor's wife withdrew as chair of the women's committee, Clara was appointed in her place, a good measure of her standing in that society.

W. A. Clark was another huge fan of the Exposition, later making it the namesake of the playground he built for Butte, Columbia Gardens. He and one of Clara's old partners, Samuel Hauser, decided they would have a solid silver life-size statue of Justice highlight

the Montana pavilion. They loaned 24,000 ounces for the project. Once again, Clara outwitted the magnates and proposed it stand on a gold platform (plinth). Ramping it up again, she said the Spotted Horse would provide the gold. It did, nearly 7500 ounces, worth 5 times the value of the silver.



Statue of Justice – Montana Exhibit - 1893 Columbian Exposition

It's almost beyond belief that the mine could sideline that much income and still maintain normal production. When the fair was over, she leased the plinth out for 4% of its value and it travelled the country for some time after the statue itself was melted down to recover the silver. Obviously she didn't need the money.

Around 1894 she finally gave in to one of the numerous requests to sell the mine and bonded the property to the Double Eagle Gold Mining Company for \$500,000. Once again, the mine was being run by men with a great deal of mining experience. They took out a large amount of ore, produced thousands of ounces of gold, but spent so much money doing it they gave up the bond little more than a year later after paying Clara \$200,000.



Ca. 1895

She was making plans to return to the mine from Detroit once again when she died January 19, 1896 leaving a \$2,000,000 estate to her husband Perry.

The relationship between Clara and her husband is very confusing. At the time of her death he was living, apparently since 1892, in a large mansion he built in Punta Gorda, Florida with a much younger wife, Marian. There is no mention of him in any of the articles about Clara between their marriage in Billings and the will. In December, 1900 he wrote a letter to the Fergus County Argus newspaper claiming the success of the mine as his own, with no mention of Clara. He died in 1918. Marian was still alive in the 1930's. He was famous for his racehorses and she was known as the Flower Lady of Punta Gorda.



Perry & Marian McAdow - 1917

My best guess is that her marriage to Perry was a convenience that allowed her freedom from the otherwise difficult problems of trying to do business as a woman. However, the quoted article makes a point of mentioning she did all her business in her own name.

The Spotted Horse was sold at a sheriff's sale in 1901 so, already very wealthy from his own endeavors in Montana (and Clara's bequest!), Bud never pursued any further interest.

The mine produced sporadically until 1918 under several different lessees, but never again spilled out gold like it did for Clara McAdow.