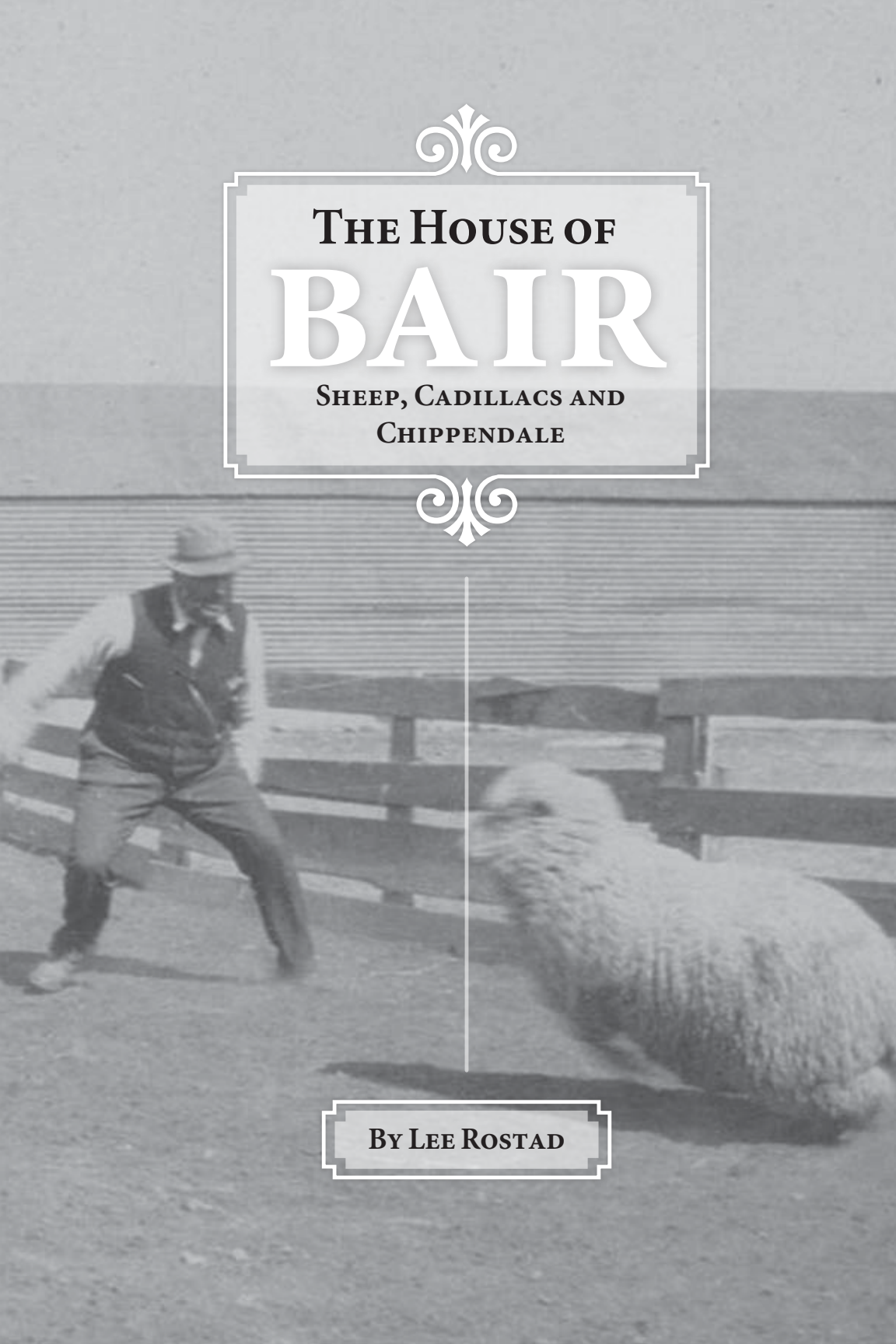
The House of BAIR

Sheep, Cadillacs and Chippendale



By Lee Rostad

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Cliff Edwards, Bobby Anner-Hughes,
Jamie Doggett, Peter Marchi, Richard Moe,
Anthony Johnstone, Mike McGrath,
...and all the other "Friends of the Bair"
Across Montana and the Nation

Marguerite, Charlie, Mary, and Alberta Bair

The Bair house around 1936 PHOTO COURTESY MONTANA STATE HISTORICAL ARCHIVES

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Ethel Berg, who was a dear friend of Alberta, has worked at the museum since its beginning, guiding, gardening, whatever it took to make a success.

Sandy Solberg started before it was closed, but stayed to care for things and took on the task of running the museum when it was with the Upper Musselshell Valley Historical Society. She is still there and still cares.

Alberta Bair

INTRODUCTION

THIS IS THE STORY OF MY FRIEND, Alberta Bair, her family and her legacy. There are many other stories for she had many friends over the course of her 98 years, but I cannot tell their stories—I can only tell my own.

Our family was only one of many in the valley that enjoyed the friendship of Alberta and Marguerite and Dave. But as members of both families died, the relationship of those left deepened and the last survivors—Alberta, Phil and I—became closer as we cared for each other. We went many places together and Phil and I often took dinner to Alberta and spent the evening. When we were both home, we visited each day by phone.

In the late 60s, Marguerite asked me if I would write a book about Charlie Bair. Both she and Alberta wanted to tell their father's story to express their love for him and their pride in his accomplishments. Marguerite, Dave and Alberta all wrote some of the memories of their father's life and we went through the letters and pictures the

family had saved. In the end, we decided to do an article for *Montana, the Magazine of Western History.* It appeared in 1970.

In 1990, Alberta and I talked again about the book.

I started to do research on the family to get some dates and information correct. Alberta had always said she was born in 1896, but a visit to the Billings Library told me that it was 1895. She chided me for making her older. When I asked about the various businesses Bair had been in, Alberta suggested I go to the lawyer's office and go through the Bair papers. I told her I would not be comfortable doing that alone, so the two of us went to Billings and spent a day going through records at the Moulton Law Firm. Then she sent me to town in the pickup to bring the files home and put them in the garage. It was my understanding that there were some sensitive files that remained at the law firm which was proper. The files remained in the garage until the museum was being developed and were then placed in the maid's room where shelves were built and the room became the "archive room."

It was great fun to listen to Alberta tell again of the family—many stories we had heard before—but she enjoyed remembering the days with her family. We decided to name the book *Fourteen Cents and Seven Green Apples* since that was allegedly what Bair had when he left home. Some days Alberta changed the numbers—we didn't see that as a problem…

She loved having me read the chapters to her as we went along, and would often comment that she had forgotten some of the stories I had found in the newspapers or files.

Readers of *Fourteen Cents and Seven Green Apples* will see much of the material repeated in this memoir.

During this time, Alberta was doing something definitive about leaving the house as a museum in her father's memory and dealing with the inventory brought back more memories. The sisters

had put many invoices in the drawers of the antiques, so I gathered them up and made copies, then returned them to the proper places. We sat and visited as Alberta told me the many stories of acquiring those treasures.

One year I told her I would polish the silver for her birthday. Bertie brought the pieces to the kitchen where I polished away and then she returned the treasure and brought another. It took us three days!

Until Alberta's death in 1993 we cared for her in some fashion—as did the community—so that she could remain in the family home. She wanted nothing to do with a "retirement home." Memories of her family were in the Martinsdale home, and she often asked, "Don't you feel the love in this house?" The story of the house is an integral part of the Bair story.

Alberta developed a potassium imbalance along with her respiratory problems.

"I enjoyed my banana every day, and thought I was being so healthy and now they tell me I can't have that anymore."

She also had to give up salty snacks. On the coffee table in the Pine Room, she kept the little corn snacks in a lovely silver "biscuit basket." After they were excluded from her diet, she kept them for friends but they soon became a little too old to enjoy. She was on oxygen and could barely see, but still the fun-loving, interesting woman she had always been. "Are we having fun yet?"

About 1990, the doctors in Billings thought Alberta shouldn't be living alone. She was reluctant to admit that she needed anyone and didn't like any of the suggestions for a place in Billings, but stated adamantly that she wasn't about to pay anyone to stay with her. I visited with Helena Hancock at the bank in Billings and we arranged through the hospital in Harlowton to have some ladies come—and Helen took care of the expenses. We also had some of

the Martinsdale ladies participate. Most were great companions, although Alberta thought it a waste of money to pay someone to sit and visit with her. If she didn't like someone she quietly saw to it that they quit. But, being Alberta, she made the most of her new situation and enjoyed it. If there were a need, Phil and I would go and spend the night.

As the steps to her bedroom became more difficult, Alberta was moved to the maid's room behind the kitchen. She complained some about this but recognized the need. She commented briefly that she was confined to the maid's room and the person caring for her was in one of the family bedrooms. Since the bedrooms were far apart, we used an intercom—borrowed from my granddaughters who no longer needed it. We also bought an electrical chair for the kitchen that would lend assistance to getting up.

Connie Olson of Harlowton began staying full time with Alberta with ladies from Martinsdale filling in when Connie had time off. Connie was a good companion in many ways for Alberta. She was a caring person and a good housekeeper. She had been a beautician and Alberta appreciated having someone take care of her appearance in such a professional fashion. Alberta and Marguerite had both gotten wigs during the years of the wig craze—but Alberta was too often singing her bangs as she lit a cigarette. Connie's hair care was better.

One afternoon when I was visiting Alberta, she got up and took me into the dining room.

"I want to show you something," she said, and went to the sideboard to the east of the room. This Sheraton sideboard had a serpentine front and around the front a couple of sections that appeared to be decoration but were actually small round accordion slats that could be moved to show a recessed area. Alberta had me open them and inside one were a couple of glasses, but in the other

Alberta Bair

a small bundle of cash and a round woman's watch, suspended in a small frame. I was surprised to see the money, because when she and Marguerite came back from one of their trips and had extra cash, they usually hid it under the carpet in the living room.

She had me take out the watch and take it back to the kitchen where we looked and admired it.

"This was Muzzy's watch, the dear thing. Dad brought it back to her from one of his trips. Isn't it a lovely thing?" Alberta enjoyed those moments of remembering her mother.

Alberta then had me return the watch to the hiding place. She wanted someone to know about this hiding place after she was gone, but the secret was out when she was having some work done on the windows and the sideboard was moved. Somehow, either the carpenter or Connie noticed the secret door and discovered the watch and money. Alberta seemed annoyed that the secret was out and sent the watch to Helen Hancock at the bank and told her to send it East and sell it.

So these are my memories of Alberta—"Bertie"—her family and her home—they are all parts of the same story.

The Bair Family home in the Musselshell Valley

CHAPTER ONE

Alberta's House Tour

TRAVELERS DRIVING WEST UP HIGHWAY 89 and turning into the road to Martinsdale, have long been surprised to round a corner and see a large Cape Cod-style home behind two stone gateposts. Spreading out behind a slowly moving stream, the red-roofed, three dormered white house with green shutters seems very much a part of the landscape of the Musselshell Valley surrounded by the Big Belt, Castle and Crazy Mountains. It was this valley that was chosen by sheep and cattle ranchers before the turn of the century, and it was this range that Charlie Bair chose for his ranch.

Bair, James Vestal, William Rea and George Corwin bought the Martinsdale Livestock Company in 1907, and Bair became the sole owner when he bought his partners out in 1913. Richard Clendennin had been the original owner of the ranch, competing with the Gauglers "old Martinsdale" for the travelers' needs for lodging and supplies. The site was important as a station on the Carroll Trail.

Martinsdale, as it appeared to Charlie Bair when he established his brand in the valley

At the time he bought the Martindale Livestock Company, Bair also acquired the John Grant ranch. It is the Grant home that became the center of the Bair home, remodeled when the Bairs

The John Grant House about 1914

moved to Martinsdale permanently in 1934. A guest house was built to the north. This was moved to join the house in the early 40s and the garage added to the north. The next addition was to enlarge the living room and add two bedrooms. In the early 60s, they added an office off the Pine Room and a large two-story addition to the south. This addition of another bedroom and bath had a caretaker's apartment with an outside entrance for use when the house would become a museum.

Mary, Alberta and Marguerite had their bedrooms upstairs and Charlie had his bedroom on the ground floor, but as they remodeled, they named the two bedrooms on the south side of the house as "Alberta's room" and "Marguerite's room." Alberta's room was used as a guest room, as was the bedroom off the Pine Room.

Marguerite and Alberta Bair furnished the home with an eclectic mix of Western and European treasures. It was a rare treat to have a tour of this treasure. This was no ordinary ranch house with the French furniture, the Regency silver, Chinese porcelain, the silk Persian rugs, the Chippendale side chairs, the autographed photographs of U.S. presidents ranging from Theodore Roosevelt to Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Although I went through the house many times, I never tired of hearing Alberta's stories, and I always seemed to see something new that I had missed before.

The Train of 47 cars of Montana Wool, shipped by Charles Bair to Boston in 1910

Entering the home, the visitor first sees a bench covered with hats—red hats—Alberta's trademark. When the door bell rang, Alberta would put one of the hats on before answering the door. If the visitor were a salesman or someone she or Marguerite didn't want to receive, Alberta kept the hat on, explaining that they "were just going out." If the visitor were welcome, Alberta took off the hat and added that, "they had just gotten in."

This was the home of Charlie Bair, who arrived in Montana as a conductor for the Northern Pacific Railroad, and in the early 1900s, parlayed $25,000 from a sheep sale, into a fortune in the Klondike gold rush and wore a stick pin with a big gold nugget—a twin to the one he had given President William McKinley. This was the home of Charlie Bair, the sheep baron, who in 1910 shipped one and half million pounds of wool to Boston on forty-seven cars labeled, from engine to caboose, "the largest wool clip grown by one individual on the North American Continent." This was the home of Charlie Bair who—according to the July 31, 1931 *Great Falls Tribune*—told a James C. Hooe, a Washington lawyer, who inquired about Mr. Bair's business and, when he told him he raised sheep, volunteered that he too, had sheep—150 on his farm in Bluemont, Virginia. "Well, Mr. Hooe," Bair said, "I've got more sheep dogs than that."

Here lived Charlie's lovely wife, Mary, who had lived in a sod-roofed house in Lavina, a brick house in Billings, and a mansion in Portland where she raised two young debutantes and supported her husband. Mary enjoyed her home, remembering well the ranch house in Lavina where snakes would curl up in the kitchen by the stove, where she raised turkeys for extra income, only to have her generous husband give them to friends. In Martinsdale, she supported the Community Aid by giving them the land where their hall stood, and joined in their fund raising events.

Here, his oldest daughter, the soft-spoken but tenacious Marguerite, eloped at age fifty with the ranch foreman, Dave Lamb and spent a fortune traveling to Europe to collect antiques.

Charlie Bair—Conductor

And here lived Alberta, with her hats, her antiques, her deer hunting escapades, her endowments to Montana theaters, hospitals and charities across the state, her cigarettes, her vodka, her stories and her love. Alberta, in short, was a woman who was as successful and colorful and opinionated as her father before her.

The house is unlike anything I had seen in

The Pine Room, a family room of Western memories

this land of farms and ranches—the mixture of Western art and Native American artifacts, side by side with impressionist paintings, Charles III and Louis XV furniture and Regency English silver. "My daughters have two boxcars full of old used furniture sitting at the siding," Charlie Bair told a county extension agent once in White Sulphur Springs. "But my goodness, they could have gone to Billings and bought new furniture for a whole lot less."

Alberta was quick to credit Marguerite for finding the antiques. "She could just spot it," she said, with a wave of her hand. "We would go into those three and four story buildings—they always kept the good stuff on the other floors—and Sissy would spot a leg under a bunch of other things and find a treasure. Those men would always say they hated to see her come, because she always picked out the best things they had, and took them away."

After Marguerite had made her selection, it was Alberta who did the "dealing." It delighted her to get a good price.

Over the years, the sisters made 20 trips to Europe and New York

The Bairs covered the walls with the colorful beadwork of the Plains Indians

to shop for antiques. One of their favorite places in London was to visit the Wallace Collection at Hertford House where they found

many ideas for their Montana home—the French furniture, crystal chandeliers, silver, Sevres porcelain, snuff bottles, art and armory. At one time they bought a suit of armor for their early Western room and then decided to send it back. For medieval armor they substituted a fabulous Plains Indian collection—more suitable to their Western home and a reminder of the days Bair sheep grazed on the Crow Reservation.

The silver in the home is mostly the work of Paul Storr, who lived in London from 1771 to 1844, was a jeweler, gold-and silversmith to Queen Victoria. The pieces are exquisite, detailed and extremely valuable. His work was bought by the eminent figures of his day. One special set of tureens is on a sideboard in the dining room. Alberta tells the story as she shows the dining room.

"We had just gotten into London and decided to take a walk down Bond Street. We saw a shop across the street that looked like they had Paul Storr silver in the window. It was getting late, but we rushed across the street just as they were pulling down the shutters. We rapped on the door, and the gentleman said they were closing. I explained that we had seen the window from across the street and just wanted to be sure it was Paul Storr. He said that anyone who could tell Paul Storr from across the street could surely come in. He had just been putting the silver in the window.

"He told us the silver was from the collection of Lord Melville—a young man who, when he found himself in need of money, would go to one of their five country homes and bring some silver to London to sell.

"The proprietor really didn't like to take the family treasures to sell, but they were part of the young man's heritage, so he guessed he could sell them if he wanted.

"There were four covered dishes we wanted, so we told him we would come back in the morning.

Silver and urns in the Dining Room—the "Melville Silver"

"Then at dinner that evening, we saw him come into the dining room. I said to Sissy we'd never be able to get him down on the price after he saw us at this expensive hotel. However, we did go back and bought the four silver pieces. Best deal we ever made."

On the advice of one of the antique dealers, they moved off Park Lane to a less expensive hotel.

On the dining room table is more Storr silver—two wine coolers that have a family crest and the mark of the Order of the Garter—an elite order of chivalry, the oldest national order of knighthood in England. The sisters bought these at an auction in New York, and after paying for them were approached by an Englishman who wanted to buy them, offering to pay $5,000 more than the Bairs paid. He explained that he had been sent by an English family to buy them, but because of fog his plane had to land in Boston and he had to come by train which made him late for the auction. The ladies were sorry later that they hadn't agreed to the sale.

Charlie Bair and Charlie Russell—The Bairs were close friends as the families enjoyed the winter months in California

"It was probably the family that originally had them, and we should have let them go," said Alberta.

It was about 1965 the girls felt that the house was ready. They had placed their antiques and art in a professional manner and then in each of the bedrooms placed a picture of a family member, a statement that although the house was a museum, it was still the family home of the Bairs.

The Pine Room - Family Memories

A tour with Alberta started in the Pine Room, a pleasant family room with red leather couch and chair and chintz settees flank-

ing the grey fireplace with red grouting. The walls are covered with art and Indian artifacts. When the guest house was moved to join the main house, the ladies ordered knotty pine from California for the interior walls and ceiling—waiting two years for it to come in the war time years. When some of the men from the ranch came in to see the new room, one of them said he felt 'real bad' that they had waited so long for the pine and then got some with all those knots.

There are family memories—pictures of Charlie Bair and Charlie Russell on the mantel taken by Edward Curtis in California. Alberta had complained to Curtis that their father would never sit for a picture for them. Curtis told her, "You get your Dad and Charlie Russell down to my studio and I'll get their picture without them even knowing it."

There are Masonic aprons on the wall belonging to Dave and Charlie, some framed letters and a picture of the train load of wool he had shipped to Boston. The west wall is covered with the beaded artifacts from the Crow Reservation days. Alberta would point out the porcupine quills used for beading on some pieces and the saddle decoration using an old military blanket. She was also pleased

This child's vest was a gift to Alberta from Plenty Coups. Alberta reported that she wore it with a sombrero from Mexico that her father brought her

with the shield.

"The shield and the war bonnet are the last two things with which the warrior parts."

A small beaded vest is pointed out by Alberta as being a gift from Plenty Coups when she was a child.

"I wore that forever, no matter how hot it got, with a Mexican sombrero Dad brought to me."

She also had a small tepee in the corner that the Crow chief had given her.

Child's teepee—also a gift to Alberta from Plenty Coups

Known by several U.S. presidents and foreign leaders, Plenty Coups led his people from the 'Buffalo Days' of the late nineteenth century into the early twentieth century and was an accomplished statesman and ambassador. Charlie Bair was one of his honorary pallbearers.

There is a pair of beaded moccasins on the mantle as well.

"These are burial moccasins. See, they are beaded on the bottoms so you can wear these on the clouds." One of the Sotheby people said they were probably made "for the trade" about 1890-1920 when the Indians were finding ways to make money.

A framed letter on the mantel from the French Ambassador recalls another Charlie Bair story.

"Dad was asked to show the French Ambassador something of the Indian life," said Alberta, "and he tried to make a good show of it."

Ambassador and Mrs. Jean Jessarand arrived in Billings for a one-day stopover en route from San Francisco to Washington and were to be shown something of the country and its resources and industries. The program called for a party consisting of the Jesserands, Mr. and Mrs. C.M. Bair, Mrs. Reynolds, Fred H. Hathhorn and Edward S. Curtis to go by car to the shearing pens at Kaiser where Bair's sheep were being sheared. They were then to go to Pryor so that the guests could learn something about the Indians. After lunching at the Donovan Ranch and watching the shearing operation, the group continued to Pryor, unaware that Bair had arranged a rather special reception.

Two hundred Indians in full war paint and regalia, filling the air with war whoops and gun fire, descended upon the cars and surrounded them. As the Indians circled the cars—a tremendous show!—Bair beamed with satisfaction and turned to accept the reactions of his guests, only to find them panic-stricken on the floor of the car. They recovered enough to enjoy the hospitality of the tribe.

On the south wall is gun cabinet, with Bair's guns, etched and carved. There also, is Alberta's gun and a gun given to her by friend Grace Stone Coates, who also lived in Martinsdale, who had published a novel, *Black Cherries*, with Alfred A. Knopf and had two collections of poetry, *Mead and Mangel-Wurzel* and *Portulacas in the Wheat* published by Caxton Printers of Idaho.

As cozy as the Pine Room was, the Bair family spent much of their time in the red and yellow kitchen of the forties. A large Monarch wood range kept the room warm in the cool evenings. Mrs. Bair had a wooden arm chair with deep cushions that she used.

Later, it would be where Marguerite would sit. When Alberta was alone, she spent her time there as well. She had her television in the kitchen, she used the counter tops for "filing" papers and usually kept her purse in the flour drawer or the dishwasher. Alberta jokingly referred to the kitchen as her "reception room."

When a tour was occurring, Dave and Marguerite would wait in the Pine Room as Alberta conducted the tour, starting with the Office but first, lighting a cigarette. She had a habit of flicking the ashes into her left hand until she reached a fireplace. She had lovely hands, always polished with bright red.

There was a fireplace in the Office with a watercolor by Russell above and a rifle "supposedly used" by Daniel Boone at one time.

All of the five fireplaces in the house have different but interesting fireplace accessories—an enlightening tour of antiques in itself.

On the west wall a large window frames a flowering crab tree—a beautiful picture in the spring. There are two clocks in the room—one a Louis XIV Boulle-work bracket clock, the other a desk clock on the Louis XV desk. The clock was made by George Prior of London, probably for the Turkish market with its domed

French Bracket Clock

top and "eastern numerals." Near the clock is a picture of the dude rancher, Court Durand, with two elk hitched to a wagon.

"That's the team Court Durand trained to use in parades to promote his dude ranch." Alberta smiles and tells about the dude ranch in the 20s and 30s that featured buffalo diving off a ramp into a pond as entertainment. If the guests were so inclined, they could jump in the pond as well, grab the animals' fur and be pulled out of the pond by swimming bison.

"One lady came from the East and brought her fancy gowns to enjoy this resort," she said. "Poor thing, she was horrified to find a big log lodge with very primitive conditions. She packed her trunk and moved in with us until she could get a train back home."

Along with several great Northwestern Indian baskets, were five folios of Curtis pictures—also of Northwestern Indians.

"Dad bought those from Curtis one time when he needed money. I think he paid about $5,000 for them."

Curtis spent several months at the Crow Reservation in 1907 and then in 1919 moved his studio from Seattle to the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles., where he met and renewed friendships with Bair and the other westerners gathered there.

Alberta pointed out two volumes of Curtis' *The North American Indian*, part of a twenty-volume project of narrative text and photogravure images that Curtis envisioned when he traveled in 1890 with George Bird Grinnell to photograph a Blackfeet Sun Dance ceremony. He published the first volume in 1907 with a foreword by Theodore Roosevelt, financed in part by J.P. Morgan. By 1912 he had completed eight volumes, and it took him until 1930 to complete the ambitious project. By that time, the effort had cost Curtis his marriage and his health. Alberta and Marguerite at one time gave Curtis prints to several of their close friends.

A large picture entitled *A Wooded Landscape with Farm and*

A Wooded Landscape with Farm and Haywain *by J.F. Herrin, Sr., and George Cole*

Haywain by J.F. Herrin, Sr., and George Cole, a pastoral of which Marguerite was especially fond is one the east wall. The two early nineteenth-century artists combined their unique talents in this painting: Cole painted the landscape; Herring painted the animals.

The sisters had discussed paying $3,100 for it at the Needham Antiques in New York, but came home without buying it. Marguerite, however, had fallen love with this Cole-Herring painting and decided she had to have it. She sent Needham Antiques a check for $2,300 to see if they would accept the price. The dealer returned

Place de la Republique *by Edward Cortes*

the check with a note pointing out that "…this painting cost us $2,235.00 landed from England, and happens to be an exceptionally fine example. Therefore, we feel we asked you a very small profit on a picture of this quality. Also, you refer to it as being too large for a majority of Homes—fortunately there are many fine homes in the East where we sell Paintings much larger than this one. As stated in our letter of April 3rd, the best price is $3,100."

Marguerite sent another check for $3,100 immediately.

"She wanted that picture," Alberta said, "and she was going to have it."

On either side of the large picture are two by Edward Cortes, a French painter who was famous for his use of light.

"We were at the Grand Hotel in Paris," Alberta informs us, "and they had these paintings of Paris. Another guest suggested we buy some. He said he was there to buy five for President Johnson. The

artist was old and when he died the pictures would gain in value.

"I asked how old Cortes was, and when he said, 'about seventy-five' I figured we could take a chance on him."

The girls bought only one Cortes picture that trip (1959), but in three subsequent trips bought three more.

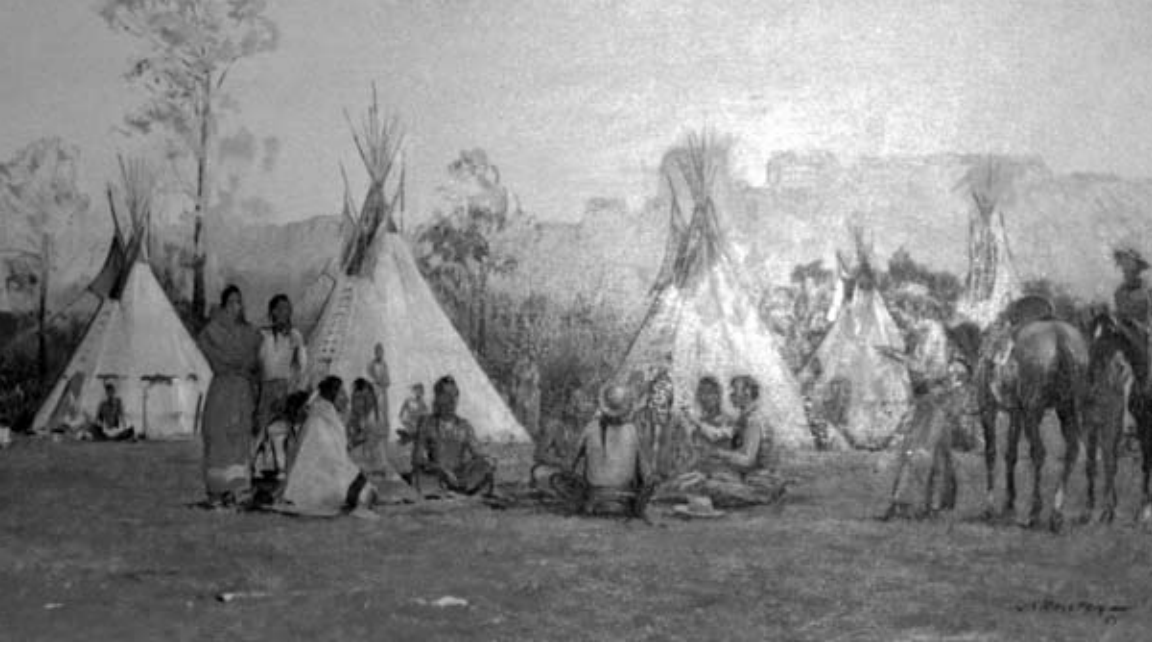
When my husband and I were in London many years ago, we went into an art gallery that had several Cortes' paintings. A very bored gallery owner stood around waiting for us to leave so he could get back to his paper work, but when we said our neighbor had several Cortes paintings, he perked up immediately. He told us that the "firelight paintings" were often copied, so Cortes put a secret signature mark on his work. The gallery owner, a friend, knew of the mark and since the artist's death had traveled the world to authenticate paintings. We never figured out the mark, but it has made an interesting game for the museum docents.

To the right of the wet bar, I can see a wall with Indian artifacts—a pair of leather, beaded pants that belonged to the famous Indian warrior, Chief Rain in the Face, a Hunkpapa Lakota Sioux who fought in the Battle of the Bighorn. Rain in the Face was allegedly responsible for cutting the heart out of Tom Custer, General George Custer's brother but this story has been discredited. Rain in the Face was also credited with killing General George Custer, but Rain in the Face himself later remarked, that there was such a flurry of battle that no one could be sure who fired the fatal shot.

Next is a beautifully decorated red vest that belonged to Buffalo Bill's bartender.

Behind the bar is a large painting of Ken Ralston's, entitled *Pow Wow Days*.

"We sent this back once," says Alberta. "Sissy wanted some red in it." Indeed, one of the Indian men has a brightly-colored blanket with red—the same red as the large, round shag carpet on the



Pow Wow Days *by Ken Ralston*

floor. One of the cowboys has red hair— I imagined Ralston smiled when he added that red to the picture.

On the opposite wall are signed pictures of Presidents and other well-known people that were part of the Bair's history.

In the midst of the European and Indian artifacts is one from the home ranch—a large red, old-fashioned coffee grinder—another touch of the "eclectic."

The Dining Room is Next— a Veritable Storehouse of Silver

The center of the room is dominated by the George III dining table with the Paul Storr wine coolers and the twelve Chippendale side chairs. Sideboards to the east and south are covered with more silver including the Melville set, Mussy's tea service and Alberta's silver baby mug.

There are a number of paintings in the room, including *Portrait*

Sharp picture of apples

of Henriette, Second Daughter of Louis XV, from the school of Jean Marc Nattier, the official portrayer of the royal family and *Portrait of a Gentleman*, but more in keeping with the family history is a painting by Joseph Henry Sharp, *Still Life with Apples*.

Sharp was an artist and friend who painted for a time on the Reservation.

"Dad gave the Sharps a box of apples one year for Christmas and Mr. Sharp painted two pictures. In this one he used Carrie Reynold's butter bowl for this picture and in the other used the box that the apples came in that says 'C.M. Bair' on it. Dad bought both paintings and gave the other one to the Reynolds. I suppose they should have had this one and we have the other, but we never exchanged."

Joseph and Addie Sharp, friends from days on the Crow Reservation

In the hallway leading from the dining room to the formal living room, hangs another picture by Joseph Sharp—a scene of water and brush—entitled *Little Bighorn River.*

"That was Dad's favorite fishing spot in the Pryors," Alberta explains. "Mr. Sharp painted it for him."

Off this hallway is Charlie's room and a stair to the upper floor where the ladies had their bedrooms.

This is no longer recognizable as Charlie Bair's room. Bair's four-poster is gone, replaced with French antiques. The bed was put in the maid's room for a while and then donated to the Old Governor's Mansion in Helena, complete with a popcorn bedspread crocheted by Mary Bair.

The room now has a bright green carpet and French twin beds with gilt wood and caned head and footboard—one the original and the other one made to match. To the south hangs a picture by Dietz Edzard, *Girl with Hatboxes.* The other picture in the room is Edouard Cortes' *Rue Royale Snow Scene.* On the east wall is a Wedgwood plague.

Little Bighorn River *by Joseph H. Sharp*

"Dad brought that for Muzzy from one of his trips."

An Adam desk was to the right of the door—simple in line compared to the French furniture, but a nice contrast.

A Louis XVI day bed is on the east wall. It is in pink with gilt wood. A nearby settee, upholstered in bright floral chintz, is Louis XV style.

"Gloria Vanderbilt was supposed to have the mate to that settee."

Another of the Louis XV commodes is in this room. It is of serpentine outline with a mottled marble top. Alberta and Marguerite kept their linens in this commode. It was fun to be able to go here to find the great linen napkins with their monogrammed "B" for the dinner table. We usually used place mats since it was difficult to find someone to launder the large white tablecloths.

There are more of Mary's painted china and on the commode a picture of Mary.

Charlie's fishing equipment was in the closet, but much of that was taken to the Visitor Center when the museum was opened.

The formal living room is again a mixture of European antiques and western art. To the left as you enter are two Charles Russell paintings: *Roping a Steer* and *The Scouting Party*. Between the two paintings are an illustrated letter from Russell to Frank B Brown of Great Falls and a small water color, *Teepee Landscape*, by Sharp. On the back an inscription reads: *To Alberta—a real hickory chip off the old smoked block! From J.H. Sharp, May 1906.* It was a birthday gift.

When Fred Renner had called on the Bairs in 1952, he thought the picture *Roping a Steer* had been printed in a Scribner magazine. The Bairs were under the impression that none of their pictures had been reproduced, and Renner promised to look up the Scribner date.

"The reason that I haven't written before," he wrote later, "is because after I returned I looked up my Scribner file and found that the painting I had in mind was not yours but a very similar one. They both show two cowboys chasing a steer, the lead puncher has on white angora chaps, and the second rider had a slicker tied behind his saddle that is flying in the wind. However, in the Scribner painting, the cowpuncher is throwing his loop at the steer's horns, rather than at his hind feet.

"The fact that I misinformed you about your painting having appeared in Scribner's has been preying on my mind ever since, especially as I was certain I had seen a published reproduction of your painting some place.

"Today, I had occasion to examine another early publication at the Library of Congress, and found the answer to our mystery. Your painting appears in an article on Russell by a Sumner W. Matteson and was published in the March 3, 1904 issue of 'Leslie's Weekly.'"

(F.G. Renner to Alberta Bair, July 24, 1953)

The picture was also reproduced in 1984 as a cover for the Montana Stockgrowers Association catalog for their Centennial meeting in Miles City. I remember we carried the painting out to the bridge to get the right light for the photographer.

After Russell's death, Nancy Russell wrote to the Bairs because she was putting together a catalog of her husband's work and asked if they would send Russell's pictures for the book. When they wrote explaining that they couldn't get to them because they were stored in the root cellar, Nancy Russell didn't ask them any more. Nancy did, Alberta added, ask her father to persuade Wallis Huidekooper to return Russell's sketch of *Waiting for a Chinook*. This sketch of the starving cattle that depicted the horrific winter-kill of 1886-1887 had launched Charlie Russell's career and it was important to her to have it back in her possession. Huidekooper, however, refused and later donated the sketch to the Montana Stockgrowers Association. It is currently displayed at the Montana State Historical Society.

Alberta gestured toward the large chandelier.

"When we put the crystal chandelier up in the living room, I had Vic Fisher helping. I was so concerned about that heavy weight on the ceiling, that I asked him 'Mr. Fisher, do you think the ceiling is strong enough to hold that much weight?'

"'Of course,' he said, and gave the chandelier a push and swung it back and forth. I just about died. All those crystals were banging against each other, but none were broken. We just went through Hades getting these things."

A picture of Dwight and Mamie Eisenhower is on a small French chest—perhaps an escapee from the panel of pictures in the Office. A pair of Louis XV marquetry inlaid commodes from the collection of the Bourbon Family are on either side of a bow window in

One of the two Russell's that hang in the living room, Roping a Steer, *painted in 1903*

the south. Alberta points out a large Chinese porcelain punch bowl on one of the chests.

"That was my dear Muzzy's." Another smaller punch bowl has been cracked and restored and there are more fine Chinese porcelain pieces that were also from Mrs. Bair's collection.

In the bay window is a George II carved mahogany tripod tea table with a pie crust top. Alberta points out the birdcage under the top and the claw-and-ball feet. There is a similar one in the White Bedroom.

"Kinda interesting, I think."

The west wall has bookcases, the fireplace and the wonderful Wedgwood shells that form the backdrop for the two Sevres perfume burners that came from the Dutch palace of Het Lo. One conservator who helped with some conservation work, looked at the urns and remarked, "The museum world has been wondering what happened to these. Wait until I tell them they are in a ranch house in Montana."

The urns are placed in Wedgwood shells in the wall.

"When Oliver was putting those in for us, he said they wouldn't fit and he was going to saw the back off.

"I said take the wall out first, we waited too long to get those. You know it was just terrible getting things done. Sissy would get too nervous. She would just go to the barn and wait until things were done."

There are other wonderful things in this room and when listed—the couch, two Adam gilt chairs, a George III style mahogany wing, arm chair, a George III painted and inlaid Satinwood Pembroke table, a tall clock, a Regency convex mirror, a pair of Regency inlaid mahogany game tables, another George III side chair, a satinwood secretariat bookcase and two fireplace stools—plus all the accent pieces would seem to appear cluttered and museum-like. However, it is warm and welcoming as the living room of the Bair home.

Alberta and Marguerite have chosen their baby pictures for the family pictures for this room.

On the floor is a white wool rug, specially made with a fringe.

"Those are called pig-tails. Really, that is what they call them," explained Alberta.

The marble for the fireplace is green Italian marble.

"We had that marble shipped from Italy. One shipment was broken and they had to send another. They pack that in lime to send. Isn't that interesting? We have this same marble in the White Bedroom fireplace."

The two stools in front of the fireplace were purchased in 1969 from a firm in New York. A letter from them to the girls reveals Alberta's good bargaining ploys.

"Hope you had a good trip home, the weather here has been superb and it is too bad you had to go back so soon.

"We sharpened our pencils with regard to the price of the pair of walnut stools. The last price we quoted was $2,800.00; then I understand young Van der Straeten quoted you $2,500; the final price we arrived at is $2,350.00 which is really a very fair reduction. The retail price is $3,500.00 as you know.

"P.S. You might get them for $2200 if you pay the shipping and packing—This is strictly between us! Try it and see."

When the girls remodeled this room in the sixties, they put in the large French chandelier and moved the smaller, existing one to the White Bathroom.

Alberta's Room

The bedroom designated as Alberta's is dominated by a large four poster bed, an American piece said to be the work of Samuel McIntire about 1820. It is described by appraisers as having mahogany and bird's eye maple inlay with carved foot posts with pendant acanthus leaves and bulbous reeding. The rug is an Isphahan rug from Persia.

Several chests are in the room, the largest being a George III mahogany ivory inlaid chest on chest. Two regular chests are also George III and date back to around 1770. Alberta points out the eagle and feather on the drawer pulls.

Over one chest is a Louis XVI gilt gessoed mirror, either Italian or French. A shaving mirror sits on a knee-hole desk near the windows.

To the right of the bed a table has a silver pumpkin shaped Sheffield hot water pot with burner, and several cups and saucers.

Alberta takes our attention to two pictures on the wall.

"This is Cornelia Otis Skinner that I went to school with in Bryn

Mawr. And the other picture is of Robert and Margaret Butler."

Margaret was Alberta's friend in Portland when the two were both tutored for school and music, and went to boarding school together.

Butler was an ambassador to Cuba and to Australia. Alberta was invited to visit them in Cuba but never made it. She did, however visit them in Michigan where she attended the christening of a ship during the war. The Butlers had a ship building concern and built liberty ships during the war.

Cornelia Otis Skinner was the daughter of a famous actor, Otis Skinner. Cornelia herself was a well known actress and author, starring in many plays and writing several. She also authored several books, the most lasting *Our Hearts were Young and Gay* with Emily Kimbrough.

"We went to one of the plays one time when we were in New York, and got back stage briefly. It was kind of fun, but there wasn't much time to visit."

On one of the chests is a picture of Charlie Bair, looking young and dapper in his 1890 photograph with his handlebar mustache, his tailored Great Northern conductor's uniform, his arm resting on a column as he stares, unblinking, into the camera.

There is a crazy quilt on the bed, one of two made for the girls by their aunt. Mary's sister who lived in Washington at the time the Bairs were in Martinsdale.

The drawers and closet are full of old clothes of the Bair ladies, and if it is just a few of us, we take time to open some of the drawers to see the clothes and hats. Alberta had a chiffon dress with shoulder straps that billowed down to calf-length and then had pantaloons in grey lace beneath the skirt.

"That dress," Alberta reminisces, "was a copy of a famous dancer of the time—I'll think of her name in a minute—and was a

debutante frock I wore in Los Angeles. It cost $400 to make."

The dancer was Irene Castle. She and her husband Vernon toured the country dancing and giving lessons and appearing in several movies.

Irene Castle in the dress that was copied for Alberta

There were other interesting clothes from many years. One that was her mother's—Victorian style—had a waist so tiny that when it was exhibited a special mannequin was needed to be small enough. What was left of Charlie's beautifully tailored formal wear and suits were hanging in the closet in Marguerite's room.

We go through a bathroom that opens into Marguerite's room.

Marguerite's Bedroom

Perhaps the most outstanding feature of Marguerite's room is the Adam bed. The English four-poster is painted all over with ribbon and floral garlands and surmounted by a gently bowed Neo-Classical tester. The bed was made in about 1780.

"We had to have the mattress made specially to fit the bed. The

Adam Bed—Painted Satinwood Tester Four Poster Bed, about 1780

nicest man came out from the Simmons Company and measured for it."

The valance around the top of the bed is a lovely striped and flowered French silk.

"The bedspread was gone, so we had the material woven in France to have the bedspread made to match the valance."

There are two Adam side chairs in the room, delicately painted with floral garlands and portrait ovals, about the same vintage as

Louis XV gilt-metal-mounted and marquetry inlaid commode signed J. Birckle

the bed. Many of the furnishings of this bedroom are of the late 1700s, with accents from the mid to late 1800s.

Another Louis XV commode dominates the west wall with a beautiful Chippendale mirror over it. The commode has a serpentine front with a marble top. There are two long drawers over three short drawers with dyed and fancy veneer parquetry floral sprays. The pulls, escutcheons, sabots and appliqués are in rococo ormolu. This is a signed piece by J. Bircle, France, about 1740.

Alberta points out a picture of her father on the commode and then points to a very elaborate small frame with Raphael's "Madonna della Sedia."

"My father brought that to my Muzzy from Chicago. Have you ever seen a prettier thing?"

A Georgian chest is on the east wall and a bookcase and sofa on the south. The sofa is a Victorian mahogany frame three seat sofa. It has a serpentine shaped seat and foot rail—could possibly be from the Portland home—about 1850 vintage.

The bookcase is George III, late nineteenth century with a four drawer slant front secretary. There are French dishes instead of books in the case.

As in the other rooms there are "accents" and lamps. The lamps throughout the house are usually converted French oil lamps, although the bed lamp here is a clear colorless lead glass luster. It is on the bedside table, an oval Pembroke table of mahogany with satinwood veneer.

From Marguerite's bedroom Alberta takes us through a hallway to the White Bedroom, but first stopping at the White Bathroom.

This bathroom is an elegant room with white carpeting and a classical Grecian theme. The two basins have gold images of Greek scenes and gold fixtures with the swan motif. The wallpaper and curtains were made to match the scenes on the basins. There is

The classical Grecian theme of the White Bathroom

Norwegian marble on the counter top. The girls used the firm of Sherle Wagner of New York for their bathroom furnishings.

A wicker chair is in the corner, decoratively hiding a working toilet. The shower is to the north and east corner and a square tub to the south and east. A long "fainting couch" and towel rack completes the furnishings.

One can't help but notice the elegant crystal chandelier that came from the living room.

There is another grandfather clock in the hallway as we leave the bathroom.

"There are gold hands on that clock," Alberta points out. "Kinda interesting."

When Barbara Roberts came to do preservation work on the furniture, she suggested that the clock be moved and attached to a wall to avoid damage in the event of an earthquake. It was moved then into Dad's room.

The White Bedroom

As you enter the White Bedroom you are struck by the charm and hominess of a room full of antiques. Just to the left of entering the room, there are French doors leading to the yard where one of Alberta's rose bushes has grown to a height of eight feet. These doors became the exit of the house tour when the museum was established.

One of the most outstanding features in the room is the large Chinese Chippendale mirror on the west wall with its pagoda top, mythical bird and bells. It has its original gilt.

"That was one of the first things we bought years ago," remarked Alberta.

"I think we paid about $5,000 for it and I thought that was way too much. Then when we went back a few years later, the dealer wanted to buy it back. He said they should never have let it get away, and they would pay us in the six figures. Of course, that just made us want to keep it more."

The appraisers later didn't give the mirror that high a value.

Beneath the mirror is another Louis XV commode, signed by John Babtiste Hedouin. It has the usual marble top, the serpentine front and the wonderful decoration of the ormolu bale pulls and escutcheons. A much smaller commode by the north door has inlays of floral arrangements and sprays in fancy and dyed wood veneers.

"These smaller commodes are in great demand anymore," said Alberta. "People are moving into smaller apartments on Fifth Avenue and need smaller furniture."

Other interesting pieces of furniture include a Louis XV desk of rosewood and kingwood, a tripod table and several chairs and a settee. The twin four-poster beds are reproductions.

A French bracket clock shares some wall space with an Italian book case. Venetian scenes decorate the bookcase of grey-green color.

The White Bedroom—furniture is mostly Louis XV and Louis XVI

"We were on the way home and stopped in New York and they were just unpacking this and sister said she was going to have that. It had come from Cuba. I think the couple were divorcing and shipped their furniture to New York to sell."

"That gold chair is from the Wanamaker estate. It's one of the oldest pieces in the house. Look at those claw and ball feet."

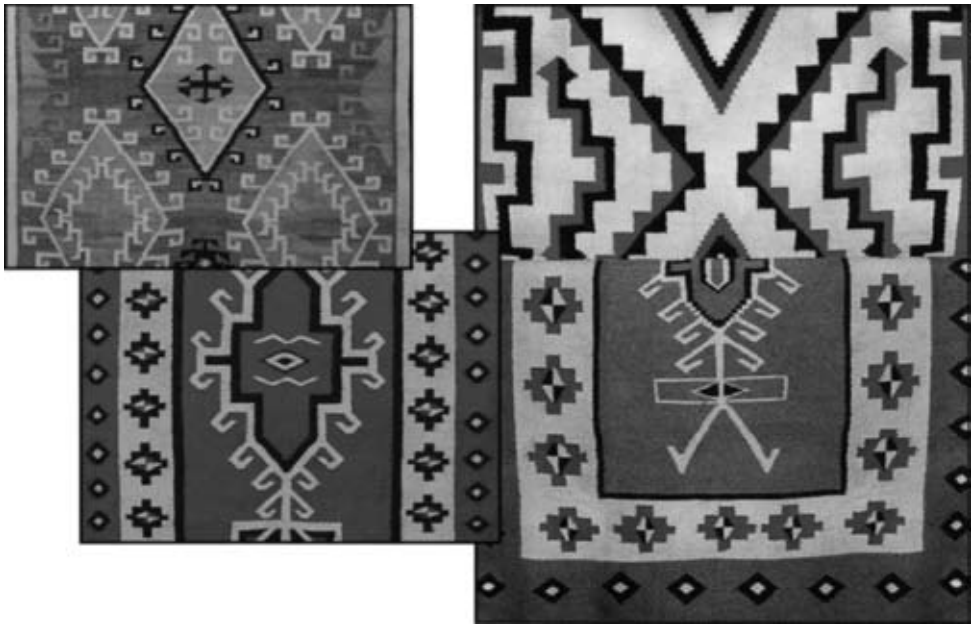
Near that was an old cellaret. It has an octagonal hinged top over a tapered body. The interior is lined with metal to hold ice for cooling.

There is more interesting furniture, but the decorations are all intriguing, placed so carefully by Marguerite. A large part of the snuff bottle collection is in the book case behind the desk, along with some fine pieces of Japanese porcelain and books—including one by Will James, a friend of the family. When the book came out,

Muzzy's Egret Hat

James sent 25 to Charlie Bair to distribute to friends in Billings.

On the mantle over the fireplace are two Paul Storr silver coolers with flowers in them and two porcelain fruit coolers. *Place de la Republique*, the first Edward Cortes painting the girls bought is over the mantle. Muzzy's painted china share a table with a massive



Navajo rugs made between 1890 and 1910

silver urn made by a husband and wife team—Ames and Barnard, about 1824.

A white carpet underneath and a beautiful Louis XV cut-glass and gilt-bronze chandelier enclose the furnishings.

Depending on the people looking at the house, we usually stopped here with a hat style show. The hats stored in the cupboard were mostly Muzzy's and we had great fun trying the hats and reminiscing. Of the egret hat, a lovely display of white plumes, she remarked, "She paid $150 for that hat. But isn't it a beauty?"

Alberta often told the price of the antiques, explaining, "I don't tell you the price to impress anyone, I just think it is interesting to know the cost of these things."

Needless to say, Alberta's extra information on the antiques and how they acquired them made the tour of the house very special.

Conductor Charlie Bair, as he arrived in Billings

CHAPTER TWO

The Iron Fist and the Velvet Glove: Charles and Mary Bair

1883-1943

From Tent Town to a Ranch in Lavina

THE STORY OF THE BAIR DYNASTY in Montana began one day in 1883, when the Great Northern Railway pulled into Billings, Montana. The twenty-six year-old conductor—originally from Paris, Ohio—held open the door of the railcar and, with a practiced turn, stepped off the train. Slight, handsome with a ready smile, and a handlebar mustache trimmed and waxed, Charlie Bair had been a conductor for the Northern Pacific Railway for four years.

Charlie Bair was heading west in the late 1870s with the railroad. The Northern Pacific Railway advanced out of Bismarck, Dakota Territory in 1879. By 1881, crews were working along the

Street view, Billings, Montana 1883 by photographer F. Jay Haynes

Yellowstone River in western Montana Territory. In September, 1883, the Northern Pacific Railway celebrated the connection of its east-west, transcontinental routes with a golden spike ceremony near Gold Creek.

The Billings that Bair saw was partially a tent town. The streets were muddy, teams pulled wagons. There were seventy tent shelters and eighty-one houses. The original town of Coulson was two miles away and had anticipated the train coming there. However, the Northern Pacific refused to pay the exorbitant land prices and located a new town at the east end of the Clark's Fork Bottom because at that point, there were two sections (deeded by the government to the railroad) that lay side by side instead of cornering. The new city was named Billings for Frederick Billings, the former president of the Northern Pacific Railroad.

Bair's early days as a conductor on the railroad are the stuff of

many stories. The sixty-mile trip from Livingston to Gardiner, for example, was usually on time, but the return trip depended on how well the fish were biting in Yankee Jim Canyon on the Yellowstone River. When bearings in the wheels overheated, they jammed and kept the wheel from rotating, a situation called a "hot box." Hot boxes frequently occurred on the return trip and it was necessary to stop the train. Bair, the train crew, and the passengers went fishing while the wheels cooled. When the train arrived in Livingston, Bair took the fish he caught to his favorite restaurant to eat—and to show the other fishermen in town just what he'd caught. Bair was competitive in business and pleasure.

In the 1889s, Montana was still sparsely populated and trains passed by many lone ranches and homesteads, where small children or farmers stood by the tracks and waved. Charlie, as the conductor, often waved and threw a piece of candy or small gift to the solitary figures. Years later, in California, a young man came up to Bair and told him. "You don't know me, Mr. Bair, but this red-handled knife you threw off the train for me on Christmas Day twenty years ago still recalls the pleasant memories of my childhood."

Bair was known for letting locals ride the trains for free if they couldn't pay or, on shorter runs, he would fill the cars with children. Occasionally, the railway complained about Bair's largesse but most of the time, the Northern Pacific Railway looked the other way. The train was going anyway, Bair explained, and the seats were empty.

Ticket stations were often closed, so riders paid for their trip when they got on the train. According to local legend, Bair threw the money to the ceiling, declaring that what stuck to the ceiling was the company's and what fell to the floor was his. It should be noted that this story was attributed to all railroad conductors, but it stuck to the larger-than-life Charlie Bair.

Headquarters Hotel (Billings Depot) and NPRR engine, 1883 by photographer F. Jay Haynes

In the early 70s, a young reporter from Missoula came to the Northern Hotel in Billings to meet the Bair sisters. He waited in the hotel lobby until the girls walked in, then jumped up to introduce himself. He proceeded to ask the Bair sisters if Bair had really thrown the fares to the ceiling; the two women drew themselves up. "Young man," Alberta said, pointing a finger at him. "You are talking about *our* father!"

Bair's time on the railroad was also the beginning of his banking days: he noticed that many of the railroad workers returned to town too late to cash their checks at the banks. Ever the entrepreneur, he started a check cashing service, charging a two percent fee and carrying a gun to protect his investment.

He became involved with regular banking in 1891 when both he and Peter Larson were listed as directors the Yellowstone National Bank in Billings. Bair's friend Albert Babcock was the president.

It was Babcock that Bair had gone to, to help finance the Lavina Ranch. Bair served as a director and stockholder of the bank through various name changes until his death in 1943, a term of almost fifty years. The bank became the Midland Bank in 1923, and then in 1929, it became part of a holding company that put together banks in Billings, Great Falls, Missoula, Butte, Helena and Miles City. The First National Bank of Minneapolis and the First National Bank of St. Paul and banks in Minnesota and North Dakota were also a part of the merger.

When the merger went through in 1929, Bair commented:

> In the old days banking was more of a personal matter. A fellow patronized this or that early day banker because in most cases he knew him personally and knew it was a 100 per cent safe place to leave his money. To a large extent that condition has passed away. Nowadays we patronize the organization whose financial statement indicates its business acumen and strength. It was natural for the old style to die out.

Alberta remembered his loyalty to the bank when there was a question of a run on the bank. "Dad would go out and stand in front of the bank every day, and just smoke his cigar and visit with people. He would assure all the people who came to the bank that their money was safe—and he'd tell them that he was leaving his money in. We were staying at the Northern Hotel and when he would come back in the evening, he would be 'pea-green' from the cigar smoke."

Charlie was working out of Helena when he went back to Michigan to marry eighteen-year-old Mary Jacobs, a beautiful, dark-haired young woman with soft brown eyes and a great sense of humor that would serve her well on the Montana frontier. Mar-

ried on Christmas Eve, 1886, in Chicago, Illinois, the two of them moved to Helena, Montana, to set up housekeeping. Mary was careful with money and passed that attribute on to her daughters.

"My mother was an orphan and when she met my father in Chicago to be married she had a very large trunk with hardly anything in it," Marguerite told me one afternoon as we looked at a picture of her mother. "She said she had done it to give a better impression."

Mary, or "Muzzy" as she was known to her family, and Charles set up housekeeping at 6 Benton Street in Helena, Montana, two blocks off Last Chance Gulch in 1887. The next year, they moved in with Peter and Margaret Larson. Bair had been friends with the railroad contractor since his arrival in Montana.

Larson had come from Denmark in 1868 and in less than ten years, he owned a six-mule team and was freighting in North Dakota. As the Northern Pacific headed west, he became the most important railroad contractor in the country. Like Charlie Bair, he invested in many other enterprises as the railroad pushed west to the Pacific. He bought mines, invested in banks, breweries, flour mills, cattle and timber.

In 1888, Larson moved his headquarters from Billings to Helena, and he and his wife Margaret moved into a house at 812 North Jackson, a two-story frame house built close to the street with elaborate lattice-work trim on the eaves and on the front of the veranda, along with the characteristic low windows of the period.

The Larsons asked the Bairs to move in with them. It was a comfortable arrangement for both families. When Mary Bair became pregnant, Charlie didn't like leaving her alone when he was on the road. Larson, too, was away a lot, leaving Margaret alone. The Larsons and the Bairs soon moved to a larger home at 616 N. Ewing where Marguerite (for Margaret Larson) was born on July 1, 1889.

Larson home in Helena where Marguerite was born

When Alberta and I made a trip to Helena a number of years ago, the houses were still standing. Alberta pointed out the room with the balcony as the birthplace of Marguerite.

Helena was an exciting place in the late nineteenth century. There were more millionaires per capita than anywhere else in the country. Anyone who was anyone—ranchers, lumber, cattle, railroad and mining barons, built a mansion there. And, after trying to achieve statehood in 1866 and again in 1884, the Montana Territory became a state during the Bair's stay, when it was admitted into the Union on November 8, 1889.

Bair became involved with many of the men who were making history. A member of the Ashlar Masonic Lodge in Billings in 1885 and the Algerian Shrine in Helena in 1888, Bair knew such men as A.B. Cook, a prominent rancher and early explorer of Yellowstone

Park; Judge Hyman Knowles, B. Platt Carpenter, Territorial Governor in 1885; Cornelius Hedges, editorial writer for the *Helena Daily Herald*, U.D. District Attorney for Montana and probate judge for Lewis and Clark County; T.H. Kleinschmidt, a community leader and mayor of Helena three times and Thomas H. Carter, elected as a Republican Delegate to the Fifty-first Congress in 1889.

In Helena, Bair learned about the importance of business and the use of political connections, and carried this interest as he climbed up the economic ladder. He wielded his political power by supporting political candidates and working behind the scenes. He never ran for public office, but served as a delegate to the Chicago Republican Convention in 1908.

While the Bairs lived in Helena from 1887 to 1891, Charlie not only continued his railroad runs but put in for extra trips if a worker were sick or had quit. He painted houses and mowed lawns, anything he could think of to make money to save for buying land. He had picked out a spot of ground along the Musselshell River and as early as 1884, filing a claim for 320 acres of desert land under the Desert Land Act. Lavina, named by an early settler for the daughter of a housekeeper, began as a trading post and stage station between Billings and Lewistown. In 1888, Bair paid $3,000 ($18.75 an acre) for 160 acres about a mile south of Lavina and two years later, bought another 5,540. His brother Alvin came to Montana in 1889 and invested in the Lavina property with him. Alvin worked on the railroad out of Great Falls and helped on the Lavina ranch until he returned to Ohio in 1913.

In 1891, the Bairs moved to Lavina.

Winters blew cold across the pine hills and the grasslands of the Musselshell Valley, but Charlie took care of stock and stockmen alike. A band of cowboys out looking for stray stock were caught in a blizzard near the Bair ranch, and Charlie put them up and

fed them until the storm subsided. Years later, at the Governor's Mansion, Governor Roy Ayers turned to Charlie and thanked him, saying, "Charlie, that was one of the best things you ever did. I was ones of those cowboys."

"My mother was a wonderful person," Marguerite said of the Lavina ranch days. "There were no modern conveniences. My mother came out in the kitchen that had a dirt roof and below the roof, above the stove; [she] saw a huge rattlesnake."

One set of guests did annoy Mary. "She cooked for my Father and the men with not ever complaining, but when the family of eleven stayed weeks contemplating whether to buy the ranch which my Father was anxious to sell, she did complain because my Father never told her they were there for that reason," Marguerite said with a smile. "Then my Father came in whistling, bringing in the wood. As she had never heard him whistle, she suspected something had happened. The ranch was sold, lock stock and barrel, even to my beautiful baby carriage my Father had sent from Chicago and that came to Lavina on the state driven by Bob Evans who drove six horses."

Billings and Klondike Gold Nuggets

After he sold the Lavina property, Charlie Bair and his family moved to Billings in 1893, a booming town with street lights, running water, brick schoolhouses, an opera house and the splendid Grand Hotel—far different from the town Charlie Bair had come to ten years earlier. The Yegen Brothers store was valued as a million-dollar concern, where one could buy anything. In 1898, the first hospital, Saint Vincent's was built, and the brewery began business in 1900. The Grand Hotel was the best hotel in town

and the Billings Social Club counted the city's leading citizens among its members. Irrigation was coming into the Yellowstone Valley. The town also had a thriving red light district and gambling houses.

Bair bought a two-story brick house on the corner of Broadway and Third Avenue North (306 North Broadway) with a white picket fence. The Methodist Church and parsonage were across the street to the south.

"The Bair House must have occupied at least three lots…it faced east, and there was a small corner porch with a double-seated swing on which four kids could ride," recalled family friend Carolyn Reynolds Riebeth, who first "met" Alberta in the summer of 1899, when Alberta was four and Riebeth was about ten months old.

Carolyn's father, Guil Reynolds, arrived in Billings in 1895, the night before Alberta was born. Charlie met Reynolds at the train and took him to the bank where they spent the night on the couches in the Director's room. As a bachelor, Guil lived with the Bair family. When he married Carrie Brown, the Bairs insisted they both live with them until Carrie became pregnant and they left to have their own home.

The house had three upstairs bedrooms, six rooms on the main floor, a kitchen and a big pantry. The cook, Inga, who had her quarters in the back of the house, also cared for a flock of chickens in the back so the family could have the traditional chicken dinner on Sunday. This flock never varied in size, which prompted Bair to ask after the health of the chickens. It appeared that their neighbor, the Methodist minister, was not having such good luck with his chickens. "Skunks," it seemed, were making off with one or two chickens each week—while not touching the Bair brood. Bair quickly understood what was going on and promised the minister that "skunks" [Inga] wouldn't be making off with any more chickens.

Home in Billings where Alberta was born

"In the back was the carriage house," Riebeth said, "and the barn and quarters for John, the capable fellow who cared for and drove the high-stepping team, as he sat high on the box of the Victoria carriage, clad in regular business suit and Stetson hat."

Bair kept his own team stabled behind the house so that he could ride to the various places where he ran sheep. When he moved to Billings, he had acquired a 500-acre farm to raise hay and leased railroad land, and eventually Indian land to run his sheep. It was cheaper for Bair to lease grazing ground than to own it, especially when the size of his operation fluctuated according to the economy.

Bair always drove at a high clip. A stranger watching Bair come up the street one evening raised the alarm of a "run-a-way" but the

Billings native with him remarked calmly, "No, that's just Charlie Bair going home."

Alberta was born at the brick house in Billings on July 15, 1895. Expecting a boy, Charlie planned to name the baby for his friend and neighbor, Albert Babcock. Although Alberta was not a boy, she was definitely a tomboy, raiding apple orchards with her friend, Melville Moss, and riding the ponies left by the Indians at the Bair house when they came to town. She took off on a pony one day that didn't stop until it reached the stockyards. When Mary went looking for her, people told her that Alberta had gone flying by, flat on the horse's back, hanging on, and hollering, "Help!" The pony stopped at the stockyards and Alberta was rescued.

Her father called her "Toddy" because he said she gave him

Charlie and driver

Melville Moss and Alberta Bair, partners in play

more of a boost than a "Hot Toddy" drink—a concoction of whiskey, honey and hot water.

The Babcocks lived nearby and Mrs. Babcock helped Mary keep an eye on the young explorer, but in the small community, many others helped. When asked who she was, Alberta would reply, "Don't you know who I am? I'm Charlie Bair's little girl."

Charlie had an abiding interest in anything new and innovative. He was excited about the possibility of flight, although he found the car and train comfortable means of transportation. When the Wright brothers began experimenting with flight in the early years of the century Bair and his friend Lee Simonsen of the Padlock Ranch in Wyoming, went to see the flight in Kitty Hawk, North

Carolina. At one time Charlie took a ride in a small plane going over Billings, but decided he preferred ground transportation.

Horse racing was popular around the turn of the century and Bair had race horses he sent around the state, particularly enjoying beating his friends. It was another challenge when cars became popular.

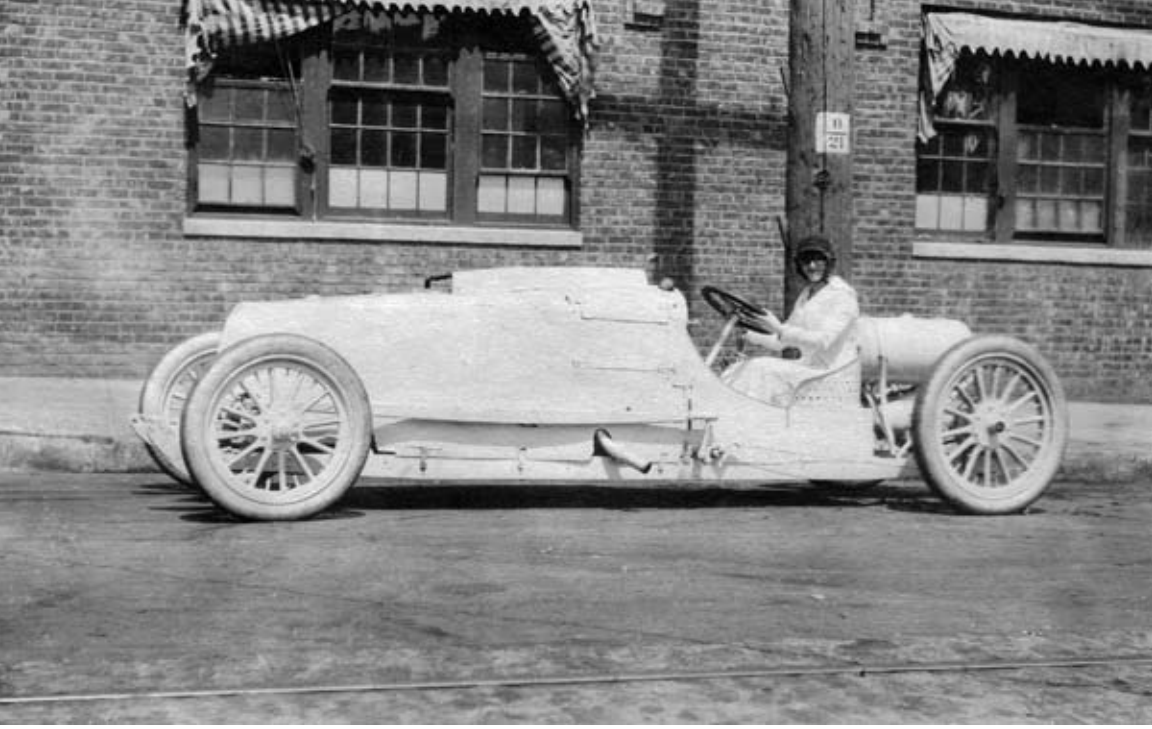
Bair took delivery of a White Steamer in 1906. The company had sent someone to teach him to drive, and Bair got in and put the car in motion. When the car refused the command "Whoa" "Whoa!" he climbed out and turned the car over to the driver. He kept the man in Montana and paid him $150 a month to drive.

The year he got his personal car, Bair bought a race car—the famed Whistling Billy. Bair had heard that his long-time rival in horse racing, mining capitalist William Morris of Butte, was negotiating with an Eastern firm for a racing car. Morris had the edge on Bair with horse racing, so Bair was anxious to beat him at auto racing.

The White Company was not particularly anxious to part with Webb Jay's famous race car, but Bair told them to set a figure on the car and he would pay any amount. Morris appeared at the Chicago showroom shortly after Bair departed and said that if Bair's price was not high enough he would buy it himself. But Bair had beaten him to it.

Bair sent the car to races all over the country. It set a new record in Helena for five miles on a flat circular track at 4.54 minutes, won a post Cup at the October 1907 five-mile world championship race in Kansas City, Missouri; ending its career in a fiery wreck in Los Angeles.

"The front tire on the white racer, Whistling Billy," reported the *Billings Gazette* on December 26, 1908, "Broke on a curve while Gus Seyfried, of San Francisco, was driving it at more than a mile a minute, the car turning three somersaults in the air, a blazing ball of flame…"



Marguerite in "Whistling Billy" the winning race car

No account was given of the driver's condition.

The Bairs were very social in Billings. Visitors were frequently coming and going. Mary often had open houses, and on the Fourth of July and other holidays, the yard was full of friends and guests enjoying a picnic. One family photograph from the early 1900s shows the Bairs and friends on a picnic. Alberta and Marguerite wore flounced dresses with the obligatory lace-up boots and stockings of the period and pointed Mexican hats. Trim and happy-looking in his suit and hat, Bair sits on the blanket while behind him, Mary wears a boater hat and a long dress buttoned to the neck. The manner is relaxed, but the dress is formal.

They were also, as a family, generous, especially during the holidays and enjoyed entertaining in grand style. In December 1925, the *Billings Gazette* reported "700 Children Enjoy Party." According to the story, the Bair family hosted a Christmas party at the Lyric Theater for "seven hundred happy kiddies" which included "Bill-

ings's newsboys, children of the Saint Vincent's hospital school and boys and girls who by reason of circumstances, ordinarily fare less bountifully at Christmas tide than their more fortunate fellows."

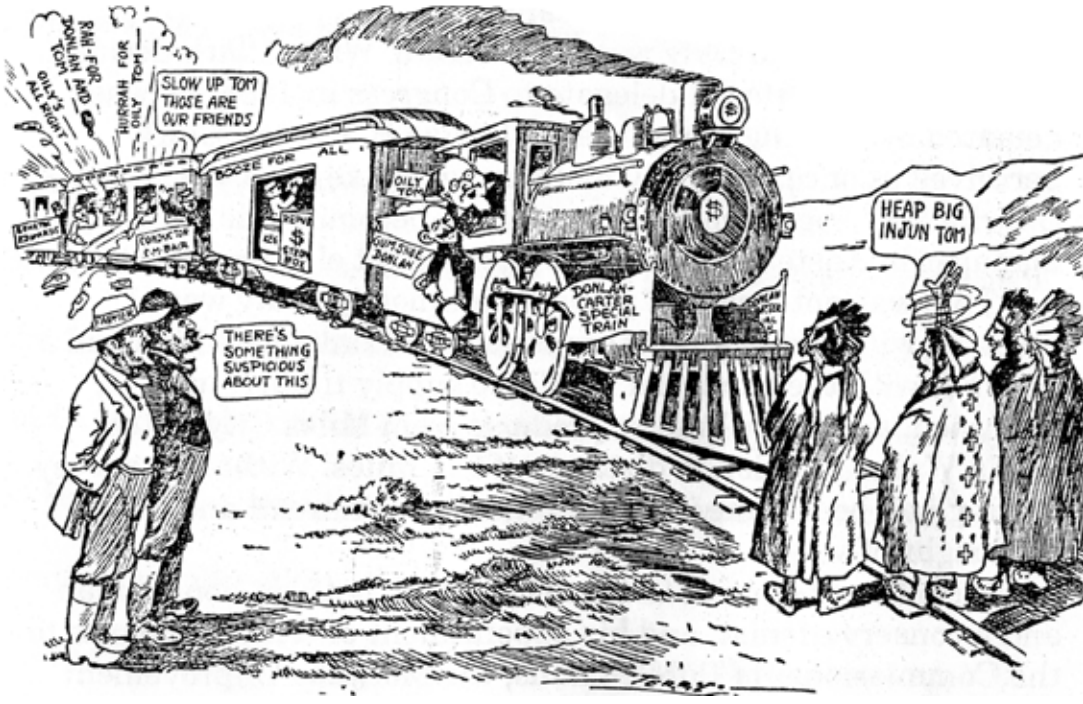
The entertainment included "a Hoot Gibson feature picture and an 'Our Gang' comedy." It was, said the *Billings Gazette*, "a noisy, joyous throng that filled the theater, rattling toys, playing mouth harps and maintaining a din that all but drowned out the music with noise making devices…For them the party added immensely to their enjoyment of Christmas."

In the early 1900s, Charlie Bair and Preston Moss sent their families east for vacation. Preston Boyd or "P.B." Moss was a wealthy Billings banker and owner of the Billings Power Company, who built the red sandstone Moss Mansion in 1903.

Starting at the Palmer House in Chicago, the families toured the Great Lakes and ended up in the Boston area. To the distress of the ladies—who thought them too expensive—the husbands reserved suites for their families. The Moss and Bair children had a great time living in hotels, with permission to go to the dining room and order what they liked.

Recalling the trip, Alberta laughed, citing the chocolate sundaes and crab salad that she and Marguerite, and Culley and Melvina Moss ordered for breakfast while their mothers were still resting in their rooms.

The politics of early Montana were interesting and complex. The first settlers brought their political beliefs from their old homes whether it be New York or Virginia. Politics were also affected by the typography of the state with its mining and timber in the west, dryland farming in the east, and cattle and sheep operations in both. Early on, the Anaconda Copper Company and the Montana Power Company became major players in Montana politics with Anaconda the dominant partner. The three trans-continental rail-



Cartoon from Butte Paper, the Democratic, *in 1908 titled* The Gum Shoe Special. *Edward Donlan lost the Governor's race to Edwin Norris. The Democrats claimed that the Republican machine has "…at its command every Indian Agent, every land officer and every forestry warden… Certain Members of the ring have in a few years become sheep kings through the favoritism of the machine in securing grazing priviledges on the Crow Indian reservation, and another distinquish citizen on the west side of the state, who is already designated as a lumber king is cutting timber upon the Flathead Indian reservation.*

roads were aligned with the "Montana Twins." A further dimension was added by the battle among the copper titans, W.A. Clark, Marcus Daly and F. Augustus Heinze.

Both Clark and Daly were Democrats. When Clark decided to run as the territorial delegate to Congress in 1888, he was defeated by a young Republican, Thomas H. Carter. Charlie Bair began working for Carter, becoming his campaign manager in Eastern Montana.

When the Progressive Movement of 1905 to 1913 reached Montana, the Republican Party was in control with Senator Carter firmly in charge.

Carter came to Montana in 1882, a year before Bair, and estab-

lished himself as a lawyer in Helena. In 1891, he was appointed Commissioner of the General Land Office, and a year later became the chairman of the Republican National Committee. He was elected to the United States Congress in 1895 and served two non-consecutive terms as United States Senator.

Even out of office, with a Republican President in the White House and Montana's representatives being Democratic, Carter was an important figure in Montana politics. He was a frequent guest of the Bairs, often staying at their home in Billings. On Election Day, the party gathered at the Bair house to await results. Oyster stew was traditional for this late supper event.

The Bair home was only a block from the business district and Alberta was politically active early on as a dispenser of window placards to the stores and barber shops. Proprietors were happy to put the placards in the window, but subsequently would take them out. Alberta soon made a habit of going back to check on the windows.

At this time, newspapers were the best instrument for furthering political agendas. In Western Montana, the Amalgamated Copper Mining Company (after 1915, the Anaconda Copper Mining Company) controlled state politics, owning or controlling most of the daily papers. In Eastern Montana, there was a struggle for the control of the *Billings Gazette*.

Senator Carter's support for protective tariffs on wool and beef made him a favorite with Eastern Montana ranchers, but his death in 1911 left a vacuum in Montana's political hierarchy. Carter, Bair, John Edwards of Forsyth, and Thomas Marlow of Helena had formed a formidable political clique that was often at loggerheads with the Joseph M. Dixon faction of the Republican Party. Dixon served in the Senate from 1907-1913 and as Governor from 1920-1924.

Edwards was a state senator, but wanted to run for higher of-

fice. To accomplish this, he sought the support of a daily newspaper. Preston B. Moss, the friend of Bair, controlled the *Billings Gazette* and the *Billings Evening Journal*, both published by the Gazette Printing Company. Moss's interest in the newspapers was largely financial, and when his financial troubles forced his bank into receivership in 1910, Helena businessman Odell W. McConnell bought them for $6001, almost $70,000 less than what Moss thought they were worth. Moss sued and the fight for control of the papers continued behind the scenes until 1914 when the *Gazette* announced new but unnamed management.

By 1916, incorporation papers listed John Edwards as the Gazette Printing Company's principal director and largest stockholder in an ownership group "…that included an assortment of merchants and railroad officials and sheep rancher Charles Bair, whose ten-thousand-dollar investment would be worth millions one day." [Dennis L Swibold, *Copper Chorus*, Montana Historical Society Press, Helena Montana, 2006 P. 149]

Alberta recalled that her father made a loan to Moss at this time, and later renewed it.

William R. Allen, Lieutenant Governor of Montana from 1908 to 1913, and a good political friend of Bair's, told this story:

> I was in Washington and met Mr. Bair who was there on business. We arranged to make the trip to Chicago together. Arriving in Chicago, Charlie remarked to me that he intended to buy a White Steamer automobile that would cost about $5,000 and he would have to cash a check.
>
> I told him I was going to one of the banks and would be glad to have him go with me as I knew that they would be glad to cash a check for him. The president, vice-president and another officer of the bank had visited with me at my

summer home in Montana. I had done lots of business and knew many people in the bank. On our arrival we were taken into the directors' room where we met the bank's officials. I had introduced Mr. Bair to them but they did not pay much attention to him, addressing all their conversation to me. While Bair was a fine looking fellow he was dressed as a typical rancher. Finally, I said to the president, "Mr. Bair would like to cash a check."

"All right. By the way what business are you in, Mr. Bair?"

"The sheep business," Mr. Bair replied.

The president asked, "How many sheep do you have, Mr. Bair?"

Bair replied, "Not so many now. I got scared about the tariff on wool that Wilson is talking about lowering."

This did not answer the banker's question, so he asked again, "How many have you now?"

C.M. said, "About 125,000 head."

The banker said, "For God's sake, how many did you have before you sold?"

"About 300,000."

Needless to say, Allen went on to relate, Bair got his $5,000 and could have had $50,000 if he had wanted it.

Prospectors returning to San Francisco with bags of gold from a gold strike on Bonanza Creek in Yukon Territory set off the Yukon Gold Rush of 1897 to 1900, in which nearly 30,000 prospectors stampeded the area. Charlie Bair, too, got "Klondike Fever, according to a March 19, 1898 *Billings Gazette* article.

Bair and Thomas Linton, a friend and Billings clothing store owner, traveled to Seattle to meet a Louis E. Miller, the inventor of the Klondike thawing machine that thaws the frozen permafrost

with hot water. "Mr. Miller had only recently arrived from the Klondike regions," the *Billings Gazette* article states, "and he says that the machines are a grand success and making good money for their owners." While they were in Seattle, Bair and Linton met with Phil Mercer, a restauranteur from Livingston whose three brothers had just returned from the Klondike, "bringing with them $60,000 in gold dust which they took from a trench less than 120 feet in length."

"Phil was having a rattling, good time," suggested the *Billings Gazette* piece, "He took the Billings gentlemen out to see the sights, treated them to dandelion supper, and threw money to the birds."

"C.M. Bair is going to the Klondike," the *Billings Gazette* reported breathlessly, where "the placer mining is all done in frozen ground, whish is thawed by building fires in the surface with wood that costs $50 a cord. Besides the heavy expenses, it takes about 30 days to thaw the ground to bedrock by this method."

The new thawing machine, however, did the work in a single day, consuming only about one-twentieth the amount of the fuel. In addition to thawing the ground, it also washed the dirt by hydraulic pressure.

"Several Klondike miners who saw the test made in Seattle at once offered Mr. Bair an interest in exceedingly rich claims if he would put such a machine to work on them," the *Gazette* reporter gushed. "Charlie Bair, who was always lucky, has probably struck it richer in this enterprise than any miner in the Klondike. He deserves his good luck, though, for he is a hard worker and a prince of good fellows."

Bair, who knew an opportunity when he saw it, had sold his sheep in May 1898, leaving his family with plenty of money to live on. He took the difficult path over the White Pass at Skagway. Most of the promising claims had been taken, but he bought a claim,

number 51, above Bonanza Creek near Dawson, which proved extremely successful. He also sold ten thawing machines and, by the end of the summer returned home with a substantial purse.

When Charlie left Alaska, he gave his mules and gear to another Montana man who had suffered bad luck and was ready to quit. As he was leaving, a third miner rushed up to ask about boats to Dawson. His wife was ill and he needed to get her to a doctor immediately. The Montana miner said he would take them at once. Bair, the miner, and the sick wife jumped into the proffered boat, with the Montana miner at the helm, and headed down the Klondike River.

When they reached Dawson, the miner profusely thanked the boatman and asked him what he could pay him. The Good Samaritan shrugged it off, saying it wasn't his boat anyway.

After returning to Billings, Bair traveled to Washington D.C. to finalize patents and then sell the thawing machine. Alberta said her father ran into one problem. He and his partners were discussing what to ask for the thawing machine at a late night conference—while the buyers listened to their conversation from an adjoining room.

"Dad laughed about it," Alberta told me. "He didn't often get bested in a deal."

He went to visit his friend and fellow Ohio native, President William S. McKinley. Charlie held out his hand filled with gold nuggets and asked him to pick one. The President said to him, "Charlie, you handle those nuggets just like we handled shelled corn back in Ohio."

The nugget the President selected was the one Bair had hoped he would pick, one flecked with blue quartz and later worn on the Presidential watch chain. Bair had a similar nugget made into a stick pin, which he wore for the rest of his life. When someone asked him once about the advisability about wearing such an ex-

pensive piece all the time, he said, "Where I go, the nugget goes." He had a smaller stickpin made that Alberta wore through the years.

Watermelon Charlie on the Crow Reservation

When Charlie returned from Alaska, he plunged back into the sheep business by leasing a large portion of the Crow Reservation along with large stretches of railroad land and private leases. Bair took over the lease for Grazing District No. 4 for 25,000 head of sheep on the Crow Reservation. In 1900, the annual lease cost $2,610.

Formerly held by his friend, P.B. Moss, the lease on Crow Indian land was a prize because of the vast acreage and price. Since Indian lands had a special legal status; ranchers who wanted to lease them had to travel to Washington D.C. to apply. All ranchers in eastern Montana who used Indian lands went through the same procedure.

When Indian Agent John Edwards left the Crow Reservation in 1902, Bair convinced his friend, banker and Billings alderman, Guil Reynolds, to apply for the agent's job. Old-line Republicans were startled by the appointment. On April 29, 1902 the *Billings Gazette* reported that "when the announcement came that he was named as the chief medicine man and guardian of the Crows, Republicans who usually know what is going on in the councils of the party began to look around for the club which had knocked over the ropes."

Charlie Bair took great pleasure, the article goes on to state, in being the one who put Reynolds up for the job, surprising the others, "who gathered in small groups and discussed the matter while Charley [sic] Bair perambulated up and down streets with a smile on his face that would lay in the shade the smiles he wore in the good old days when he used to help his friend Colonel Babcock into

Charlie and team, heading out to check the sheep

legislative offices in the county. Mr. Bair strolled into corners where he could not be observed in order to shake hands with himself…To catch the other fellows napping is a trick in politics that ought to make any man feel like congratulation himself. The coup places Mr. Bair at once as the chieftain of his party in this section, at least as far as the dispenser of plums to be passed around is concerned."

When the lease expired in 1905, Bair submitted a bid for $7000 but the highest bid was $8000, submitted by John T. Murphy to run cattle. Plenty Coups was in Washington at the time and protested leasing it for cattle, claiming that the cattle would "break down their fences and overrun and damage their farming lands; that cattle would furnish little or no market for hay and other produce, while sheep outfits furnished a good market for produce…" (P. 643, Hearings before the Committee on Indian Affairs, April 21, 1908)

Apparently this argument had weight with the Department, as the Secretary decided to reject all bids for the leasing of district No.

4 and give it to Mr. Bair to run 35,000 sheep. Under his permit Bair was required to buy from the Indians in his district at market rates all their surplus hay and other produce.

Bair was well situated, and then Helen Grey arrived. Frederick Hoxie, in his story of the Crow Nation, said a critical event was "the arrival of a genteel white woman at the agency train station in the fall of 1906. Helen Pierce Grey was a muckraker, and she arrived at a moment of difficulty."[Parading Through History, The making of the Crow Nation in America 1805-1935, publ. 1995]

There were strains among the leaders of the tribe as well as in relations between tribal leaders and government officials over the sale of Crow land. One million acres were to be opened for settlement and Congress eliminated the government's obligation to pay the tribe directly, substituting instead the promise to pay filing fees collected from the homesteaders. The Indians particularly disliked Big Medicine, the chief of the agency police, who saw that the agent's orders were carried out.

Grey had come to the reservation to observe the tribe's annual harvest fair and to write an article for *Collier's Weekly* on the tribe's transition to "civilization." She had originally meant to stay a few weeks, but after hearing of the tribe's complaints, settled in for the winter. After listening to the complaints of some of the Indians, Grey determined to take a delegation to Washington D.C. When the Indians weren't allowed to leave the reservation, Grey went alone and was able to arrange short audiences with President Theodore Roosevelt, Secretary of the Interior James R. Garfield and Indian Commissioner Francis Leupp who sent his private secretary, Z. Lewis Dalby, to investigate the situation on the reservation.

Grey was also after the stockmen who leased Crow land, principally Bair and F.M. Heinrich, claiming they ran more sheep than their lease called for and poor dealings with the Indians.

In April of 1908, The Committee on Indian Affairs, United States Senate, convened to hear Helen Grey's story. Grey told the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs that when she started to Washington in March of 1907, with a petition from the Indians to the President, "…Mr. Bair hurriedly trailed his sheep off the reservation…The Indians counted twenty-three bands (69,000 sheep) that crossed the bridge at Custer."

Reynolds explained that since it was the custom of the area to sell hay in the stack and bring the sheep to the hay and feed it near where it had been cut, many sheep probably were wintered on the reservation.

Charlie had endured both the charges of running more sheep than his lease called for as well as personal attacks on him from Grey ("He stole from the railroad. Everyone knows that.") He, along with others accused, were relieved to have the episode over, and the reservation people went back to their normal business.

Senator Joseph M. Dixon, the former governor of Montana, sat on the Committee for Indian Affairs, and he became a reluctant ally of Bair. The following Christmas, Bair sent Dixon a painting done by Sharp of *A Quiet October Afternoon on the Little Horn River Crow Reservation* in appreciation for the "manly and able manner in which you stood by us last winter." Dixon wrote to Bair in May of 1909 thanking him for the Indian articles he had sent, although presenting most of the thanks from Mrs. Dixon who was so pleased to receive them.

Bair also acquired the name, "Watermelon Charlie," for the wagonloads of melons he brought down to the reservation each summer—Alberta said her father would take his wagon to the railroad and buy them off the rail car.

There was much traveling back and forth between Reynolds' household in Crow Agency and the Bair household in Billings

in those days. Charlie Bair's arrival at the Reynolds house was an event. "He rarely arrived without a huge box of candy from Edy's, five pounds," recalled Carolyn Riebeth. "It would be a work of art. I thought the candied violets were simply thrilling; and those little, crisp candy peanuts filled with peanut butter, gave us our first taste of peanut butter…then of course there were all sorts of chocolate-covered bonbons—mints, caramel, marshmallow, cream." [Letter from Carolyn Riebeth to Alberta, May 13, 1975]

Alberta attested to the closeness of the families. "We always thought the Reynolds kids were our real cousins," she told me during one of our visits. "We went down on the train to spend Thanksgiving at the agency, and they came to Billings for Christmas."

Alberta remembered those Thanksgivings as cold. "The agent's house was big and cold. We would take our clothes and run to be in front of the fireplace to get dressed," continued Alberta. "And that little Mike with his red hair was a pistol. He was asked to say Grace at the Thanksgiving dinner and said, "Dear Lord, bless this food, and let us have time to eat it before those Indians come."

"When the Indians had a problem," Alberta explained. "They would come and sit on the front porch until Mr. Reynolds would go out and talk to them."

"What I remember best about Uncle Charles is the way he'd drop in on us at Crow in our early days there," continued Carolyn in a letter to Alberta. [March 21, 1989]

"If there was a bad storm, he'd be sure to appear to see how his sheep were doing—and off he'd go all bundled up in his huge buffalo coat, muskrat cap, fur-line mittens and buckled overshoes. Those buffalo coats, you remember, were split up the back, like slickers, so that they could be worn on horseback."

She recalled the time he had been caught in a blizzard on a pony "with rattlesnake legs" while riding around one of his camps. "But

Marguerite, Mike Reynolds, Alberta, Charlie, Addie Reynolds, Mary Bair, Guil Reynolds as identified by Alberta

the pony wasn't lost, and he took Uncle Charley right to the camp. I don't doubt that there were many such adventures in his life."

Mike Reynolds, the oldest of the children recalled "Uncle Charlie" as "…a giant of a man, indefatigable and absolutely fearless."

Mike told of the rescue in 1903 of about 6,000 sheep that were snowed in on upper Tullock Creek and without feed.

Louis Ballou, the Agency carpenter, and Charlie Dillon the blacksmith, worked twenty-four hours to build two snowplows. They were V-shaped and 16 feet long with an eight-foot spread at the open end. The points were reinforced with iron with six-inch straps along each side ending in a loop at the point where the doubletrees were placed. A wide brace bolted in four feet from the

tip provided a place to stand for the driver.

The plows were loaded on wagons normally used to carry coal and wood. The wagon wheels were replaced with runners and the beds filled with hay and sacks of oats for the horses. A four horse team was hitched to each wagon. Bair and Reynolds rode in a spring wagon, dressed against the thirty-below weather. Four Indian policemen on horseback rode along to act as guides. They were dressed in wolf skin coats, deerskin pants, and beaver moccasins. Silk scarves were wrapped around their heads under their hats.

The guides—Big Medicine, Bear Claw, Sharp Nose, and Fire Bear—broke trail, crossing the Little Horn River, up the Cheyenne trail to the divide between the Little Horn River and the headwaters of Sarpy and Tullock Creeks. Bair and Reynolds followed, and then came the wagons with the plows.

At the top of the divide, the snowplows were unloaded and a four-horse team hitched to each plow. Guided by the Indians, the two plows continued down the Divide where the snow had reached a depth of three feet until they reached the head of Tullock Creek. One team would plow for a mile and then the other would take the lead; it was tough going and dark by the time the procession reached the sheep wagons and sheep.

At daybreak, the teams were split to pull the sheep wagons, and the procession started out: Bair and Reynolds in the lead, followed by the two plows, the sheep wagons and finally the sheep, herded by the sheepherders and their dogs. When they reached the divide, the plows were again hooked up with four horses and a trail plowed to the Medicine Trail crossing on the Little Big Horn River. Mike Reynolds also reported that his father and Bair shot four wolves and three coyotes. The herders had already shot six wolves and ten coyotes that had threatened the sheep.

The winters of the early years of the century continued to be

harsh. During the winter of 1910, the *Billings Gazette* reported that there were rumors that Charles M. Bair, the prominent sheep man, had become lost and had possibly perished in the severe storm that had been raging in this and adjoining counties for the last three days…

They noted the news and retorted, "…Mr. Bair has been absent from Billings almost a week and because he hasn't reported daily to the hot air experts of that town this word goes out all over the country that eastern Montana storms are so severe the losses run in millions of dollars…Charlie Bair goes out prepared to weather any storm. He'll turn up all right…"

The winter of 1910 continued to be a stormy and cold one, with many losses for the stockmen. In the spring of 1911, when a number of stockmen were discussing their losses at a gathering at the Northern Hotel in Billings, someone declared that Charlie Bair was lucky to have pulled through with so few losses.

Bair's friend, Judge O.F. Goddard, spoke up, "What do you mean, lucky? Charlie was out there plowing snow and hauling feed while you tender-headed amateurs sat by the stove."

Bair and his herders had indeed plowed out 78,000 head of sheep over fifty miles, moving them to better range. He had slept out at night, often in minus-thirty degree weather with only his buffalo coat, fur cap, and a blanket, with his overshoes wrapped in papers.

The story of rescuing the sheep was one of Alberta's favorite stories about her Dad, and she told it with great relish and pride.

Carolyn Riebeth also remembered Charlie's ability to snore. "I wasn't going to put that in this memoir, but I was much impressed by his ability. He used to sleep on that big oak davenport of ours when he came to Crow, with the fireplace flickering on the opposite wall."

Girls visiting on reservation with Chief Plenty Coups

But it was his spirit, his ability to surmount cold and distance to have a good time that impressed her. "Once when Uncle Charles was there, we all caught the late passenger for Billings; and we walked to the depot. Uncle Charles, in buffalo coat and all the rest, carried little, bundled Ros [her sister]. I think that that was the night of the spectacular northern lights—anyway a gang of us were en route to catch the midnight train when we saw banners. I have seen nothing like them since. I can remember Mother and Dad getting up and dressing to catch that train because somebody famous was going to play Lady Macbeth the next night at the Billings Opera House. Doubtless they were going to the show with the Bairs."

Photographs taken by Charles A. Benz during a later period depict a visit by Marguerite and Alberta Bair to the Crow Reservation. Among the haphazard jumble of wagons, vehicles, tents, suitcases, bedrolls, washbasins, water cans and dogs, these two fashionable

Alberta and Marguerite visit at the Crow Reservation

and comely girls pose for the camera, wearing well-cut day dresses, turbans and high heels.

Of the nearly 300,000 sheep that Bair ran at the peak of his career,

Bair ran only 35,000 on the reservation. The sheep were castrated male sheep known as wethers. His ewes were kept in separate herds on land he leased from the Northern Pacific Railroad, north of the Yellowstone River, and he also had sheep in Oregon. From 1906 to 1908, Charlie sold 156,000 yearling wethers to Louis Swift

and Company. Other sheepmen who used the reservation at the time were James Ash of Absorokee, F.M. Heinrich and Thomas Snidow of Billings (Moss's partner). Snidow, who was the first to use a machine to shear sheep, bought some of the surplus hay and produce that Bair was required to buy, and the two ran their sheep much together to utilize the hay. F.M. Heinrich of Hardin and Edwin Dana of Slack, Wyoming, had cattle permits.

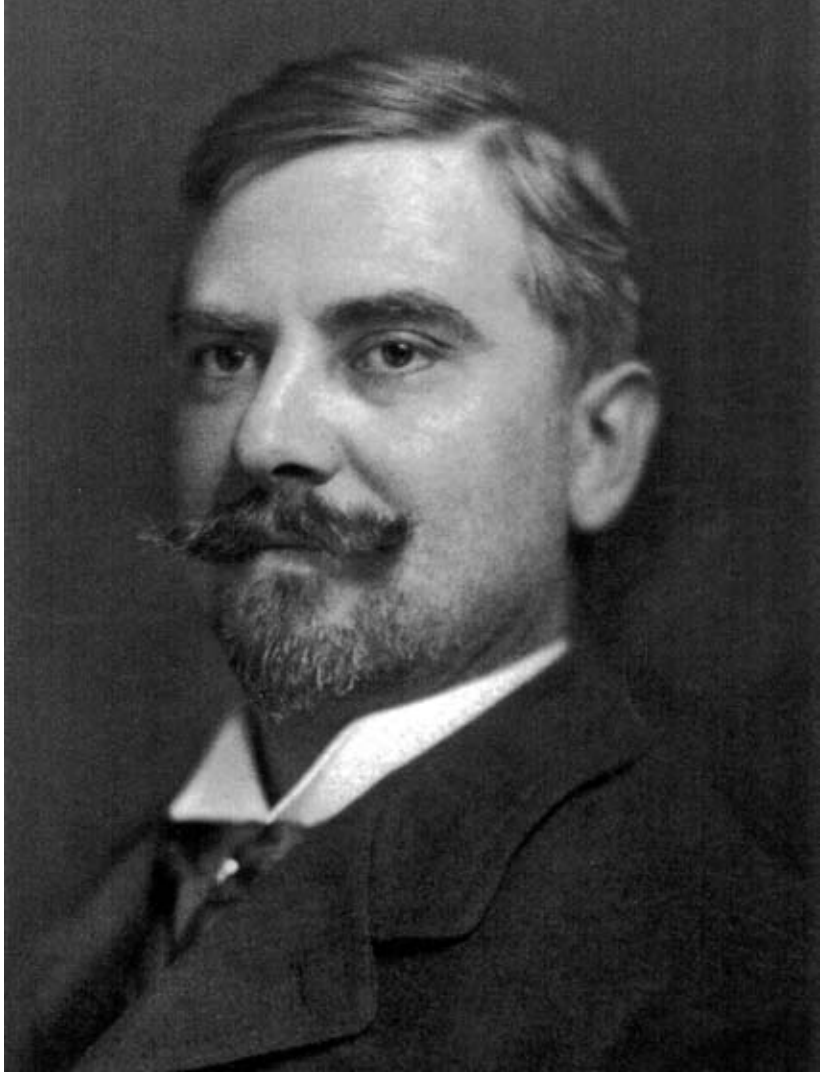
Bair bought Rambouillet bucks that he used on large ewes, Columbias on his middle-grade ewes, and the half-bred Romneys on his small ewes.

In August 1909, Charlie wrote to Mary from Washington.

My Dear Mate,
Should have written sooner but had little to write about. Yegen overbid me on my District but hope to skin him out yet. Soon as I can will hike for home. Awful warm here. Expect to be home some time next week will come on Special train with Senator Carter and Committee
With love to all as every yours,
C.M. Bair

Apparently Bair was not able to "skin him out" and lost his reservation lease in 1910.

An important friendship developed between Joseph Henry Sharp and Charlie in the course of Bair's time on the Crow Reservation. Joseph Henry Sharp settled among the Crow in 1902. He came to Montana at the behest of Phoebe Hearst, the wife of publisher George Hearst, after she became a regent in 1897 at the University of California. Hearst had bought eight of Sharp's paintings at his exhibits of Indian portraits in Washington D.C. (the Smithsonian bought eleven). She then commissioned Sharp to paint fifteen Indian por-



Joseph Henry Sharp

traits annually for five years. Sharp's career previously had taken him from the Cincinnati Conservatory of Art to Europe and then to Taos, New Mexico, where he helped found the Taos Society of Artists. The Sharps had a home in Taos and another in California.

The Crow Agency studio was built first so that Sharp could start the Hearst paintings. The Sharp house was built in 1902 of logs, one of only three at the agency. Trees at the agency were mostly cottonwoods, box elders and ash, so the pines logs had to be brought

some distance. Indian Agent Reynolds supplied the agency carpenter, and one account mentions "prison labor," the men from the guard house on the reservation, who worked under the direction of "Smokey." Smokey was the "black man of all labors" around the agency. His real name was Charles Wilson. He'd been born a slave but he'd come to Montana as a young boy. Later he broke horses for the cavalry, and at the agency, he tended the cows and horses and acted as a policeman, mail carrier and whatever else was required. Alberta remembered him as the person who kept his eye on the Reynolds children and taught them to ride.

The interior of the Sharp home reflected their travels, with an abundance of Indian artifacts and rugs, Roycrofter and Mission furniture, Japanese print curtains, and blue and white Willow Ware English china. Sharp later enlarged his studio, and erected a buffalo hide tepee, which he sometimes used as a studio. Many of his fine "tepee" pictures were painted there.

Charlie Bair also gave Sharp another studio—a sheep wagon in which Sharp installed a mica skylight for better light. "The Prairie Dog," as Sharp called his wagon was a great gift for it offered Sharp mobility: he could travel to all parts of the reservation to paint out of doors in winter. He removed the "furniture" from the wagon, except for the stove. In winter, he'd often work at night until his paint froze, then crawl into the wagon, thaw his paints and work some more. Bair ordered his camp tenders to stock the studio wagon when they went to the reservation to supply the sheepherder wagons.

"My, the memories your letter calls up! The many, many fine studies made from the sheep wagon studio when it was below zero—the visits to Billings and the eats!" Sharp wrote to Marguerite Bair Lamb in the fall of 1939.

"Tell Dad I have the Stetson he gave me—it is rather disreputable but I can't give it up."

Joseph Henry Sharp and the "Prairie Dog" COURTESY BUFFALO BILL HISTORICAL CENTER, CODY, WYOMING

Marguerite had asked Sharp to visit, and perhaps to do her portrait.

Declining an invitation to visit, he wrote, "…nothing in the world would I like better, and to meet Mr. Lamb. I'm really glad at all you say. You have missed a lot out of life, but making it up now….I've always said I would paint in Taos until I was 80-then get a high powered car and some girls and go out and have some fun. We have the high powered car in Taos, and I was 80 last Sept. but the girls! Want to go along? And how about 'Alfalfa' [Alberta]…"

During the Sharps' stay at the agency, they visited the Bairs in their Billings home, and the families became warm friends. Addie played the piano for them. (Although Sharp was deaf, he loved to watch his wife play.) The Bairs sought Addie's advice about Marguerite's musical education. When Marguerite went east to study music, she went to Addie's old school, the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music.

Charlie became one of Sharp's best customers. Along with the still life in the dining room and Pryor Creek in the hall way, two other Sharps hang in the house—one in the Pine Room, the other in Dave's room. In addition to the painting he sent as a thank-you to Dixon, Bair bought another oil painting, *The Little Chief*, to donate to the Billings Chamber of Commerce in 1915. It was loaned in 1967 to the Yellowstone County Fine Arts Center, now the Yellowstone Art Museum.

Bair gave Sharp a stack of photographs of native huts, art, dog teams and prospectors from his Klondike days. Sharp gave Bair some Indian artifacts from his collection, including the beaded leggings worn by Rain in the Face.

The Bairs and Sharps stayed in contact after the reservation days. At one point they asked Sharp to buy some European paintings for them on one of his trips east. He bought three or four oils and watercolors that are in the house today, mixed with the Western art.

MORE SHEEP TALES

Bair had a number of sheep shearing sheds: on Pryor Creek and the Little Big Horn River by Garryowen on the reservation, near Edgar and Huntley off the reservation.

By 1902, Bair had become the second sheepman in Montana to shear sheep by machine, shearing 9,000 sheep at Thomas Snidow's plant on Pryor Creek. Snidow had been the first to machine-shear.

Charlie was immediately impressed by efficiency and effectiveness of the machines. "A sheep shorn by a machine comes out of the operator's hands slick and as clean as a race horse and there are none of the mutilations so common where the old way is

Charlie visits with his sheep dog

employed. The animal does not look as though it had been run through a barbed wire fence or as if somebody had caught it and helped himself to a meal from the carcass."

When he heard the rumbles of a strike from hand shearers who were unhappy about the machine-shearing, Charlie went to Butte and hired a couple of ex-pugilists for his shearing crew and finished his shearing without incident.

Carolyn Riebeth recalled visiting one of the sheep camps during shearing.

"I do remember the long row of stalls, with a shearer and a sprawling sheep in each stall. The shearer was really busy, and the wool came rolling off like a fur coat being removed—with those old-fashioned shears that I can't even cut grass with." [Letter Carolyn Riebeth to Alberta, May 13, 1975]

In spring 1906, Bair and one of his partners, William Rea of Forsyth held Montana's largest sheep drive. The two moved 62,000 head out of Big Timber. More were added on the way. The two men bought larger numbers of sheep wagons and teams to make the big drive and expected to make about five miles a day. Half of the sheep were driven to Bair's ranges on Pryor Creek, and Rea took the others to Forsyth. A few days later, they moved 8,000 head of sheep out of the Lewistown area to the Pryor Creek country. An older resident of Billings remembers, as a child, awakening one morning to hear the sound of the sheep moving through the streets near his home. By the time he went to bed that evening, they were still going through town.

In 1909 Rea Bros. and C.M. Bair shipped 22 carloads of sheep, approximately 5,500 sheep to market in Chicago. Eleven cars of twenty-two cars were loaded at Billings; the rest were located at Park City.

After leaving the reservation, Bair transferred his operation to the Martinsdale Ranch. About 100 miles from Billings, it made a longer trip for Bair to oversee the operation. He maintained his headquarters at the Northern Hotel in Billings and also had an office at his lawyers' firm, Woods and Cooke.

Bair expanded in other areas. While still running sheep on the reservation, he became interested in the Two Leggins Irrigation project and the Rosebud Land and Improvement Company.

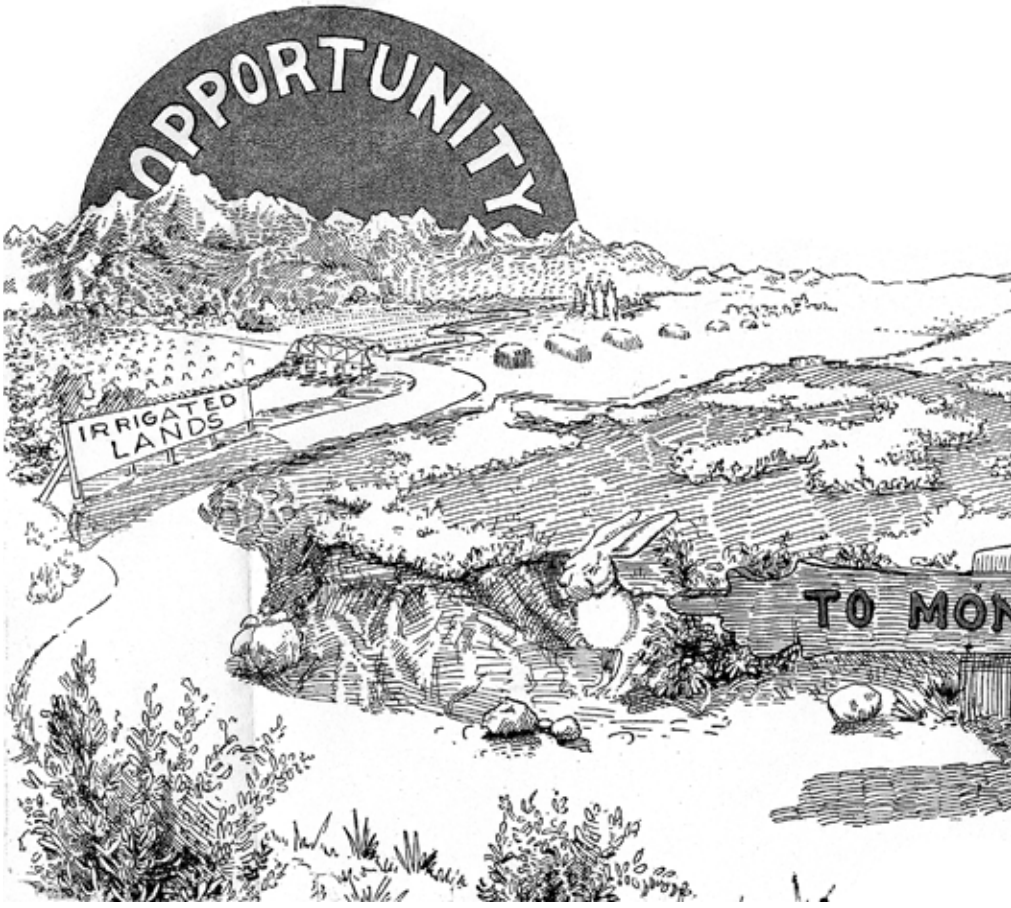
After 1900, many farmers were lured to Montana by new land policies and lots of promotion. Many boosters saw reclamation

Bair maintained his headquarters at the Northern Hotel in Billings

as the key to prosperity. The Newlands Reclamation Act of 1902 committed the federal government to a long-range program of building large scale irrigation projects throughout the arid West. In April, 1904, Articles of Incorporation were filed for the Rosebud Land and Improvement Company and signed by John Edwards of Forsyth and George Beattie and Peter Larson of Helena. Bair joined them the next month.

John Edwards was originally from Illinois, leaving at the age of seventeen to go west. He worked as a cowboy in Colorado and northern Texas, coming to Montana in 1889 on a cattle drive. He worked as the superintendent of the Cruse cattle ranch in Fergus County, and then he went into the mercantile business. He was appointed Indian Agent of the Crow Indians, a post he held for three years.

After leaving the reservation, Edwards organized the Bank of Commerce in Forsyth and the Richardson Mercantile Company. Bair was an investor in the bank, and later was in business with



Pamphlet on Two Leggins Irrigation MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Edwards in the Forsyth light company.

Edwards went on to serve in the state Senate and unsuccessfully tried for the national Senate nomination in 1916. He was a part of the "Carter faction" in Montana Republican politics. The one-time cowboy was described as hot-tempered and arrogant but a skilled political manipulator.

Charlie Bair, with the help of his lawyer Fred Collins, soon became the major mover and financier for the land company, especially after

the death of Thomas Carter in 1911 and General Beattie in 1915.

The cover of the pamphlet distributed by Bair and his partners portrays Uncle Sam leaving an urban landscape and following a "To Montana" sign that leads to the promise of irrigated lands and opportunity. Uncle Sam has dropped fliers that read "Oats," "Wheat," "Barley," "Potatoes," "Montana Sugar Beets," and "A Magic Crop in Wonderland." A huge banner ahead reads "Irrigated Lands."

Despite hard work in development and lots of advertising in the East, the project didn't prosper. Money brought in from land sales

was put back into ditch repair, a seemingly endless problem.

In 1909, the directors of the company met to consider the advisability of forming an irrigation district in Rosebud Count, deciding to call it the "Cartersville Irrigation District."

Using land irrigated by the Two Leggins canal, Bair in 1910 plowed 20,000 acres in the Big Horn Valley, near Hardin, to create the Alberta Ranch. From time to time, he would write Alberta telling her how her ranch was doing. This interest for Alberta didn't prevent him from later selling the place, along with the Lower Hardin Ranch to the Great Western Sugar Company.

According to The Medicine Lake Wave, January 17, 1917, he plowed "under the native sod and planted the land to alfalfa with oats as a nurse crop…and started a farm of "1,200 acres in the valley of the Big Horn adjoining the town of Hardin some 60 miles from Billings, and near the Crow Indian Reservation…. making it one of the most outstanding pure bred stock farms in the state."

The 1917 story went on to boast of the Bair's accomplishments: he had "probably "the largest field of irrigated oats in the state, 1,200 acres; 800 acres of alfalfa and sugar beets. He also had a farm stocked with, the paper recorded, "the best of animals"—purebred livestock he bought at state fairs and regional livestock shows. His Percheron stallion, for example, won the "grand sweepstakes at the International Livestock show at Chicago", his Poland China Boar, "a grand champion" and his Duroc Jersey red ribbon winners at the Midland Empire fair in Billings.

"He is not raising these animals for show purposes," the paper assured its practical-minded readers. "This year he shipped 700 fatted hogs from the thorough-bred stock to market. He is fattening white faces, a large shipment of which will go to the eastern market this month.

"Having installed the thoroughbred animals in his cattle, horse and stock pens, he turned his attention to the chickens. Hundreds of chickens are raised every year. Recently he instructed the people on his farm to kill off all of the chickens this winter. In the spring he is going to start out with nothing but pure breeds and will install Barred Rocks."

The article went on to describe the buildings and machinery including an ice machine for the cold storage. Charlie thought there was a gas field under the ranch and had a well dug. Gas was found and soon the machinery was operated and the buildings heated by natural gas.

In 1924, the Rosebud Land and Improvement Corporation tried to reorganize and refinance the Cartersville Irrigation District with some limited success, but not until 1934 was the company able to collect a portion of its investment with a "bailout" from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation.

Bair still believed in irrigation projects, and later, he had plans drawn up by a Boston firm for $65,000 for a dam and irrigation system on his Martinsdale Ranch. He never began that project, but when the state determined to build a dam on the North Fork of the Musselshell, he provided the basis for the Upper Musselshell Water Users Association by giving the state the blueprints he had hired Boston engineers to put together.

The dam and irrigation ditches were installed in the 1930s—on Bair and Court Durand land. The reservoir was named the Durand Reservoir, but in 1986, Governor Tim Babcock and the Water Resources Board renamed it the Bair Reservoir. The governor said it was a small payment for the love and dedication that Charles Bair gave to the state of Montana. He went on to comment that Bair was also "…instrumental through a large personal contribution, in bringing Montana Power into Martinsdale."

Coal and Oil wells

Bair was the first to explore drilling for oil in southeastern Montana and northern Wyoming. Bair's excitement of the oil business stemmed from his acquaintance with oil prospector E. Howard Hunt, who prospected without much success near Miles City, but went on to make a "big find" in Texas. Bair told his family he had often paid Hunt's laundry bill and gave him the use of his hotel room in Miles City.

The first well the Bair Oil Company drilled was in Bairoil, Wyoming which is located in Sweetwater County, forty miles north of Rawlins. The Bair Oil Company was incorporated in Wyoming on August 29, 1916. Bair and Fred V.H. Collins created the company; George Brimmer was the resident agent at the Rawlins office. A bright young lawyer from the east, Collins and Bair had formed a deep friendship when Collins served as legal counsel to the Rosebud Land and Livestock Company. Collins had also defended Bair in personal legal issues.

The company's capital stock was listed as $3,500,000, with the 25,000 shares valued at $100 each. Its purpose was to encompass all levels of the oil industry, including the ability to:

> Locate, purchase, lease and otherwise acquire lands, mines, and mineral claims, and particularly lands containing or believed to contain petroleum and other oil springs and deposits; to prospect, drill, mine, bore, and sink wells and shafts, to prepare, prune, refine, pipe, store, transport, supply, but sell manufacture and distribute petroleum and other oils and their products and by-products…

In the fall of 1915, drilling operations began around Lost Soldier

Butte at Bairoil with a great deal of optimism, dampened somewhat when the company drilled into water on the oil fields' north end. The company shut down for the winter and began again in the spring. The new well marker told a success story:

> Lost Soldier-A-Well No. 1. Drilling began June 20 and was completed June 29, 1916. The well delivered 200 barrels a day.

A pipeline was soon built to the Union Pacific Railroad at Fort Steele.

One of Bairoil's first buildings in 1915 was a boarding house. The boarding house was the common meeting ground for the oil workers and tradesmen connected with the oil industry, a colorful group that included roustabouts, pumpers, tool dressers, drillers, teamsters, gang pushers, foremen, truck drivers, caretakers, geologists, pipe-liners, machinists, office men and others.

When the boardinghouse finally closed in 1941, the *Republican Bulletin* of Rawlins reported, that "In the boom of the early '20s, when most of the work performed was done by hand as many as 300 men ate three meals a day during the peal of the boom along about 1923."

Shortly before the Bair Oil Company dissolved in 1933, the company stopped operating the boardinghouse. It was kept operating, however, under different owners. Good roads, trailer camps adjacent to the oil fields, shorter work days and other eating places nearby lessened the need of a boarding house in the oil fields and it was closed in 1941. It was used again as a dining room by Prairie Oil and Gas Company executives.

Today, the population of Bairoil, Wyoming, has less than 100 people sustained by the production work of the Merit Energy Company. The people of that community mounted a plaque on

Last Soldier "A" drilling from June 20, 1916 to June 29, 1916, produced 200 barrels of oil a day

the first well and remember Bair, the man who drilled it.

The *Billings Gazette* reported that the Bair and Collins had sold "one-half interest in the holding of the Bair Oil Company of Rawlins" to the Washington-Wyoming Oil Company of Seattle, Washington. "The consideration paid," the newspaper reported, "was $250,000 cash." On Collins' advice, they didn't sell the whole company and retain royalties. In retrospect, this was a mistake as a great quantity of oil was taken from the area in later years.

Bair also backed Fred Collins in the Bair-Collins Coal Company, which was incorporated in 1919 with Collins as president and Bair as vice president and capitalized at $500,000. On the Bair-Collins stationary, the Hardin Light and Power Company and the Forsyth Light and Power Company are also listed. John Edwards of Forsyth was originally part of the corporation, but Edwards and Bair had had a disagreement over money in 1924 and Bair and Collins bought out Edwards.

In a 1925 letter to Bair, Collins details how a "blow-up" between Edwards and Bair precipitated the sale of Edwards' interests. Bair's faith in his friends was sometimes tested.

"When you and Edwards blew up you had $6,259 invested in Hardin and Forsyth plants—I paid Edwards $25,000 for his ½ interest in cash although I have before me an appraisal of both plants by the Montana Power co. offering $50,000 cash for them, and they owed you at that time $31,000 borrowed money and owed the Bank of Commerce $15,000 and the debts were a total of $46,000 or almost as much as Montana Power offered but if you and John blew up any further there might have been lots of results so I paid him $25,000 for his interest and then started to see if your investment could not be saved and my own also. I got $25,000 Bair Collins Co. stock for the Edwards interest and you got $25,000 stock for your interest although your stock only cost $6,250. Then you also got the $31,000 stock for what the plants owed you."

"You have put up in cash at different times for Bair Collins Co. stock $50,500. I only hope that in 1926 I can pay dividends to you amount at least to $22,649.38 and when that is done you will have every dollar back you have invested and your interest in the Bair Collins Co. and its property and anything that comes after it thereafter will be velvet."

Bair let Collins run the coal company. Collins told Bair that people often thought his name was Bair Collins, and Bair jokingly referred to him as "Bare Collins." Each year, Bair presented his partner with a white Cadillac—Bair felt indebted to Collins for serving as his lawyer in some law suits.

The company's immediate intent, the 1917 *Billings Gazette* reported was to develop a "bituminous coal mine at Painted Robe between Billing and Great Falls on the Great Northern railway."

Collins wanted to develop the mine at Painted Robe first because

coal in this region was hard or semi-bituminous and, unlike softer coal, produced a cleaner-burning flame for the home heating market. Musselshell County was also threaded by Milwaukee and the St. Paul Railways, which meant easy access to markets. Collins developed the Silver Tip Mine, which marketed its coal as Silver Tip Coal. He also planned to develop an area in the Carpenter Creek field, adjacent to the Milwaukee Railroad. After a serious strike in the coal mines in Roundup, the company bought the Keene Mine at Roundup in 1921.

The coal business was not that lucrative for Bair. By the end of 1928, his cash investment was down to $10,880.63, although dividends in the 1930s may have paid off that investment.

During the 1920s and 1930s, Bair stopped in Roundup on his way to look at cattle he had out in the Musselshell Valley and always called at the Bair-Collins Company office. Lillian Gildroy Kirkpatrick, who worked for the Bair-Collins Company from 1921 to 1954, recalled Bair's visits with great nostalgia. He was, she reported, a straight-forward businessman with great acumen, but at the same time a very human, caring person who helped many of his neighboring ranchers during the Great Depression by giving them free coal. In 1936, when the company's Star Mine at Musselshell was closed, the Bair-Collins Company donated twenty-five buildings to the Billings Polytechnic Institute, now Rocky Mountain College.

Bair kept his interests in the coal company. After his death, the Bair-Collins Company retained business interests until 1954. The coal business declined as railroads replaced steam engines with diesels and the home heating market converted to gas or electricity. By 1954, their lawyer advised Alberta and Marguerite to declare bankruptcy because the company was in debt, but instead they dissolved the company and spent $250,000 to pay off the creditors.

A Life Divided

Shortly after Bair lost his grazing lease on the Crow Reservation, he moved his sheep to his ranch in Martinsdale and his family to a new home in Portland.

Through his friend William Rea, Bair bought property in Martinsdale Land and Livestock Company in 1907 and sole ownership in 1913. Located at the confluence of the north and south forks of the Musselshell River, the ranch was in an area known for its wide open country and its excellent winter rangeland.

In 1915, the company was reorganized as the Bair Company. One of the Bair Company's cattle brand, an "A" over a "7", stands for the month, August, and the year, 1877, when Richard Clendennin started the Clendennin Ranch at this site.

Charlie bought a home in Portland in 1910 for his family, saying he was looking for a better climate for Mary's health. In previous years, the Bairs had traveled through Portland, Oregon, enroute to California where they wintered.

"Dad was in the lobby of our hotel, when Joel Long walked up to him and asked him if he was interested in buying his house there in Portland," Alberta related when she and I and Marguerite were in the Pine Room, discussing those Portland years. "He said he couldn't stand the rainy weather anymore and had to get back to the sunshine in Montana."

After he spent fifteen minutes looking at the new, twelve-room Victorian mansion with wood paneling and a large veranda, Bair bought the house. He returned to the hotel, told his family they were moving, and wired Billings to have his servants and cars sent.

The Bair ladies furnished the home with American antiques—heavy mahagony pieces—that they purchased in Portland and Canada. "We didn't know anything about it at first," Alberta said,

recalling a table they bought that they were so proud of until a dealer in Portland "pointed out that one leg was not original and of course, that spoiled it as an antique."

The family made their home in Portland, but continued wintering in California and the ladies joined Charlie in Montana in the summer, staying either at the Northern Hotel or at the ranch in Martinsdale. At the ranch, they stayed in the foreman's house and Alberta remembered that Mrs. Martin was not a cheerful host.

Charlie attempted to make investments in the coastal life. He bought about 18,000 acres of land in Yamhill and Polk Counties, part of the Grand Rogue Reservation. He then invested in the Grand Rogue irrigation company, and an 82-acre dairy near Tigardville, Oregon, which he sold in the 1920s for $40,000.

In California, he also tried to take up ocean fishing. Alberta recalled that her father "thought he might buy a yacht," so that the family could go "bob-sledding over the waves." Unfortunately, he got terribly sea-sick and "one afternoon of fishing was all he needed, but we still have the pictures of me and Sissy with the fish we caught. Dad sent them to the papers in Montana and said we caught them on the Musselshell."

Bair spent most of his time, however, in Billings, looking after his Montana holdings. This family separation led to rumors of estrangement. One of their Portland neighbors remarked in later years that was the impression of the Bair marriage. Family friend, Carolyn Reynolds Riebeth remembered that in about 1910, Charlie Bair "moved his women to Portland, where he bought them a nice house and a fine car and left them. He lived at the Northern Hotel, where they lived, too, for part of each year. Then Mr. Bair would have a big dinner for us all in the Northern's dining room."

When asked by the *Oregonian* press why he was leaving Montana, Charlie told the reporter that he was seeking better opportu-

Alberta (left) and Marguerite (right) fishing in California

nities. "For 27 years I have made my home in Montana. I have felt the necessity of giving my family some of the better opportunities of life, and for that reason I have chosen Portland as the place to live in. You have the only water level city on the coast, and your territory is beyond question one of the largest in the country today remaining undeveloped." He discussed his land purchases in Yamhill County and the benefits of the milder climate and the better schools for his children. But he added, with a bit of Big Sky boosterisms, "There is no better state in the world than Montana, and it is with regret that we have decided to leave for the present and

make our home here. The winters there are severe, however."

His "whim" may have had more to it than family health or educational concerns. Carolyn Reibeth, for all her love for Uncle Charlie, related "…Mr. Bair, though not the greatest family man in the world, was a very kind person." A letter from Burton K. Wheeler to poet Gwendolen Haste reveals what was widely known in Montana about Bair in those days.

In 1920, democrat Burton K. Wheeler, a four-term U.S. Senator from 1922-1940, ran for governor against republican Joseph M. Dixon. Because he was endorsed by the non-partisan league and the labor league, he wrote to Haste on February 21, 1962,

"All of us were looked upon as dangerous radicals, or at least that is what we were called by the Company newspapers in Montana and by the Merchants' Organization, which I think was headed by a man named Bill Selfridge in Billings…I am sure you will remember old Charlie Bair who was part owner of the *Billings Gazette* and who was looked upon in those days as a millionaire sheep man. He had several big ranches around in Meagher County. The reason I am recalling his name to you is because of the fact that I am sure you will remember that they said during the campaign that if I were elected Governor they would have free love in Montana like they had in North Dakota. During my speech at the Little Theater across from the Northern Hotel, I said, "You all know Charlie Bair. You know the kind of life he has led. And I just want to ask you one question: If there was free love in North Dakota, would Charlie Bair be living in Billings?"

Bair had a good laugh over the speech.

"He had a great reputation as an old roué and, in fact, some of the good church people, as well as some of the Democratic politicians, came to me when I was U.S. District Attorney and wanted me to prosecute him under the White Slave Act for taking some

Billings woman back to Washington with him. I submitted the case to the jury but I was sure they got to some of the jurors because they refused to indict him. In fact, they bought off the woman and she refused to testify at the last minute, though previously she had been anxious to testify against him."

Wheeler also told of the incident in his book *Yankee from the West.*

Bair was an energetic man, always on the go. He had many interests and many friends, but sometimes in the course of that business he made some enemies. His only concern was that such talk might harm his family.

While Mary was settling into her new home in Portland, the Bair girls were finishing their education in Victorian tradition of learning the social skills that would best serve in their roles as young heiresses. Their continuing education included riding, shooting, cooking, bridge and golf lessons. As part of her cooking instruction, Marguerite once made six butterscotch pies, one after the other, until she made a perfect pie—then she never made another. Francis Kern, whose aunt lived near the Bairs, remembered that his aunt benefited greatly from the sisters' cooking lessons because they were constantly bringing her one of their cooking results.

In January 1911, Charlie was back in Montana to take care of business. He wrote to his wife and daughters in Portland that the weather was cold, 61 degrees below zero in Havre and 58 below in Glendive. He reported that the snow was halfway up the fence in their yard in Billings.

He continued, "I have met a great many of our Billings neighbors that say they will not stand for us moving to Portland. I console them by saying we only turned the key on the house here and may return at any time but they do not take to it kindly…but it looks quite old and dead and mighty cold here in comparison with Portland. They all say you made your money here and should stay

and live it out here…we can spend it where we like and that is all there is to it…have plenty of chances to rent the house but do not think it wise until we see how well you all like Portland."

Charlie wrote often to Alberta, citing business problems, even though she was only sixteen at the time.

In August 1911, Charlie wrote to Alberta from Billings keeping the family informed of Bair's business.

> My Dearest Alberta,
> Your splendid letter of August 28th from Seaside just received. I was awfully glad to hear from you all…I want to tell you old Montana is not what it used to be. I have been unable to dispose of any of my mutton wethers yet. I have traded some ewes for wethers & bought some at very low figures. Billings the deadest you ever saw it. I noticed number of cars on the street last evening, running around these few blocks of paved streets with one light on the car lit to save light that looked poverty stricken to me…Ranch at Hardin is the wonder of the whole country and just looks beautiful will thresh about 40 car load of oats that I think have sold at $1.25 per hundred. Hoping this will find you all well with lots of
> Love from
> Your Dad

Another letter written in the spring of 1912 to Alberta sends more information about her father's activities.

> My Dear Alberta,
> Your kind little letter just received and your old Dad can not express in words his gratitude to you for the nice manner in which you speak of Sister when you tell of how nicely she

handles the car and how well she drives it is certainly very gratifying. Mr. Rea & I have been down in Wyoming since the death of Mr. Smith & will be obliged to return there in a few days with some expert accountant and lawyer as the matters of the company are in bad condition have just returned from Helena where I had the good fortune of being excused of serving as Grand Juror expect to go back in Wyoming about June 1st & do not know how long it will take to get straightened out just met Mr. Gillfillen here & was up to the Politicuie [sic] School with Mr. and Mrs. Dores. Simon Graduates there tomorrow never saw Mrs. Dores show her age as she did today. I really felt sorry for them & will give them the money tonight to get Simon a present as I do not know what to get him My self it is warming up here a little today sheared 4425 sheep yesterday and am going out tomorrow & am going to do my best to get to Portland for the Carnival unless somebody else kills themselves or something Happens that I have no knowledge of now Met Second Cousins by the name of Unkifer coming down from Helena yesterday they were in Portland a week wish you could have met them. They are very fine people manufactors in Chicago & showed some class believe me they stopped here visiting the Calstream People
[Unkefer was the maiden name of Charlie's mother.]
With lots of love to all Dad

Charlie and William Rea made a business trip to Mexico in 1911, going by way of Chicago and Saint Louis. Bair spent a day in Chicago looking for "auto" coats for the girls, the large protective coats that were so necessary with the open cars and dusty roads. It seemed typical of Bair to make the "grand gesture" of buying a

car instead of a coat. Bair wrote Marguerite in December of 1911, "I could not get as nice a coat as I thought you girls deserved so early this morning before leaving Chicago I started out again and ordered you a white auto to match the coat you have. It will be made to order especially for you…the Dearest Marguerite in all the world it will be equipped with electric lights self starting and …tire torpedo drive and the nicest thing the White Co can turn out. But they are afraid they may not be able to get it to Portland for Xmas as this something of the very latest style and am sure it will suit as it is a very classy racey looking car."

On December 19, 1911, Charlie Bair wrote again from Little Rock, Arkansas, after a long railroad trip, that he was trying to "hustle to get home for Xmas" but to tell Marguerite that he might not be able to get the car there for Christmas, but it would be "one that they will sit up and take notice when it does come. As it will be of the latest type and be grand one nothing too good for you all…"

When the car finally arrived, Marguerite took her father for a ride. Driving along the street where the trolley went, a wheel of the car caught in the track and Marguerite lost control of the car. Marguerite's arm was broken and Charlie injured his knee.

Alberta shared her father's passion for cars and grew into the position of being the family chauffeur. Charlie bought Alberta a Stutz Bearcat—yellow with red cushions. She was active in the Red Cross Association, serving as Commandant of the Motor Corps and used her car during the World War I in volunteer programs and was always available to lead parades. Alberta adored this chore with her car festooned and beribboned, and she in her hat, waving to the crowds.

Marguerite and Alberta would go riding around Portland. Francis Kern, who grew up in Portland and later settled in White Sulphur Springs, said the two sisters would ride "in Alberta's bright

Yellow Stutz Bearcat, two-seater with the top down, [a] very sporty car. We used to sit on the curb and watch it go by—there were not many cars in those days."

The Porter family, friends from Helena days, was a comforting presence in Portland for Mary and the girls. Mrs. Porter was Margaret Larson's sister and young Margaret "Min" porter was Alberta's age and they soon became best friends. They shared the same piano teacher and tutor. Alberta did not attend public school because she was in California for so much of the year. Alberta said she had little interest in music, but she was quite proficient on the piano. Min was an excellent musician, however, and Alberta always felt that she was in her shadow. The two of them went to Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, to attend the Baldwin School.

Marguerite continued her education at the Anne Wright Seminary in Tacoma, Washington, and graduated from Liberty College in Kentucky. She also attended the Cincinnati Conservatory for voice and violin at the recommendation of Addie Sharp, the wife of artist Joseph Sharp. While she was at Liberty, Marguerite met among others the Heinz girls and Aubrey Black, who later married Richard Ringling of the Ringling Brothers Circus family and lived in White Sulphur Springs. The girls often met Aubrey in Washington D.C. or New York when they traveled east.

In the winters, the Bair family continued to go to southern California to get out of the cold, to enjoy a season of warmth and sociability. One year, during Prohibition, Alberta told me that when they arrived at the Biltmore, "…when our trunks arrived, one smelled like liquor and the hotel manager was very upset. He told dad, he just couldn't break the law and have the liquor in the hotel. Dad assured him that he had just packed a couple of bottles of peach brandy. Muzzy enjoyed a little glass of that on occasion, when she had an upset stomach. He finally settled down and let us get the trunk."

Before Prohibition went into effect on January 16, 1920, Charlie Bair and two friends had bought the entire liquor supply of the Northern Hotel. Not only did he have a supply for California trips, but a supply later for the house at Martinsdale. Many years later, with labels off or smeared, cocktails at the Bair household were often an interesting experience.

The Bair ladies enjoyed California and Alberta and Marguerite had plenty of beaus.

"I had this one beau," said Alberta, "who was a banker or something, but Dad thought he was too old for me, I guess. He was invited to San Simeon for a party and wanted to take me with Marguerite going as chaperone."

San Simeon was the home of William Randolph Hearst and his friend Marion Davies. Called Hearst's Castle, San Simeon was the realization of his dream to have a castle similar to those he saw in Europe. He and architect Julia Morgan collaborated for 28 years to build his castle and during construction Hearst used the Castle as his primary residence and entertained the elite of Hollywood, sports and politics. Marion Davies' career as an actress was eclipsed by her love affair with Hearst.

Since the location of the Castle was remote, parties were often several days or two weeks long. Such glamour surrounded these fetes, it is no wonder that Alberta was keen to go. It is also no wonder that such a father as Charlie Bair would not let his daughters go.

"I was always sorry we didn't get to go," said Alberta, smiling. "I guess there were some interesting parties and people there."

There were other parties—the Bairs enjoyed the company of Bill Hart, the Charlie Russells—the other old westerners that gathered at the Biltmore to visit. Alberta remembered the long, winding road to Bill Hart's Horseshoe Ranch at Newhall, California—after a rain, a slick and fearful climb. The Russells usually entertained

Mary Bair, affectionately known as Muzzy to the family

Bill Hart and Charlie Russell

in their home as well, but the Bair girls were seated near them one evening at the Ambassador Hotel where they were entertaining prospective art buyers.

Russell tapped Alberta on the shoulder and started a long visit until Nancy intervened. She called Alberta to their table and introduced the guests who Alberta thought appeared bored, stiff and wealthy. They were dressed in formal wear for dinner. Russell was in his usual dress-up clothes: tuxedo, red sash, and cowboy boots. The artist was as bored as his guests, leaving Nancy to do business and entertain. When Russell got a chance, he leaned over to Alberta

and inquired, "Has Charlie heard from Pink-Eye lately?"

"Oh, yes," and Alberta was off on her tale.

Pink-Eye O'Conner, a sheepherder, had just killed a man and had written her father that the killing was entirely justified and that if Bair would send him the money for a lawyer, he would work for Bair for nothing for the rest of his life. (Pink-Eye was 65 at the time.)

Bair made a trip to Montana to appear as a character witness and to help his old herder.

It was an interesting case. The sheepherder was accused of killing a popular cowboy named Pat Loney. The state based its prosecution on the fact that the herder was bitter toward Loney because Loney had often baited him by riding through his sheep bands on the Philbrook Rosebud Range. On the last occasion, the State contended that Pink-Eye had opened up the sheep wagon and shot Loney as he stood at the wagon neck yoke where he had dismounted from his horse. He died instantly and O'Conner left him there for four days while cooking and sleeping in his wagon.

Bair, I.D. O'Donnell of Billings, and other former employers of O'Conner testified that there was "…not a vicious drop of blood in his body and that he never awakened in the morning with a speck of malice in his heart toward anybody."

O'Conner testified that Loney shot himself accidentally and that further the creeks were swollen and that he was seven miles from the Newell Philbrick headquarters on the Rosebud, that he couldn't leave the "sheps" unless he could take the "sheps" with him as that was his training, and for that reason, he stayed with the body for four days. Under vigorous cross-examination, he kept repeating, "I couldn't leave the sheps" and "Him was dead anyway."

In an unusual move, a hog was shaved and shot and introduced to the jury, showing body burns, and even the face skin of the victim was produced to show that he had been shot in the face, but

Bair was instrumental in getting the statue of Bill Hart on the Billings Rims—here at the dedication ceremony are Guil Reynolds, Bill Hart and Charlie Bair

O'Conner was finally acquitted. His friends "put up a very generous purse" and saw him and his little dog off on a train for Colorado.

Russell and Alberta spent the evening having a good time talking about Pink-Eye while Nancy and the prospective purchasers sat in silence.

About this time Russell sold a painting to Douglas Fairbanks for $10,000 and another to the Prince of Wales for $10,000. Bair also bought some work from Russell.

Bair's cronies in California were aging, and Russell died in 1926. When Will Rogers and Wiley Post were killed in Alaska in 1935, Hart wrote to Bair, "It is so good to hear from you. It really cheers me up a lot. I get mighty blue at times. I knew dear old Charlie Russell since 1901—Bill Rogers since 1905—Charlie Mack since 1910. And they're all gone. Two cut down by tragic accidents and one before his time. I seem to hang on. I'm in great shape…"

In the same letter, Hart commented on the statue of himself which stands above the Rimrocks in Billings. The statue had been originally planned for North Dakota, but Bair got it for Billings.

The unveiling took place during Founder's Day Celebration, July 2-4 in 1927. Photos taken by Peter Billings of the event are revealing. The real-life Hart faces the life-sized bronze of the movie cowboy and his horse, but the statue appears more dominant, more heroic-looking. Bair, the man responsible for bringing the statue to Billings, is by then 62, and showing a portly figure.

The Hart statue was done by Charles Christadore. Bair paid for the Pinto to bear the brand of Charlie Russell's old outfit.

Will James, a well-known Western artist and writer, was a friend of the Bair family, although never a part of the "Biltmore gang," James had worked for Hart as a stunt man in the movies, who thought he was not a very "good cowboy."

The Bair's friendship with James flourished during the 1940's, when James made his home in Billings and lived there until his death.


FOU
BILLING


UNVEILING OF BILL HART MONUMENT
RANGE RIDER OF THE YELLOWSTONE.
INDERS DAY CELEBRATION
S, MONTANA. JULY 2ND 3RD 4TH 1927.

Marguerite and Alberta on the Crow Reservation

CHAPTER THREE

Marguerite and Alberta—Always the "Girls"

"MARGUERITE IS THE SPANISH TYPE, with an angelic disposition and a voice like an angel. Alberta plays cards and golf like a man and that is a fine compliment—if one picks the man. She has impeccable card manners, with no feminine dirt," wrote Grace Stone Coates to James Rankin [June 3, 1938] of her Martinsdale friends, the Bair sisters. Coates was a noted poet and writer of the late 1920s and early 1930s and also an assistant editor of *The Frontier*, a northwest regional magazine started by H.G. Merriam at the University of Montana. Her husband Henderson and his brother Jack owned the general store in the small town.

In three short sentences, Coates, ever the observant student of human character, summed up the widely differing characters of the two Bair sisters. Alberta was social; Marguerite lived a quiet life

Marguerite Bair

with her husband Dave. Alberta was boisterous, Marguerite was demure, but the two of them were inseparable. When they took off in their white Cadillac, Alberta drove and Marguerite navigated. When they socialized, Alberta talked and Marguerite listened.

Alberta Bair

When they shopped for antiques Marguerite spotted the treasures and Alberta did the bargaining. When they dressed, Alberta wore more casual, free-flowing clothes—even wearing Dave Lamb's flannel shirts around the ranch after his death because they were

warmer than her own—and she never shopped for clothes unless there was a sale. Marguerite, on the other hand, wore navy blue, finely tailored outfits.

Marguerite spent the first years of her life at Lavina, and then Billings. The gentle and demure Marguerite was not opposed to making an extra dime or two. In Billings, when the boyfriend of Inga, the cook, came to call, an eight year old Marguerite cut the yellow roses in the yard and sold them to him for Inga. It was a good business until her mother caught wind of it. While Marguerite's mother was upset about her daughter's enterprise, Charlie was quite pleased with her early business ability.

When Guil Reynolds arrived on the date of Alberta's birth, Bair took him to the Yellowstone National Bank where they spent the night on couches in the board room.

When the Bairs needed passports in 1953, Alberta wrote the health department in Helena for birth certificates.

"We are not at all sure of our ages," she wrote. "I—Alberta Monroe Bair was born in Billings Montana July 15, I think the year 1896 or 1890—I think. Marguerite Bair Lamb was born in Helena, Montana July 1, 1891 or 1890,—I think."

The health department assigned them the respective birth dates: July 1, 1892 for Marguerite and July 15, 1904 for Alberta. Years later, Alberta told Tim Healey she thought she was born in 1896. When we went to the newspapers and found the correct date of 1895, Alberta jokingly chastised me for "making her a year older."

Alberta, throughout her life, demonstrated the same adventurous nature. Alberta was not a tall woman, a little stout, but she always carried herself erect. She never seemed to grow old—either in her appearance or in spirit. She looked at life with humor and compassion.

In 1933, when Grace Stone Coates published her novel, *Black*

Alberta on pony

Cherries, she inscribed a copy to Alberta with the following poem.

Alberta—
She's the riddle of the Sphinx
Forever new!
She can tramp the links,
She can make homebrew.

She can bring a buck
To the frying pan,

And she plays her cards
Like a gentleman.

Marguerite and Alberta grew up in an extended family. In Helena, the Bairs had their friends, the Larsons; and later, in Portland, they would have the Porters. In Billings, the family was close friends with the Babcocks, the Reynolds and Browns and the Moss family.

Alberta liked to go to the Methodist Church across the street and each Sunday morning Mary would give her a nickel for the collection plate and she would be off. One morning, Mary had only a quarter, so she gave her that. Alberta dutifully made change out of the collection plate, and brought the twenty cents home.

Like many of the Victorian ladies at that time, the Bair sisters were well educated. Both girls attended grade school in Billings before they went on to the other schools.

While attending the Baldwin School in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, Alberta, the night owl, devised a strategy to survive the curfew that all students lived with in those days. "I used to go to the bathroom and lay in the bathtub to study after lights out."

Charlie sent plenty of money for Alberta's school account.

"Dad always kept a lot of money in our accounts," Alberta told me. "He expected us to be able to handle it. We didn't make many mistakes."

When the Baldwin School notified Bair that it was against their policy to allow students to have a great deal of money, Charlie wrote back, "That little girl is a long way from home, and might need that money."

Marguerite and Mary went for graduation, but Charlie was unable to get away. He sent Alberta some more money and wrote since Alberta had "…such a meazlie [sic] little graduating present

Mary and Marguerite

of the best Girl that ever attended Bryn Mawr just thought I would send you a present of 500 after sister has told me of your apetite [sic] thought it might come in handy before you get home…"

Marguerite attended the Liberty Ladies' College in Liberty, Kentucky. While she was there, she met the daughters of John Heinz, founder of the Pittsburgh-based Heinz Foods, and Aubrey Black, who later married Richard Ringling of the Ringling Circus family and lived in White Sulphur Springs, Montana. The Bair ladies got together with Aubrey in Washington, D.C. and New York over the early years.

At the recommendation of Joseph Sharp's wife, Addie, Marguerite also attended the Cincinnati Conservatory, where she studied voice and violin. One of Marguerite's music professors remarked that it was too bad that Marguerite didn't have to work for a living—she could have had a brilliant career as a vocalist if she had had to support herself. Marguerite's performances, however, were limited to local concerts, such as the one she gave for the Billings Women's Club. In a *Billings Gazette* article, the reporter gushed:

> The third number was two songs, 'May morning,' by Denze and 'Spring Song' by Becker sung by Miss Bair, who possesses a fine voice with much quality and power, and who gave her song with such taste that an encore was demanded and given. She gives much promise for a young artist.

Alberta took piano lessons in Portland and became quite proficient. In spite of these musical abilities—Marguerite's singing and Alberta's piano-playing, I was intrigued that their Martinsdale home did not have a piano or any other musical instruments. Once they moved to the ranch, their interest in the arts seemed to become focused on fine arts, including painting, sculpture and fine antiques.

Alberta Bair

When the family moved from Portland to Martinsdale in 1934, Marguerite was forty-five years of age, and Alberta was thirty-nine. The "girls," as they were known in the area, were unmarried, well-educated and on a ranch situated 100 miles from Billings, one of Montana's largest towns. As a result, their social circle widened geographically—those living in the country often travel great distances to socialize. They had friends across central Montana—in Clyde Park, Harlowton, Livingston, Melville, Martinsdale, Two Dot, White Sulphur Springs—and of course Billings. Some of their close friends included Bill and Ann Donald and Bob and Dorothy Stevens of Melville and Pete and Mary White of Two Dot. There were many more as well.

After the family settled in Martinsdale in 1934, the girls began to take more interest in the ranch operations. Alberta and Marguerite liked to help move the sheep to the summer pasture, west of the ranch. Even into 1960s and early 70s, the girls acted as "flaggers" in their white Cadillac, alerting traffic at the head or rear of the moving livestock, as required by Montana law. After Marguerite's death in 1976, Alberta continued to participate in ranch operations, no matter whether it was moving cattle or branding. The foreman picked her up in his pickup to take her where the action was, whether it be branding at one of the corals or shearing at the sheds behind the house. Alberta enjoyed the involvement and the camaraderie.

Alberta grew up learning about business from her father who wanted his daughters to learn how to handle the money he would someday leave them. He was far-sighted enough to put his assets into the Bair Company in 1913 and make his family stockholders.

Alberta and Marguerite had learned one lesson in business when they were still spending winters in California.

"I'm embarrassed to tell this—and haven't for many years—but when we were at the Biltmore, there was a lady from Billings who

Alberta and Will James

had her daughter with her, trying to get her into the movies. She asked one day if we would like to invest $10,000 in an oil well—sure to make a lot of money, and our father 'would be so proud of us.'

"Well, we invested—had no papers or contracts or anything—and of course there was no oil well. We thought she would be all right since she was from Billings.

"We hated to tell our Dad, but he didn't say much—just to learn from the experience. And the interesting thing, he would have given her the money if she had asked."

Alberta and Marguerite remembered.

At Martinsdale the foreman took Alberta to buy the rams for the sheep bands. She bought from the Lehfelt family in Lavina, continuing her father's desire to continue the Ramboulet strain in the sheep. Albert Berg, a cattle buyer and neighbor, was her escort when she went to buy bulls.

As an adult, Alberta kept the ranch accounts in a neat and tidy manner. She had inherited her father's skill with numbers and

could remember transactions correctly—down to the penny. Accountants and lawyers were constantly amazed by Alberta's retention of figures, and her memories of what year things happened.

Alberta was the "front man" when it came to dealing with salesmen and the cattle and sheep buyers. She received them in the Pine Room and gave them a couple of drinks. After some talking and joking, they got down to business. When an offer was made, Alberta took the ice bucket and went to the kitchen. There she visited with Marguerite about accepting the bid. It might take several trips to the kitchen before the deal was finally finished. Alberta always said she had to have at least a half cent per pound more than the neighbors as a matter of pride. She usually got it.

On one occasion she sold the sheep to a young livestock buyer, who upon sober reflection, decided he was going to lose money on the transaction. However, a deal was a deal, whether any paper was signed and he prepared to take delivery. Dave, understanding the situation, bought the contract and saved the bacon of the order buyer. The buyer continued to buy livestock from the Bair Ranch over the years, enjoying the friendship and camaraderie of Alberta, but was always on his toes when bargaining with Alberta.

The girls traded in the stock market, but seldom sold. Once they bought a stock, they held on to it. When Lee Enterprises bought the Billings Gazette in the late 1950s, the stock that the Bair Company held in the Gazette Printing Company made the girls the largest individual stock owners in the Lee Corporation. They owned both A and B stock which gave them voting shares. In 1964, Strand Hilleboe notified Alberta that she had been selected vice president of the Gazette Printing Company following the annual stockholders meeting.

Over the years, Lee Enterprises sought to buy the stock from Alberta. A representative would fly to Harlowton and with a picnic

Marguerite and Phil Rostad enjoy a joke

lunch head for Martinsdale to visit Alberta. She would have an enjoyable time, enjoy lunch and send him on his way. Once when she forgot to pay her subscription to the Gazette, they stopped mailing it. I commented that when she owned so much stock, I thought she might warrant a free subscription.

"No, I wouldn't want them to do that," Alberta told me sternly. "That's not good business to be giving away papers."

Despite their wealth, Alberta and Marguerite had learned from

Alberta and Marguerite off to town

their mother to live frugally, and they did so all of their lives. When eating out, Alberta carefully checked the bill before paying.

They were in Harlowton one winter day and spotted one of the local "characters" walking down the street in an old moth-eaten fur coat.

Marguerite stopped Alberta and looked at her mink coat and her own Persian Lamb and said, "Bertie, we're getting to look just like her."

With that, they went to Billings and bought a new mink for Alberta and a new Persian Lamb for Marguerite. The lamb coat of Marguerite's had a mink collar and she chose a mink hat to go with her new coat.

Alberta generally wore a felt hat and started to wear red hats more and more until the last decades of her life she always wore red, unless it was an old hat of Dave's. Alberta would often wear

a hat in the house if her hair needed fixing. She also claimed that in winter the hat kept her warmer. One signature hat, however, was a straw hat with plastic red cherries around the band that she liked to wear into Martinsdale. The hat sported fewer and fewer cherries each year, but it was always there, perched on Alberta's head.

The girls each had a diamond band, gifts from their father in an earlier time. In 1958, they took them from the safe deposit box at the bank and took them to the Peacock Jewelers to be repaired and made into watch bands. The repair order indicated that the jeweler added a Gerard Perregaux watch and 20-3 pt. diamonds to the original bracelet of 165 diamonds.

Alberta had 22 diamonds added to the original 158, although she had an Omega watch rather than the Perregaux. They were stunning pieces and the girls enjoyed wearing them although people kept warning them about exposing themselves to robbery. When the girls left the house and didn't take their jewelry with them, they left their beds unmade and hid the jewelry in the foot of the bed in the crumpled sheets. They finally decided to heed the warnings of their friends and put them in the safety deposit box with Charlie's large gold nugget stickpin.

Alberta had a smaller stickpin that she wore—also a gold nugget with a diamond. Marguerite and Alberta also wore their mother's "butterfly" pin, a lovely little brooch of many different jewels—a gift from Charlie. Alberta also enjoyed the jewelry of the South west Indians. She had a bright red dress that showed her Squash Blossom necklace well and she wore a number of the turquoise bracelets.

Alberta always wore a large diamond ring. My son, as a child, was admiring it one day. "Sure is a lot bigger than Mama's," he told her.

"Yes, Honey," she replied. "But your mother got a man with hers."

Two Bairs and a Lamb

Dave married Marguerite on January 3, 1939. They secretly stashed their wedding clothes in a sheep wagon and after each had changed in the wagon, drove to White Sulphur Springs and got married, destroying plans, the paper said, "of an elaborate home wedding."

There is no record as to how Charlie reacted to the elopement of his 49-year old daughter, but in a saving grace gesture told his friends that he instructed the girls that one of them had to marry Dave to "keep a good foreman."

Born April 25, 1893 in Whithorn, Scotland, David W. Lamb came to the United States as a young man and served in the Aviation Corps during World War I. After the war he homesteaded near Big Timber and later bought a ranch there. He married and had a son, but when his wife died, he left the son with the grandparents and moved to Martinsdale and became the foreman of the Bair Ranches. In Dave's will, his assets were left to Marguerite, but she in turn put the money in a fund for the education of his grandchildren.

An active Mason and a member of the Saint Minian Lodge, No. 499 in Newton Stewart, Scotland, one of the oldest lodges, Dave was also a member of the Knights Templar Palestine Lodge 18 of Harlowton. In 1950, he was initiated into the Al Bedoo Shrine Temple in Billings.

Marguerite fixed up the cook's house in the back for Dave until the big house could be enlarged. They did this by moving the double garage to the north and moving the guest house and attaching it to the main house on the north side in 1939. The bedroom off the guest house addition became known as Dave's room because it had a picture of Dave there.

Alberta was close to Marguerite and very fond of Dave. The

three of them went everywhere together. At home, Alberta cooked and fussed over Dave as much as Marguerite. People who didn't know them would often ask which woman Dave was married to.

Marguerite

Dave had a great sense of humor. In the 1930s, everyone listened to Ma Perkins over the radio—it was probably one of the first "soap operas." Every year the program featured a flower seed promotion and one year, Alberta sent for some flower seeds. She planted them along the house, and watered and cared for the bed. Only one plant seemed to come from the packet, but it grew and flourished. It had large green leaves, but no flower as yet. Alberta showed it to Dave and asked his opinion—if it were really a plant from the packet of seeds. Dave praised the plant and encouraged Alberta to care for it. He admonished her through the next month to water and care for this wonderful plant. When the flowers appeared, the plant revealed itself as a burdock—a noxious weed. Dave had a good laugh at Alberta's expense.

In September 1956, Dave sent a story to the Meagher County News, headlined, "Lamb Kills Bear that Kills Bear's Lamb" This is the story:

Marguerite, Dave and Alberta

Martinsdale: "Lamb kills bear that killed Bear's Lamb," said Dave Lamb telling the story and added that it was the first time he ever used a Cadillac to chase down a bear.

Mr. and Mrs. Dave Lamb and Miss Alberta Bair were leaving the ranch in their Cadillac, heading for Mosby—a 500-mile round trip. As they turned north on the Martinsdale detour Alberta called attention to a peculiar looking dog streaking through their orchard and up the hill.

"That's no dog," said Dave, "it's a bear!" and he whirled the car around to go back for his rifle. They had heard a commotion the night before in their sheep corral. He took a quick look to see that the rifle was loaded, and they started out, turning off the road to the Bair's dry land hayfield and climbing the hill to head the bear off. But the bear had got ahead of them, and they finally saw him crossing a slough to the north, heading in the general direction of Johnny Duncan's mailbox.

So back they tore over boulders and badger holes to circle the slough and head the bear off. They turned in from highway 6 just below the diversion ditch and might have had the bear there but for a little creek which the bear crossed on the jump but the car couldn't cross at all. Back they went to the highway over ditches, gullies and rock piles and came in sight of the bear at the corner of Charles Holliday's field. Dave took a long shot and toppled the bear, but when he pulled the trigger a second time the gun clicked—he had killed the bear with the one shell he had in his rifle.

A Scotchman with a delightful sense of humor, he wrote poetry for a pastime. Once, while convalescing at the Mayo Clinic, Grace Stone Coates wrote him, as she prepared the local news for the weekly paper.

Dear Dave—Saturday, news day. Alberta said maybe you didn't want to be in the paper so I didn't hospitalize you Publicly.

We send you only good thoughts, and wish you didn't have to hurt. I'm going to head Stimpson off from getting all the meadow mushrooms, which ought to be on their way soon now, if the weather ever gets warm.

Mrs. Heath prepared a chicken for her mother, the baggage master forgot to pick up the parcels post sack, Mrs. Heath was stuck with the chicken, so I bought it—you know Wanamaker's slogan: One man's necessity is another's opportunity.

The chicken is in the pot,
Henderson's on the cot,
I'm pestering you on the typewriter

Dave with his dog

But don't think this is so hot!
Good wishes and a short session to you.
It must have inspired him, because while he was convalescing he wrote, "Montana My Home."
Put on the big skillet—I'm coming back home
To the land where the deer and the antelope roam
Where the coyote's wail at the dawn of the day
And the lonesome sheep herder has squandered his pay.

Where the porcupines gnaw on the cottonwood trees
And the antelope skims thru the sage scented breeze
Where the woolies are tops and the cattle are round.
And the wool in the grease is worth four bits a pound.

Where the Rockies are piercing the sun's gilded beams
And the wheat has established the honyockers dreams
Where pleasures are many and troubles are rare.
And the little bum lambs go to bed with the Bairs.

Where liquor goes straight and poker's the play
And the mowers sound sweet in the meadows of hay
Where the punchers are tough and the bronks hard as nails
And the woodchucks and gophers are flipping their tail.

Where with good grass and water we'll always survive
Whiles Tim as boss wrangler is heading the drive
Take me back to Montana—no more will I roam
Outside of Heaven, Montana's my Home.

During the 1930s, Alberta decided to marry, but called it off when she realized her suitor was less than enthusiastic. I found this out years later, when she and I made an inventory of her old clothes. Alberta told me to open the top drawer of a small federal chest. Inside I found several articles of silk underwear, in the sleek design typical of the mid 1930s—very plain, no lace.

"This was for my trousseau when I thought I was going to marry Steve Ingersoll," she said.

In 1928, the Ingersoll family bought the neighboring ranch and Harold Ingersoll and his family spent the summers there and became close friends of Charles and Mary Bair and their two daugh-

ters. When Harold's brother, Steve came to visit, the families did a little matchmaking. Although Alberta said she had been engaged fourteen times, she was now forty and had not been married.

When Marguerite and Alberta visited friends in Chicago, Alberta stayed on after Marguerite went home to go to a party at Steve's apartment.

"I didn't know many of the people," said Alberta," and Steve more or less ignored me to be host. I thought I would stay later and have a chance to visit, but when the other guests left; he just went to his bedroom and went to bed."

"Good heavens," I said, "what happened then?"

"Nothing happened," Alberta waved her hand. "That was it. That was the end of that. I got on the train the next day and came home. He married later and got a rich wife."

I thought it was sad that she kept the lingerie and never used it.

When Charlie Bair died in 1943, the family was bereft. Alberta wrote to a friend:

> We lost our darling Dad March 8th. We are simply heartbroken. There is a void in our hearts and lives that never will be filled. Dad was such a wonderful person. We miss him terribly.
>
> Dad, although he never felt especially well since he had the Flu two years ago, was very active until about the first of February. All of us went to Billings for the Woolgrowers convention, which was dedicated to Dad. He seemed to enjoy seeing all of his old friends. As he did not feel very well we stayed in Billings. We did everything we could for him, even chartering a plane to bring Dr. Garbuson for consultation with our doctors and we were very fortunate to have three nurses, but the doctors said that it was not a surgery case, but

the breaking down of a super machine, something no doctor could combat.

I didn't realize that it was possible for one man to have so many friends. His room was filled with flowers and he received over 500 floral pieces. Friends from California to New York tried to charter planes to come to Billings. Many people were turned away from Smith's Chapel…he looked so wonderful and peaceful in his red shirt and red silk knit tie. As many people said, 'Charlie is like an institution of the West, he will live on forever.' That helps a little bit, but not much.

Mary Bair died in 1950. Alberta and Marguerite had taken their mother to Billings to the doctor and they were just ready to come home, when Mary unexpectedly died of a heart attack.

Marguerite, Dave and Alberta continued to work very compatibly together. They spent most of their time in the kitchen. Added to the 40s décor there were tiles over the sink from Scotland and a large map of that country on the south wall. A colorful ruffle went over the top of the windows, but it was often kept in the drawer to keep it from fading.

To the south, there was the utility room with a large cooler and freezer, cupboards and a washer and dryer. They shared the household chores and ran the ranch. Dave, in turn, seemed to accept it that he had two women to escort. Alberta and Marguerite continued to travel together as well, going to Martinsdale for the mail and to shop at the little grocery store there or on to Billings. No matter how late, when they drove in, Alberta would go into the house and check the mouse traps before Marguerite would come in.

Once Alberta was out, she enjoyed a party more than her quiet sister and husband. At our house one evening, it was getting late.

Marguerite said, "Bertie, it's time we went home."

"Sissy," Alberta replied. "When I take a bath and comb my hair, I want to stay up until midnight."

With Mary's death, the daughters started to make plans for their home. They decided years before to leave their house as a museum to the people of Montana in tribute to their family and for people to enjoy who could not travel to Europe to see the European antiques. In 1953, they spent three months in Europe, staying each place two weeks. London was their immediate favorite. In all they made twenty trips to Europe in the next decades to shop for antiques, going one time on the Queen Mary, but generally flying.

On one of their shopping trips in New York, they spotted a set of Meissen dishes that matched a tureen they had gotten in New York in 1961. The proprietor said he had just sold a complete set to Jackie Onassis. Curious to know the value of their piece, Alberta asked if they ever sold pieces out of the set—she wondered how much that tureen might cost. He would check and later reported to the girls at their hotel that they could have the tureen for $3000. They had paid $300 for the one they had in New York after bargaining down from the asking price of $450.

Alberta always concluded this story by saying the painters were busy at the house back in Martinsdale, and Marguerite called Dave and told him "don't let anyone mix paint in that soup tureen!"

As the antiques arrived and were unpacked, Marguerite was always extremely nervous about how well they had traveled across the ocean and across the country to Montana.

"Sissy got so nervous," said Alberta, "she just left it to me and Mr. Feeback to unpack and went to the sheep shed or the barn and stayed until we got done. Mr. Feeback was so good to help us, but we were scared to death that he would be too rough."

In 1957, they took a trip organized by American Express to New Orleans, the Caribbean, Venezuela, Florida, and then home. The

Alberta visiting with John and Doris Clymer following a Russell Auction

first stop on their travels, however, was the Mayo Clinic. They took the train to Rochester. The Milwaukee did not have a regular stop at Martinsdale, but accommodated passengers who were ill and going to the Mayo Clinic. One time when the girls were catching the train, they had to run up the track to get to their car. The porter who waited to help them on shook his head as he watched them run and said, "Them don't look sick to me!"

Neither of the sisters ever got a credit card, although earlier had hotel cards from Biltmore and Hilton. In the winter of 1958, when the girls were headed over to Europe, they began with a stop in New York. In the city they had a difficult time cashing a check for a large amount of money. They called their friend Bob Stevens who was chairman of J.P. Stevens and Company, an established textile company and chairman of the Pan American Board. Stevens also owned the American Fork Ranch out of Melville.

Meissen Porcelain Two-handled tureen and cover, circa 1880

Alberta told Bob they were having trouble "establishing their brand."

Bob assured the bank that the Bair check was good and told the board of directors to give the Bair sisters any amount they wanted. Stevens chastised the girls for not planning time in New York with them. Then he called the president of Pan American Airlines. The next morning, a limousine called for Alberta and Marguerite at their hotel and whisked them off to the airport. There they were put on board before the other passengers were allowed on.

Marguerite described the airplane as "two-storied." She reported to Dave that they had excellent service and Alberta had a good time in the lounge visiting with some folks from Minneapolis.

Arriving in London, they were taken off the airplane first and taken through the back way to a limousine. They continued to have special service from Pan Am during their travels.

"We no sooner had arrived at hotel when Pan American's main office phoned to welcome us to London and inquire if they could do anything for us. They are sending their private limousine to take us to airport when we leave. Nice, isn't it?"

Although the main purpose of the trip may have been shopping for antiques, the sisters also took time to sightsee and sent Dave interesting reports on their travels, careful to keep the letters to one page, two sides, which they determined would not require extra postage.

Marguerite always sent her love to Dave and would faithfully check at the American Express office in each city for his letters. There were times when she or Alberta also included a chore for Dave.

"If it is important, put all our mail on the dining room table," Alberta wrote, "It will be out of your way then."

Or another time as Marguerite was off spending hundreds on antiques, she wanted to make sure her can of red paint wasn't wasted, so she wrote Dave: "Please don't let a five gallon of Red Paint freeze that I left in front of the garage. We can't use it if it freezes."

"I don't know when you will be home but I have bought some chairs and a small table, also some silver as it probably will be the last time I will make this trip. If they should come before I get home will you please make out any papers necessary to clear them and pay the freight. When you bring the boxes home, please have some one help you…"

In each capital, the Bair sisters had meetings arranged with the United States ambassadors and in Rome an audience with the Pope.

From London, they went on to Paris, Lisbon, Brussels, Zurich, Vienna, Rome and Lisbon before flying back to New York.

In 1970 the girls spent February and March in London—probably their sixteenth trip since the *Meagher County News* reported their arrival home as their thirty-second Atlantic crossing.

Dave went with the ladies one time and vowed to never to go again. He tired of carrying bags and shopping. The next year he went alone and visited with his family in Scotland. He also bought Marguerite a pair of urns that he thought were Sevres. He said he had them authenticated by three different antique experts. However, when the appraisal was done of the house in 1993, the urns were listed as German or Austrian, "a fine pair of polychrome gilt covered porcelain urns with gilt bronze mounts." It would have made no difference to Marguerite—she loved them because Dave

took the time to shop and brought them to her.

In 1962, Alberta and Marguerite added on the two-story wing to the south that contained a large bedroom and bath on the lower floor and an apartment on the second floor with an outside entrance that would be for a caretaker in the future. At the same time they added an office off to the north and west of the Pine Room. They went to Minneapolis and New York to find the bathroom fixtures they wanted and bought chintz in England. They had several carpets made to fit the rooms they were decorating—a bright red one for the office, an emerald green for Dad's room and a white one for the living room.

The girls also had new stone gateposts built at the entrance to the ranch road topped with pineapples. Pineapples, Alberta told me, were a symbol of warmth and hospitality since colonial times, the pineapple first began appearing as a motif on textiles and furniture when early seafarers brought the fruit home to New England from their voyages.

The redecorated, remodeled home was an eclectic wonder. Sitting companionably together were French commodes, Impressionist paintings, western paintings, English silver, early American pieces, Indian artifacts, Oriental rugs, Navajo rugs, family guns in the gun rack, painted china done by Mary Bair, and family pictures. And, as Alberta always said, the house was full of love.

When it was finished, Marguerite and Alberta decided to have a party in 1965 to show off the house and to repay some of their social obligations. They invited about fifty people. The ladies had everything organized to have cocktails and serve a great turkey dinner about eight o'clock. However, when they plugged in an extra coffee urn, the power went off. They hurriedly put candles around the house and told the men serving drinks to pour another. One woman slipped on a Navajo in the dark and her wig went flying.

The power outage, however, was caused by something other

than a fuse and the power company was called. The repair men had to replace the transformer outside of the house, which meant that it was close to midnight before the guests were finally fed and on their way home. The poor "girls" were understandably upset about the long cocktail party by candlelight and the late dinner, but all the guests had a terrific time. After the grand party, the girls and Dave entertained smaller groups, but the affair merited a poem written by Dave.

The long awaited time had come
The Bairs had saved their rations
They finally made up their minds
To pay their obligations.

The snow was swept from out the door
The silver shone in splendour
As Jennie hooverized the floor
They organized the bender.

The names of all good friends around
Were all adeptly listed
After many meatless days
The hunger strike was lifted.

The guests arrived in record time
And as the day was murky
They found that they could not resist
The smell of ham and turkey.

The glasses rattled at the bar
The place was filled with laughter

And many found their gracious curves
Still filled the morning after.

Alberta took them on the trail
In search of art and beauty
While others rested by the rail
And tended social duty.

The moisture mixers at the bar
With caps and vest so bonnie
The reason for so many trips
To visit Phil and Johnnie.

Some were self-supporting
And some were not so bad
But mighty few did not pursue
The arm of Old Grandad.

Some came by plane and some by train
And some just didn't make it
But those that did took off the lid
And showed that they could take it.

They all were there in festive mood
To watch the fireplaces flicker
To talk of cows and how they brouse
Between the snorts of liquor.

The pioneers were there in force
Tho some have lost their prime
But all were able to discuss

A glimpse of Early Times.

As night wore on some headed home
As the night was bitter
They hated so to hit the snow
To check the baby sitter.

The crowd was happy clean and neat
And most of them stayed on their feet
Tho many a butt that hit the floor
Was not meant for the cuspidor.

Now David and Tommy swapped their duds
Their grins were wider still
They proved that they could spill the suds
As well as John and Phil.

As time to go too soon arrived
It was the voice of all
With food and drink filled to the brink
We really had a ball.

In the late 1960s, I discovered "Sissy" or Marguerite had been cutting herself out of the family pictures. I discovered this because she had also asked me to write a book about her father, so when I went to look for a good picture of the family, there was only one family picture of all four—a casual picture of the family in front of the house. When I mentioned this to Alberta later, she said "Sissy always thought she was fat and cut herself out of the pictures."

The project was an effort of all of us—Marguerite wrote down some of her memories and Dave Lamb was a great help because he

A casual family picture

had written down some of his father-in-law's tales over the years. Alberta told me that her father leased the entire Crow Reservation, a mistake I didn't learn about until later. Bair's lease was only one of several. At first, I didn't think we had enough material for a book, so we pitched a magazine article to Vivian Palladin, editor of *Montana, the magazine of Western History.* She was enthused about the story, and came with her husband Jack, to meet the Bairs and see the house. Long after the article appeared in the autumn 1970 magazine, this friendship continued for all of us.

Twenty years later, I decided to pursue the book again, with the help of the papers from the law firm.

A good picture of the Bair family that appears in the book is one that was taken at a California polo match. It features Charlie in his high fedora, Mary in her fur coat, and Alberta in her flapper-style dress and low hat, mostly in the 1920s, judging by the dress. However, Marguerite had cut herself out of that picture as well.

Back in 1969, Marguerite at eighty was still a lovely woman. Her

Charlie, Mary and Alberta watching a polo match

skin was soft and unwrinkled and her demeanor was as smooth as her skin. She tried different diets over the years, but around 1970 I found them in the kitchen with a monster machine that was to "roll" the fat away. It looked like a lounge chair with rollers in the back and seat. It ended up shortly in the furnace room. When the museum people came to inventory the household, they could not figure out the use of this machine, and they looked doubtful when I explained.

Dave died in 1973. The funeral was in Harlowton, but he was taken to Billings to be in the family crypt. Marguerite asked our

family and Pete and Mary White of Two Dot, to go to Billings with them. We were all guests of the Bairs for dinner and overnight at the Northern Hotel.

In 1975, Marguerite fell and broke her ankle. The injury was slow to heal and they decided to go to Rochester. Alberta wrote us from the hospital…

"They put Sissy in bed immediately and she hasn't been out of it until yesterday when she sat in a chair and was taken to therapy…

"When she first entered the hospital fifteen doctors came to see her. That frightened us terribly until we learned that the head doctor and four of his fellows had come from three different sections, vascular, bone and general. Now, just morning and night visits from a vascular section. It was like an invading army and one expected the fellows to salute their captain any moment.

"The opinion of the doctor here is that Sissy didn't have a broken leg or even a slight fracture as the x-ray couldn't detect a healed fracture but a very sprained ankle.

"…Do write and tell us the news and scandal if you don't know any make it up. It would make us feel more like home."

Back home, the pain and swelling of the leg continued and in December Marguerite went into the hospital in Billings where she died of heart failure on December 23, 1976. Her last words to Alberta were, "What will you do without me?"

Alberta Alone

Alberta's friends were worried about her after Marguerite's death. She and her sister had been so very close—some even wondered if Alberta would live long without Marguerite. To help her through her grief, Alberta turned to her faith in Christian Science. Mary

had instilled in her daughters a love of and faith in God. Alberta started each morning with a prayer of affirmation that her mother had taught her when she was five years old.

Let Every Morning Seem to Say
There's something happy on its way
For God is Love and all Powerful

When personal grief or troubles seemed too much, Alberta turned to her Christian Science practioner, a person who is trained to practice healing through prayer according to the principles of the church and Mary Baker Eddy's *Science and Health with a Key to the Scriptures*. Alberta spent long hours on the phone with her practioner in the lonely days after Marguerite's death.

After a year, Alberta began taking a renewed interest in life, beginning with Marguerite's will. That will, written in 1961, created the Charles M. Bair Memorial Trust. Alberta was the executor with the Midland National Bank of Billings as co-executor. Alberta on the same date, had executed a will similar in many respects…and for the same general purposes. Marguerite wrote:

> It is not my intention that my will shall fail in any manner because of any change or alteration or failure on the part of the will of my said sister. However, it is our mutual desire that from and after the death of the survivor of the two of us, the charitable trusts hereby created shall be administered along the same lines and for the same purposes, and in this connection it is my will and my intention that my trust, though separate from the trust of my sister, Alberta M. Bair, be managed and administered through mutual trusteeship, so that the proceeds from her trust and mine may contribute to and

be paid out and expended for the purposes of the Charles M. Bair Memorial Trust, in loving memory of our father.

Marguerite's will created the Charles M. Bair Memorial Scholarships that gave eight scholarships for graduating seniors—four in Wheatland County and four in Meagher County, a marvelous gift to these rural counties. In choosing the recipients of scholarships, consideration was to be given to achievement in high school, both academic and otherwise, good citizenship, moral character, apparent ability to benefit by a college education and financial need.

After the scholarships, the net income from the trust was to be divided "in such proportion as the trustee may…determine" to any general nonprofit hospital in "Wheatland or Meagher counties, the Billings Deaconess Hospital, the Billings First Church of Christ, Scientist and The Mother Church, the First Church of Christ, Scientist in Boston, Massachusetts."

Alberta and Marguerite were always interested in Martinsdale's young people, stopping to visit with them at any opportunity. Richard Moe was on the bus with them one evening after school and the Bair sisters asked him a number of questions—how he was doing and what he was taking in school. Richard, who was ten years old at the time and painfully shy, never forgot the encounter.

Alberta, as trustee of her sister's trust, looked for ways to select the students for the scholarships. She asked three people in Meagher County and three in Wheatland County to serve as advisors in picking the candidates. The bank reviewed the family financial picture of students applying, and then turned the names and applications over to the two committees. Over the years, the trust department asked to have more control over the scholarships and the local committees were dissolved. Alberta, however, still retained the final vote over the recipients, if she wanted to exert that privi-

lege. Occasionally she did vote in favor of a special situation.

Alberta told me about one student who asked if the scholarship included room and board for her horse. She also shared with me the fudge that one mother sent in thanks for her son's scholarship. Alberta appreciated the fact that the mother continued to thank her.

When Alberta was first in charge of her sister's estate, the scholarships were presented at commencement exercises by the school. However, she was asked so many times to come; she finally did attend some events in person. This was something of a turning point for her. Previously, the girls had always been reticent to publicize their gifts, but Alberta began to enjoy going in person, relishing the joy of giving. She blossomed from the warmth of the people who thanked her for making such a change in their lives. One student's story, in particular, warmed her heart. The young woman had two children to care for, one who was handicapped, and her job opportunities were limited. Alberta had to go to court to change the wording in Marguerite's will to allow the scholarship to go to "graduates" rather than "graduating students" in order for the scholarship to be awarded. The young woman went to nursing school and once she graduated, she was able to support her children. Alberta beamed when she talked about this change in the young woman's life.

Alberta also distributed gifts of money to hospitals at Harlowton and White Sulphur Springs and the Deaconess Hospital in Billings. A representative of the Christian Science Church came to the Northern Hotel in Billings to receive their check.

In the fall of 1986, the Mental Health Association awarded Alberta an Outstanding Citizenship Award for all she had done for Billings and Montana. There was an "Alberta Day" in Billings complete with a lavish banquet and letters of appreciation from many, including President Ronald Reagan.

One year she asked me to take her to the scholarship ceremony in Judith Gap in Wheatland County. When we got there, we found we were a day late. Alberta had written the wrong date on her calendar. The folks at Judith Gap were disappointed. Alberta, who remembered the good food served at the school was especially disappointed. We stopped at Harlowton for dinner before heading home, Alberta berating herself all the while for writing the wrong date on her calendar. She seldom made mistakes.

On July 29, 1989, many scholarship recipients gathered to thank her in person as part of Alberta Bair Day in White Sulphur Springs. Hosted by the Mountainview Memorial Hospital, the celebration was held to thank Alberta for all she had done for Meagher County. The scholarship recipients from over the years put a book together of their letters of thanks.

Alberta made gifts to other organizations as well. Tim Healey, president of the trust department of Midland National Bank helped Marguerite and Alberta with their finances. After Marguerite died, Alberta depended very heavily on Tim's financial advice. Alberta was fond of Tim and said he was like a brother she never had. Each December, when taxes were being tabulated, Tim reminded her that it was time again to make some gifts.

Tim gathered the names of some charities from people in the trust department and then presented them to Alberta when she came to town or he traveled to the ranch to get the checks written before the first of the year. The Boys and Girls Club, which had helped disadvantaged youth in Billings since 1971, was one of Tim's favorite charities—and it became one of Alberta's as well—over the years she supported the club with generous gifts. In 1985, when Alberta sold a piece of property she owned in Los Angeles, California, for $22.8 million, she presented the Billings Boys and Girls Club with a gift of $700,000 to build a new club, now the Bair

Family Clubhouse. The California sale also provided the money for a science building at Rocky Mountain College.

As much as she enjoyed giving out the checks, she did not always enjoy writing them—Alberta did not like to part with her money and made no bones about it to her friends. Alberta, by nature, was careful with money, and the tendency became more pronounced with age. However, Tim advised her, she would be paying a lot more in taxes if she didn't. So, somewhat reluctantly, she would write out the donation checks.

"I'm going to give some," she would say, "but I want them to suffer first." By suffering she meant the uncertainty of waiting.

One of Alberta's favorite beneficiaries was the theater that now bears her name: the Alberta Bair Theater for the Performing Arts in Billings, which features performances by artists, writers, musicians, and dancers from around the world. Built at the corner of Broadway and Thirty-Fourth Street, the theater was once a Fox movie theater, which was built when the original Bair home was torn down in 1931. The community of Billings greeted the movie theater's opening with great fanfare: Charles and Mary Bair and their daughters hosted a dinner for the movie theater officials, featuring venison that had been shot by Alberta at the Martinsdale Ranch. Following dinner, the theater's first movie was shown, *Merely Mary Ann* starring Janet Gaynor and Charles Farrell. Afterward, party-goers danced at the Persian Gardens. Over the years, the theater became the home to the Billings Community Concerts, the Billings Symphony and Chorale and the Fox Committee for the Performing Arts.

In the late 1970s, when a movie company planned to remodel the theater into a three-screen Cineplex, the Fox Committee for the Performing Arts raised money to renovate the theater for the performing arts. When the committee asked Alberta for donation, she

turned them down flat. Later, she told me she was offended when committee members told her they "had her down" for $1 million. She was not one to take dictation about her contributions.

When it became apparent that the money drive would not be successful, Alberta gave them the $650,000 they needed to complete the fund-raising drive. In 1987, the theater was opened as the Alberta Bair Theater for Performing Arts. Alberta had wanted the theater named for her father, but friends, especially Tim Healey, persuaded her to let the committee name the theater for her. She was reluctant, but in 1987, when the theater was christened with a great deal of ceremony—a reception before, a concert by Burt Bacharach, and a gala dinner afterward—she smiled and told me, "You know, Lee, I do believe I rather like having the theater named for me." She continued to enjoy the gala performances each year and meeting with the top ranked performers who came to Billings. She had two reserved seats in the middle section.

"I'm not interested in what people wear, I'm interested in their minds and if they love each other and the curiosity they have about the world. That's what the theater is about, you know," Alberta said. "The theater is about love and people working together." She truly loved the theater and attended as many productions she could. After she died, her trust continued to support the theater.

Through the 1970s and 1980s Alberta took her work as a philanthropist seriously, supporting arts, education, and charitable organizations throughout Montana. She wrote a check for the flag pavilion at the Museum of the Rockies which was named for her father. When I mentioned that she should have mentioned the Bair women, she gave the money the next year to have them named in a plaque that is in the museum's foyer. "It's your fault," she told me. "You said I should put our names on something."

There were other gifts, less publicized, such as a variety of social

Alberta Bair Theater in Billings

and cultural institutions including the White Sulphur Springs and Billing libraries, Meagher County Historical Society, Billings Symphony, Yellowstone Art Center, Holter Museum of Art in Helena, the Parmly Billings Library, Zoo Montana, The Billings Symphony Orchestra & Chorale, J.K. Ralston Studio at Rocky Mountain College, Montana Mental Health Association, and St. John's Lutheran Home. She told me she once made a gift to a "seniors" organization, but told them no publicity. She said, "I don't want to be associated with old people." A gift to a shelter for women also received little publicity but was one of her favorite gifts.

Alberta was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Laws by Rocky Mountain College in 1982, an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Montana State University in 1988, and the Phillip Fortin

Alberta receiving Honorary Doctorate of Humane Laws, Montana State University 1988

Humanitarian Award in 1986. When Montana State University awarded Alberta her honorary doctorate at the 1988 commencement, they recognized her contribution throughout the state in the "areas of education, health care, the performing arts and the preservation of our cultural heritage." As President William Tietz continued, "as a humanitarian, you perceived the ways, as a philanthropist, you provided the means…your generosity has

College host Harvey Larson, Alberta, Phil Rostad, Lee Rostad, LaVille Larson at Montana State University

touched the lives of countless Montanans."

And as the *Billings Gazette* remarked on the occasion of Alberta Bair Day in Billings, 1987, "If you study the list of recipient organizations, you will notice something. All of them, in one way or another, are connected to the work of enriching and enhancing civilization and our life on earth; music, theater, art, education, mental health and medicine."

In 1975, Charlie Bair was inducted into the Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage in Oklahoma City. Several years later, Alberta was asked to join the Hall's Board of Directors, the only woman member at that time. Bill Mckay of Roscoe, Montana, was

also a board member and gallantly escorted Alberta to the meetings. Although a seasoned traveler, Alberta had not traveled out of the state since she and Marguerite had gone to Rochester, and her age made traveling more difficult for her.

In short order, in the early 70s, we had lost my father-in-law, Dave and Marguerite. My mother-in-law, Pearl Rostad, and Alberta were great friends and Pearl often stayed with Alberta for several days at a time. Pearl's room was Alberta's downstairs bedroom west of the living room.

One day in the late 70s, Alberta called Pearl to come down one day and help her look for a ring. She was in the habit of taking off her jewelry in the kitchen and putting it in the ashtray on the counter. She was still a smoker, so when she missed her mother's ring that she had been wearing, she was afraid she had thrown out the contents of the ash tray in the stove. Pearl spent a couple of days helping Alberta search the kitchen, the stove and the garbage cans, but Muzzy's ring was never found.

When Pearl died in 1983, Alberta was seated with the family at the funeral, and later joined the family when we went out to scatter her ashes on the ranch.

Alberta also joined our family for some holidays, such as Thanksgiving, but she wanted to celebrate Christmas at the Bair Ranch with our family and their other good friends, the White family of Two Dot. There were other guests over the years—Alberta always wanted a full table. The last year we had Christmas dinner at the Bair Ranch, she insisted Helen Hancock—a Midland Bank official, but also a friend—drive up from Billings because she didn't want Helen to spend Christmas alone.

Alberta insisted on preparing the turkey and aspic herself. The aspic salad was traditional for her and she would spend the night before cutting the ingredients and carefully preparing it along with

Alberta and Pearl Rostad

the turkey. Once these "main ingredients" were taken care of, she would retire to the Pine Room and entertain her guests, while a couple of us pitched in and finished the meal, setting the table with place mats, large napkins with an embroidered "B", one of the several sets of china, and crystal, stemmed French goblets. We always had a large poinsettia on the table—the only decorations she had except for a couple of rather ancient plastic wreaths that Alberta put on the two front doors. She and Marguerite never had a tree—for so many years, they had been traveling during Christmas.

Our relationship with Alberta deepened in 1986, when my husband, Phil, contracted pneumococcal meningitis. He was in the hospital in White Sulphur Springs, Great Falls and finally Salt Lake City for three months. I brought him home in a wheel chair with

Christmas dinner—Lee Rostad, Phil Strope, Rosie Strope, Alberta and Leonard Llewellyn

no memory. We had many years of therapy before he regained some of his memory and health.

I visited with Alberta every day by phone, and we also went once or twice a week to have dinner with Alberta—the "chatter" and association were a big help to recovering memory and health. We still went together to art festivals or to Billings.

Since its inception in 1968, Phil and I had attended the Russell Art Auction in Great Falls. Organized by the Great Falls Ad Club to benefit the C.M. Russell Museum, the event features western artists in quick-draw events and then an auction of exceptional western art. After Marguerite's death, we asked Alberta to join us. Alberta had known C.M. Russell as a young woman—so she immediately became a celebrity at the event.

At the auction, Alberta renewed her friendship with Ginger Renner, who with her husband had visited the Bair ranch in 1974.

Fred Renner was a native of Great Falls, and his parents were friends of Charlie and Nancy Russell. Fred remembered seeing Russell's work as a five-year-old, displayed in the businesses along Central Avenue. As a young boy, he started collecting Russell's post cards, which were printed locally by the W. T. Ridgely Company. Renner worked for the Forest Service and traveled in the west extensively the first years of his career giving him the opportunity to scout out owners of Russell works and cataloging them. He lived in Washington, D.C. as Chief of the Range Management Division of the Soil Conservation Service, and this also involved traveling. Again, he used the travel to find more Russells to catalog. He spent his life collecting and cataloging the artist's works and was considered the premiere Russell authority.

Ginger, an art authority in her own right, added her husband's knowledge to her own.

When we would arrive at the Heritage Inn in Great Falls, Alberta would be swept away by Ginger and the members of the National Board of Directors of the C.M. Russell Museum who wined and dined her. On Sunday, after the auction she often invited some of the auction-goers to see the house in Martinsdale. She would often ask me to give the house tour, while she visited with the other guests in the Pine Room.

Over the years, Alberta became closely associated with the Russell auction and museum and she donated a gift of $25,000 to the C.M. Russell Museum each year. In 1986, she was awarded the Scriver Bronze Award at the auction in recognition of her friendship with the late artist. She was asked to serve on the National Advisory Board and was only one of three women to become an honorary member of the Charlie Russell Riders, a private philanthropic enterprise that supported the museum. In 1993, she became an honorary chair of the twenty-fifth C.M. Russell Auction.

We were included with most of the festivities, but it was all Alberta's show. One year, when I was out of town, Phil took Alberta to Great Falls and found that hotel accommodations had been made for Alberta and her "chauffeur." We usually left Alberta at the hotel and stayed with family.

One year, Corrie Llewellyn and I decided we had more paintings than walls and we planned to sell some so that we could buy more. Leonard and Corrie Llewellyn moved to Martinsdale for the summers—Leonard had lived there as a boy—and they joined our little group traveling to art shows. We all tried to pick artists we thought would grow in reputation over the years. While we enjoyed the idea of art as an investment, we bought what we liked and wanted to hang on our walls. It was a great game and we enjoyed sharing it.

Corrie and I rented a display room at the Russell Auction and set up shop. Alberta got in the spirit of things by helping us to man the room. We did not sell much, however, and generally ended up trading between ourselves and with other collectors. After trying the display room for two years, we went back to the fun of bidding at the auction.

In 1992, Corrie and I decided that Alberta shouldn't stay by herself in the hotel, so Corrie stayed in a room adjoining hers. The next year, Connie Olsen, traveled and stayed in the room next door to Alberta.

Alberta accompanied Phil and me on trips to the Museum of the Rockies in Bozeman. We traveled to Helena's Holter Museum, where they named a gallery for the Bair family in honor of her gifts. Each year, we also went to Helena's Western Rendezvous of Art, sponsored by the Montana Historical Society and the Civic Center. With Billings friends, Alberta also visited the Yellowstone Art Museum and provided them with a donation of $25,000 each year, knowing that they depended on this gift to keep the doors open.

Alberta giving the house tour

At each party, banquet, buffet or tea, Alberta was the center of attention. Organizations always wanted her to support their cause—but it was more than that. She was just plain fun. When she attended any function, she'd have her hat on her head, a drink in her hand, and a twinkle in her eyes—and she would laugh and ask, "Are we having fun yet?"

Over the years, Alberta had a number of interesting guests at the

Alberta, Corrie Llewellyn, and Arlene Hooker Faye enjoy art show in Helena

ranch—welcome and not-so-welcome. In 1979, Alberta answered a knock at the door. There stood some fishermen looking for permission to fish. There at the door were four men on their annual Montana fishing trip; Howard (Chub) Stewart, an IBM executive; George Kerr, an attorney; Bob Domaille, a car dealer and banker; and Bill Shedd of Rochester, Minnesota. They had previously stopped at the North Fork Ranch to ask permission to fish the North Fork of the Musselshell River, where they were told that the stream was reserved for employees of the Bair Ranch. The foreman sent them to Alberta to get permission to fish the South Fork of the Musselshell.

"We pulled the motor home up in those years, and I went to the door in my waders and rang the bell," Chub Steward said of his first meeting with Alberta Bair. "My first view was of all the shell casings on the steps in front of the door. I found out later they were there from Alberta's shooting at the gophers in her flowers. She would shoot at them out the front door."

Chub said when she finally came to the door and he told her they were from Rochester and were looking for a stream to fish, Alberta said, "I know Rochester. I know Dr. Rotorooter." I told her I knew Rochester, too, and it is Dr. Wrightmeyer,

That was the beginning of a long friendship. Chub told me Alberta invited them all in for a drink and visit. After their drink, the men thought they should get on with the fishing, "But," he said, "Alberta said 'you're not going fishing yet, I'm going to show you the house.' She showed us the house and we must have been there for a couple of hours."

After the initial visit, the fishermen came each year and parked their motor home in the front yard. Each visit they would invite Alberta out to their home on wheels for a fish dinner. Pearl and Phil and I were included and one year we reciprocated with dinner in the formal dining room. I remember we introduced the gentlemen to their first taste of Rocky Mountain Oysters.

Another visitor at the Bair home was the actor George Montgomery, who had met Alberta in Great Falls at the Russell Art Auction. Montgomery was interested in leaving his collections to a museum in Montana where he had been born.

When Bob and Dorothy Stevens bought the American Fork Ranch at Melville, their whole family would join them. After he retired, Bob enjoyed nothing more than going with his driver on short trips around the area and often called at some of the ranches. One summer, at Bob's suggestion we drove to the Tenderfoot area

George Montgomery and Alberta

in the northwest part of the county where the Bair Ranch had ten sections. (One was traded later for forest property at Martinsdale.) Charlie ran sheep there and had built a commissary cabin to house supplies for his herders. He used the property until traffic and settlement made it more difficult to trail the sheep from Martinsdale, and then leased the grazing to a local rancher. A local man from White Sulphur Springs had the use of the commissary cabin in return for maintaining it.

There were six of us—Bob and his driver, Alberta, Pearl and Phil and I. It was a grand day. We picnicked at the Bair cabin, enjoyed the scenery and ended up back in White Sulphur Springs—toasting a successful day in the parking lot.

Other visitors were not so welcome. Even though the commu-

Alberta and Bob Stevens

nity kept an eye on the Bair property and privacy, security at the house was only the locked doors. Dave's car was part of the "security system." It was left parked in the front, Alberta said so people would think someone was at home. The other part of the "security system" was Alberta's .22 that she kept in the foyer—but that was mainly for "protection" from gophers.

One break-in occurred when a carload of strangers stopped at the bar in Martinsdale. After a few beers, the men started talking about the big house down the road. They apparently decided that it would be a good place to break in to see what was available. After

a few drinks, they piled out and sped the mile down the road to the Bair Ranch. Alberta was in Billings at the time.

The other bar patrons, however, had been listening to their conversation and followed them out of the bar. The burglars parked the car just past the entrance and left a woman sitting in the car. The others walked to the back of the house, climbed up the balcony over the kitchen, and broke into a window on the second floor. When they came out of the house with some jewelry, however, they were caught by "the local vigilantes" as the *Meagher County News* called them.

Another break-in occurred when Alberta was home, although the perpetrators may not have known since the car was in the garage. Several young men came in the back door looking for the television, liquor and guns. One man, however, took Alberta's hat, threw it on the floor of the foyer, and hit it with a hatchet, slashing the hat and scarring the floor. Fortunately, Alberta was upstairs and she had locked the door that led to the upstairs bedrooms—and she sensibly did not try to confront the burglars. Something, however, startled them, because as they were headed out to their car, they dumped the guns in the water in the moat in front of the house. One gun was never recovered. Gene Tierney, the local game warden, dried and cleaned the guns for Alberta and there was no permanent damage.

After that, Tim Healey and I insisted that Alberta put a phone in her bedroom upstairs. A retired ranch hand was moved into a mobile home next to the barn. Also, we had the Mountain View Medical Center in White Sulphur Springs put in a Life Line system for Alberta and enlisted one of the EMTs in Martinsdale to be available to answer any emergencies. Alberta called in each evening, and if she forgot, the operator on the Life Line System would call her. On a couple of occasions when Alberta didn't hear the

phone, the EMT, Billeta Swallow, was at Alberta's door to check on her. There was never an emergency, but it gave Alberta and the rest of the community some sense of security. I also visited with her every evening and she was always interested in what was going on in the valley. When gossip was a little sparse, she would chide me to make something up.

In the 1990s, keeping up with Alberta's social life became a community project. Many other neighbors joined us in seeing that Alberta had a ride when she wanted to go somewhere. She attended events in Harlowton with Norman and June Voldseth; if she wanted to attend parties up the South Fork of the Musselshell, Don and Ethel Berg took her. Alberta loved the parties and enjoyed visiting with the men about ranching or politics. She laughed and flirted, the life of the party. Bertie never wanted to eat, and generally we fixed a plate for her to take home and eat much later.

Alberta began to spend more time in Billings as she was invited to a number of parties and she enjoyed them.

"I wish you would get in with those people so you could go with me," she said to me one day.

"Not I," I said. "I have way too much to do at home." Working with Phil's health problems and helping run the ranch took much of my time.

Alberta loved stories and was a great raconteur. She had several that she told, usually about older people although she never admitted to being old. When she renewed her driver's license, she confessed to me that the birth date was wrong on the license.

"When we first came here, we didn't want the girls in the courthouse to know how old we were, so we storied about our age. Do you think they'll do anything now about that?"

I could see she was really concerned, so I assured her, "You're probably safe from any legal action." Her driver's license continued

to list her birth date as 1904 instead of 1895.

One time, after a trip to Billings, she told me, "I'm so embarrassed. I had a couple of drinks and they wanted me to tell a story and I got up and told dirty stories to 200 people in public. I'll never be able to face people in Billings again."

Sometimes, coming back to the ranch through Lavina, Alberta put the gas pedal to the floor, using the current speed law of "reasonable and prudent."

The Highway Patrolmen recognized her car and watched out for her, occasionally pulling her over.

She'd roll down her window and look up at him apologetically.

"Alberta," he'd tell her. "I clocked you at 75 miles per hour through town."

"Heavens," she'd cry. "It's good you didn't catch me beforehand. I was doing 90."

I don't believe she ever received a ticket.

In the winter of 1984, Alberta decided to host a party to reciprocate for all the parties she attended in Billings and in the Musselshell Valley. I suggested that she throw a big party in Billings, but she wanted to entertain everyone at the ranch. I love to plan parties, so I agreed to help her. There were a number of people invited, so we decided that the people who had to travel along distance were invited for the afternoon and the local people would come at a later hour.

There were more than one hundred guests, but the house is so large that it never appeared crowded. Drinks were served at the bar in the office and a lavish buffet was spread in the formal dining room. Governor Ted Schwinden and Mrs. Schwinden flew over in the helicopter and landed in the alfalfa field south of the house. Alberta sent Phil over in the white Cadillac to pick them up, and they bounced back across the field to the party.

Governor and Mrs. Ted Schinden

Alberta had the best time of all. She loved to have the house lit up and full of people.

Over the years, Alberta always told us to bring our guests down to see the house and visit. We scheduled different events there as well—a Republican Tea, The Hobby Club, the Western Corral and a

writers' group from Billings. The writers group didn't have a name, but was an informal bunch that met once a month to discuss their work and enjoy a meal together. I tried to have them each summer for lunch and Alberta always invited them on a visit to the Bair House. Sue Hart of Billings remembers many long conversations with Alberta about the future of the house as a museum and tribute to the Bair family.

The Corral of the Westerners out of Billings, men and women interested in Western history, were invited for a tour of the house, lunch at our ranch and a trip to Castle, the old silver town in the Castle Mountains. Everyone enjoyed the visit to the house so much that lunch was late and no one ever went sightseeing to the ghost town.

Alberta was an excellent driver, but after her eye sight began to fail, she ran off the road turning off Montana Highway 12 to Martinsdale. She didn't drive again, although the Cadillac sat in the driveway and she liked other people to drive it when they took her anyplace.

I had begun to realize Alberta was having trouble with her vision when one day she said, "If I put on too much rouge when we are going out, be sure and tell me. Remember our friend in Great Falls? She kept putting on more and more rouge until she looked like a clown."

There were other signs of diminishing eye sight. She asked me to read her mail and make out checks that she would sign with the aid of a card along the signature line. Business people asked me about overdue bills of hers. I called Helen Hancock and she said she had been getting complaints as well, so Helen began paying the house and the ranch bills and I helped with the small day-to-day expenditures. I tried to convince Alberta to get special glasses or equipment, but she didn't want to do that—she did not want

anyone to know. We did get a special panel to enhance the TV because she enjoyed watching television programs until late in the night—gathering tidbits of Hollywood gossip or beauty tips—that she would regale Phil and me with the next day.

"Did you know," she told me one morning, matter-of-factly, "that the stars used hemorrhoid cream on the faces for a quick face life?"

Alberta never complained about her health. Only one time she mentioned a headache. I asked if she had taken aspirin and she told me she hadn't had any aspirin in the house for 50 years.

After the longtime Bair ranch foreman Louis Larson and his wife Dolly retired in 1978, Alberta started looking for another foreman, but she was having a hard time finding one with a wife that would cook. The Bair Ranch was one of the only ranches in the valley that still maintained a cookhouse—the other ranchers hired married help. Alberta did not want to pay the increased wage that was necessary—she wanted things to stay the same on her family ranch. She did, however, decide to shut the cook house down, convinced; at last, the "old days" were gone.

Alberta asked me to help her fix up a ranger station cabin for a married couple one half-mile northeast from the home ranch, but before we were done she decided to turn the management over to the bank. They, in turn, hired a Bozeman management firm and Jim Murphy was hired as foreman. The ranger house remodeling was completed by the new management. It was about this time that she met with her advisors to draw up the Charles M. Bair Family Trust that she signed in 1990.

In the fall of 1992, Alberta was in the Deaconess Hospital in Billing. Phil and I had planned a trip to Egypt, and with great misgivings, we left. She was released while we were gone to join some Billings friends for Thanksgiving dinner, where she had a relapse. When we returned home, she was back in the hospital and very sick.

We immediately went to the Deaconess Hospital from the airport.

In the room, her hair tousled against the white pillow, the usually strong Alberta looked frail to me. I could tell she had been frightened by her seizure. She held my hand and told me, "Don't go anyplace anymore."

I promised her we would not.

When we returned from attending the Russell Art Auction in 1993, we expected Alberta would be at home a month before she had to travel to Billings for a doctor's appointment. Connie Olson had family business she wanted to take care of so decided to take Alberta down early. When Alberta checked into the hospital, she complained of a stomach ache. Her long time doctor, Dr. Nick Walter wanted her to stay for a series of tests. She was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and hospitalized immediately.

When Alberta was admitted to the hospital, she told her practitioner that she must work harder because she "needed to live another ninety-seven years." In an attempt at easing her spirits, a nurse suggested that she must be looking forward to being reunited with her family.

"Yes, but they can just wait," she retorted. "I'm not ready to go yet."

I asked the doctor if we could take her home for the rest of her time—in the home where she felt so surrounded by the family's love. Before any decision could be made, her condition worsened.

Dr. Walter gently told Alberta that she was declining faster than he had anticipated. "You told me you wanted me to be honest with you." he said.

"I know," she replied with vigor in her voice, "but I changed my mind."

Alberta had the best of care. Her nurses were kind and nurturing. Alberta held court and enjoyed the visitors that she was allowed.

I was there as often as I could get down to Billings. Her friend Penni Nance and Helen Hancock were there a great deal of the time. Tim Healey came by often. Alberta requested and drew great comfort from the Christian Science reader, who came frequently. One nurse brought in a baby lamb for Alberta to hold. She smiled and told everyone how much she enjoyed it, but, as I whispered to Tim, it was probably the only lamb she had ever held. That "hands-on" experience didn't encompass the kind of sheep business the family had been engaged in.

Ginger Renner flew up from Arizona to see Alberta and we all had a good visit and dinner in the hospital room. It was apparent that Alberta had not seen the museum proposal Ginger and Lorne Render drew up, but it was too late to make any changes now.

Alberta continued to ask Helen Hancock if everything was "okay" with the trust. Alberta was concerned about her wishes being carried out—she had outlived so many of the people she had done business with over the years.

Alberta died on May 29, 1993, in the Deaconess Hospital in Billings. Services were held June 2 in the church across the street from the house where Alberta was born and baptized. The church was packed with many friends and many people whose lives had been enhanced because of Alberta and her family.

Architecture of a Legacy

Shortly after Marguerite's death in 1976, Alberta started negotiating with the state of Montana on the resolution for the house. When Marguerite and Alberta prepared their wills many years ago, they realized that they had not provided for the future of their home. So as they headed to Europe they sat in the airport and drew

Alberta's favorite hat and suit

up a short narrative to leave the house to the state of Montana as a museum. They knew that the house was an important part of state history that they wanted to share with the people of and visitors to Montana.

When they finished writing out their wishes, Alberta sealed the letter in an envelope, and mailed it to Tim Healey at the bank.

In 1977, a delegation from the State Historical Society came to tour the house and Alberta asked me to come down and help entertain them.

One of the delegations took a look around and said, "We'll take the Russell's to Helena, and we can take the Indian collection on tour."

"Absolutely not!" Alberta said firmly, looking him straight in the eye. "I want everything left in the house exactly where it is."

The state, however, could not afford to accept the gift without an endowment. Governor Ted Schwinden and the director of the Montana Historical Society discussed how to fund the museum. Alberta wanted to leave the ranch to fund the museum, but MHS was not set up to run a ranch. They were discussing alternative methods of funding and a budget, when the MHS director made an unfortunate joke about needing a new white Cadillac each year. Alberta was not amused and brought an end to the discussions.

Alberta decided that if she were going to fund the museum, she might as well set it up herself. She bought back from the state her sister's portion for $450,000 with the understanding that it be put in an endowment to be used for educational purposes. To this day, the money from that endowment funds educational programs at the Historical Society, and has lately been used to help launch the text book, *Montana: Stories of the Land.*

Like many people, Alberta had a superstitious feeling about drawing up a new will. When she had to quit smoking at 94—"I never inhaled"—and was on oxygen and with her sight failing, she faced the fact that it was time to put things in order and she went to the people she had trusted over the years—her bankers and lawyers.

In 1989, with the help of the men at the bank and the law firm, she finalized the trust that would determine the goals of her estate. Tim Healey had retired from the Trust department, but he continued to work as Alberta's advisor. Charlie Bair had been on the board of directors for the Midland Bank for over fifty years

when he died and the family supported the bank through when it became the First Bank of Billings and then the US Bank. The bank personnel, in turn, were very solicitous when Marguerite and Alberta, and then Alberta alone came to town.

Banking hours did not apply to them.

"They always came in at five o'clock on Friday," Tim Healey remembered, "so I had to keep the office open to discuss their business."

Helen Hancock, who had transferred from Missoula to Billings, took care of Alberta's account and she saw to her needs when Alberta was in Billings. Alberta always stayed at the Northern Hotel, and Helen would check in each time to do a little shopping for her.

The Charles M. Bair Family Trust

Alberta signed the trust agreement in early January 1990. The document made the First Trust Company of Montana the trustee for Alberta's Trust, and, in the event of illness or incapacity she placed herself in the hands of the trustee. After her death, the estate would go into the Charles M. Bair Family Trust that was to establish the Charles M. Bair Family Museum in the family home.

The trust first stated that to carry out the charitable purposes of the trust:

> It has long been the cherished aim and foremost desire of Grantor's sister and Grantor to establish a museum which would perpetuate the historic and artistic significance of the Charles M. Bair Ranch and the people associated with it… The Board of Advisors is directed to use whatever principal and income of the Charles M. Bair Family Trust that is necessary to establish, improve and maintain the museum…

Portrait of Alberta by Mary Gayle Shanahan

The trust document specified that the entire residence was to be devoted to becoming a museum:

Together with all personal property of lasting historical and

> artistic value located therein, and together with surrounding grounds and outbuildings necessary for such purpose…
>
> Finally, the trust document included:
> …If, at any time following the fifth anniversary of Grantor's death, the Board of Advisors, acting in its sole judgment and discretion, shall determine that the said Charles M. Bair Family Museum has ceased to serve the purposes thereof so as to make it inadvisable to continue the museum for public and educational purposes, or if at any time the main dwelling or its contents is destroyed or substantially damaged by fire…Board of Advisors is thereupon empowered to sell, transfer, relocate the museum, or otherwise dispose of all of the property…

Other funds were to be used exclusively for charitable, religious, scientific, literary or educational purposes.

The advisory board mentioned was to determine the charitable recipients and the amount of the gifts. Board members were to include "the president of First Trust Company of Montana or his nominee, the president of First Bank…or his nominee; president of Moulton, Bellingham, Longo, Mather, P.D. or his nominee." The other two members were to be representatives of Wheatland, Meagher and Yellowstone counties. Alberta vocally asked that Tim Healey and I be put on the Advisory Board.

Once she signed the trust document Alberta felt that her money and her museum were in safe hands. Through the C.M. Russell Museum, she hired museum conservator Barbara Roberts to repair and stabilize the French furniture that showed signs of cracking from the changes in weather over the years.

Barbara Roberts's expertise was in disaster management. She

Portrait of Marguerite by Mary Gayle Shanahan

had worked as a volunteer to raise funds for the rescue project in Florence, Italy, after disastrous floods in 1966. In 1976, she returned to her native England and started at the London College of Furniture studying Furniture Design and Technology, then worked

at the Victoria and Albert Museum. For the next seven years, Roberts worked as a conservator in private practice and served on the Conservation Advisory Panel of the Wallace Collection—where Alberta and Marguerite went for many of their ideas. In 1978, she came to the United States, where she worked at the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and then the J. Paul Getty Museum. By the time she was in Martinsdale, she was back in private practice.

One of the Bair pieces that needed attention was the clock in the office—made by George Prior of London, apparently made for the Eastern market with its domed top. The red lacquer finish had chipped off and lay around the clock on the desk, carefully saved from the dusting. Repairing the clock would be a long, slow task of gluing each little piece back on the clock. Since Barbara had only the month in Martinsdale, she carefully packed the clock in the back seat of her car and took it to her home in Seattle where she patiently fitted the pieces together.

Roberts stayed in the house while she worked, so she and Alberta had many evenings discussing the museum and its future. With Barbara's knowledge of the Wallace Collection it was easy to help develop her ideas. They visited late in the night about the plans for the Bair Museum.

"Alberta knew only too well," recalled Roberts, "that the trustees of the estate, with the majority appointed by 'the bank', would continue to oppose the concept of 'the Museum.'"

The conversation went something like this. She told Barbara that the "advisory board were bankers and making money is their business, for me and for themselves…they will not understand or believe it necessary to keep this place running as a museum."

Alberta would have looked at Barbara and measured her comments—"Keeping a collection costs money. We've spent a lot to

buy art, too," and Alberta would have laughed as she continued. "Look what I am paying you! It will take a lot of persuasion to keep this place going in five years. I worry about that, but there is a lot of money in the Bank and this place and this idea are bigger than I am. I am very proud it will be working out."

Barbara's next conservation job was the Indian Collection. Alberta and Marguerite had nailed and tacked the artifacts on the walls of the Pine Room and Office and the pieces needed to have plastic mounts and a less damaging way to attach them to the walls. Barbara suggested Richard Beauchamp and his wife Jane Hutchinson of Vancouver Island, Canada. In the spring, 1993, Barbara returned with Richard and Jane. Barbara and Richard worked on re-hanging the Indian artifacts, while Jane worked on the textiles in the house. The three of them stayed at our ranch while they were working.

When we went to the Russell Art Auction in March, Alberta had a serious conversation with Lorne Render, director of the C.M. Russell Museum and Ginger Renner about creating her home as a museum. Whenever Alberta and I talked about the plans for the museum, she would invariably say, "We'll ask Ginger. She knows about those things."

Alberta was having some second thoughts about the agreement with the bank, and wanted to explore other options. Lorne and Ginger were to put the negotiations discussed in some written form and send it to her. She was in the hospital when the proposed plan arrived, and she never received it. Alberta kept asking Helen Hancock, if "every thing was taken care of."

Helen assured her that everything was in good order.

The Charles M. Bair Family Museum

CHAPTER FOUR

The Battle for the Bair Museum

ALBERTA'S PASSING WAS A GREAT LOSS for Montana. Gone was the vibrant woman who embodied so much Montana history. Gone was this dynamic character with her red hats, her vodkas, her mink coat, her thirteen beaus, her white Cadillac that did a trip to Billings or a hunting venture up the river. She embodied a womanhood that few had the freedom, means, or personality to inhabit: she was tough, independent, witty, frugal and generous.

After her death, however, her dreams for a museum at Martinsdale now rested on the Charles M. Bair Family Trust Board of Advisors. Alberta's trust was separate from Marguerite's which was known as the Charles M. Bair Memorial Trust. Both trusts were administered by the First bank, the former Midland Bank that her father, Charlie Bair, had been loyal to all his life.

Trust documents are aptly named—because embedded in the legal documents is a great deal of trust between the dead and the

living. Trusts, however, are interpreted by trust boards composed of humans; each with their own sets of interests and values, each with varying interpretations of what Alberta envisioned for her trust, which represented a great deal of money, property, and valuable artwork. And thereby hangs another Bair story.

Following Alberta's death, the Advisory Board was organized by the bank as Trustee and included Roger Sullivan, First Trust Company; Bill Strasburg, bank president; Gerald Murphy, Moulton Law Firm; Douglas Jenkins, Yellowstone County Representative and Lee Rostad, Wheatland/Meagher Counties Representative. Chairman Gerald Murphy presented a mission statement to the group:

> The Charles M. Bair Family Trust Board of Advisors is required to distribute Charles M. Bair Family Trust funds from time to time each year, in such amount as the Board of Advisors deems prudent, exclusively for charitable, religious, scientific, literary or education purposes to beneficiaries located or domiciled within the State of Montana. Beneficiaries located within the counties of Yellowstone, Meagher and Wheatland, Montana were deemed to be preferred by Alberta M. Bair and the Board intends to honor that preference, although that preference does not limit the Board's power to direct the disbursal of the trust funds to other beneficiaries located or domiciled in other counties of the State of Montana.
>
> In addition to the above, the Board of Advisors will create a Charles M. Bair Museum which includes the Bair residence together with all the personal property of lasting historical and artistic value located therein. The Board shall establish the museum pursuant to Alberta's desire as indicated in her trust document. The Board shall use whatever principal and

> income of the Trust that it deems necessary to establish, improve and maintain the museum. Five years after Alberta's death the Board shall determine if this museum shall be continued or whether it will sell, transfer, relocate the museum, or otherwise dispose of the property with any sales proceeds to be added to the Trust.

This mission statement filled me with dread for it seemed to set up the demise of the museum as quickly as it established it. And, in the course of advisory board meetings, I could sense the foot-dragging about the museum among some of the board members. One member suggested that the museum shouldn't be developed at all, but was quickly reminded by the others that that was blatant disregard for Alberta's wishes.

One suggestion came from Wayne Schile, publisher of the *Billings Gazette*, "In a few years we'll cut it [the Bair Museum] in half and ship it to Billings, where it belongs."

The people of the Musselshell Valley disagreed.

The board met several times at the Bair home to discuss the establishment of the museum and at the same time, began to make grants. We decided to "honor" Alberta's traditional gifts, such as those to the C.M. Russell Museum, the Museum of the Rockies, Yellowstone Art Center and several others, if they presented a grant request.

The board made the decision to have another entity manage the museum, and after exploring several options, decided to have the C.M. Russell Museum manage the Bair Museum. Lorne Render, Director of the C.M. Russell, had already been involved with Alberta in helping have the conservation work done before her death.

Since I had been involved with the project before, I worked with Director Render to formulate exhibits and set up tour talks.

Charles M. Bair Family Museum Visitors Center in the old barn

CTA Architects of Billings recommended electrical and plumbing upgrades, a fire-sprinkler system, a climate-controlled enclosure for the archives and general upkeep totaling nearly $1 million. The board rejected many suggestions, choosing instead to focus on converting the barn into a visitors' center that featured a large interpretive area, where visitors could learn some of Bair family history before they entered the house. The horse stalls were left as open areas for exhibits, one of which was a "wool room" which showed various aspects of the sheep industry—fleeces, branding equipment, pack saddles, a sheep tent, spinning wheel and pictures. Another stall contained many pictures and awards that recorded the philanthropy of the Bairs. There were special exhibits of furniture, clothing and mementos and enlarged black and white photos on the walls helped tell the story of the Bair family—one of my favorite shots captured Alberta visiting the shearers at the sheep shed in her mink coat and hat. Only Alberta would have thought that as ordinary.

The rest of the barn provided restrooms, a gift shop, and a waiting area that featured a short video on the Bairs as well as an en-

Pictures and awards on the wall

larged picture of Charlie Bair and the forty-seven car freight train of wool—the "largest wool clip in America from a single grower" he shipped to Boston in 1910.

We had hoped to open in 1995, but the visitor's center was unfinished. Instead, we planned a July 1995 fundraiser for the Mountainview Medical Center in White Sulphur Springs featuring the Bair home and a tour through the Castle Mountains with a map we created highlighting various tour features. For a $10 ticket, participants took a bus from the Martinsdale Community Hall to the Bair ranch. Rather than a guided tour they walked through the house where docents were in each room to answer questions about the artwork, antiques and family history. The community pulled out the stops to create a wonderful event: there was a historic walking tour of Martinsdale, an arts and crafts fair, a barbeque lunch and an ice cream social and dessert served at the Bonanza Guest Ranch. More than one thousand people went through the museum that day, making it the most successful fundraiser for the hospital in some years.

The Gala Opening of the Museum

The May 6, 1996 opening of the Charles M. Bair Family Museum was a grand affair. As the snow tipped mountains glowed in the distance, hundreds of people gathered on the grounds of the Bair Ranch. The event was a combination celebration, box social, and wake as Hutterrite neighbors and friends of the Bairs from throughout the state—Helena, Billings, Harlowton, Roundup, Red Lodge, and White Sulphur Springs—gathered to see the new museum, meet old friends, and to celebrate in stories the life of Alberta Bair and her family.

Opening of the Charles M. Bair Family Museum Visitors Center

With suggestions from the Russell Museum and the folks at Billings, Lorne and I planned a full day. The Crow Dancers did traditional dances, bringing color and delight to the museum goers. The Billings Symphony String quartet shivered in the lawn tent but still played beautifully. The Ringling Five performed their humorous songs of the life of the modern day cowboy and the Jazz band from White Sulphur Springs High School played, "Don't Get Around Much Anymore," which was an immediate hit with the crowd. Spinners and weavers were posted on the ground with demonstrations combing, spinning, and weaving sheep wool.

When Governor Marc Racicot arrived at 3:30, the short opening ceremony began. Carl Rostad, also an old friend of Alberta's—was the master of ceremonies. Gerald Murphy and I spoke briefly as well. We wished that Alberta and Marguerite could have been there to see the result of all their efforts—the museum, the display

An exhibit in the Charles M. Bair Family Museum Visitors Center

of antiques and artwork, the happiness of everyone touring the grounds. We told some stories about the girls—how Marguerite would go to the barn when the antiques were unpacked because she was so concerned about their safe arrival.

I was thrilled to see people arriving from far and near to share in the Bairs' remarkable life, to share in their frontier history that spanned the years from arrival of the railroad to the arrival of computers and to share in Alberta's bounty. As people toured the house, strolled the grounds, and listened to the stories about the family, they were in awe.

Almost everyone had a story to share, and they were thrilled about the museum being added to Montana's attractions. "What a gift," someone said to me. "It is wonderfully surprising—and there are things here you don't see in major exhibits in large metropolitan areas—such a wonderful gift to Montana!"

We had a tent up for a reception and then soon it was time for dinner. We had thought about having dinner on the grounds, but even with tents it seemed a gamble to plan an outdoor event in May.

Dinner was at the armory in Harlowton—a rather plain brick building but the interior was transformed with flowers and crepe. The tables were draped with white tablecloths and had vases of tulips and daffodils and small stuffed lambs and bears as centerpieces. The food was regional, delicious, and Bair-specific: Alberta's Spinach Salad, Charlie's Leg of Lamb with Musselshell Rhubarb Salsa, Mary's Parsleyed New Potatoes and Baby Carrots, Steamed Asparagus, Montana Sunflower Whole Wheat Rolls and finished with Marguerite's Strawberry Shortcake and Sheepherder's Coffee.

Historian Hal Stearns and long time friend served as master of ceremonies, and writers Gwen Peterson of Big Timber and Mike Logan of Helena read cowboy poetry.

As the White Sulphur Springs High School Jazz Chorus brought the house down with Celie's *Blues* from *The Color Purple*, it was easy to see that the answer to "Are we having fun yet?" was definitely "Yes!"

Throughout the summer, I continued to work with the C.M. Russell people: oiling the wagons sitting by the Cook House and working with landscapers to beautify the grounds. There were two old sheep wagons in the back that were restored with the professional help of Dr. Dan Gebhart and Jerry Massee of White Sulphur Springs. One was given to the Meagher County Historical Association as Alberta had wanted, and the other was placed in front of

the Visitor's Center next to a sheepherder's tent. I traded two old wagons for an Indian tepee that was placed in the grass area northeast of the Visitor Center. The next year we put in picnic tables and a pop machine. Peter Marchi tried a "lunch wagon" one year, but decided it was easier to direct people to the Crazy Mountain Restaurant in Martinsdale.

At the request of Lorne Render, I put together tour information and trained some of the docents. One volunteer drove his motorcycle from Bozeman twice a week—he had an exceptional knowledge of the French furniture and treated visitors to a special tour.

Margaret Wood of the Museum of the Rockies gave us special instruction on caring for textiles, and we wrote a grant to help catalog the archives. I sought permission from the Board to seek the archival grant—Bairs saved numerous letters and papers but they needed to be cataloged for future scholars.

Anyone who worked at the museum, either paid or volunteering, developed a special bond with the home and its previous occupants.

Each July, the museum offered birthday cake and free admission to celebrate Marguerite's and Alberta's birthdays. For special events, such as arts and crafts days or book signing events, there was also free admission.

The C.M. Russell continued shopping for the gift shop (The Bair Company) but we also took local arts and crafts to sell on commission.

Museum visitation was good in 1996, when articles about the Bair Family Museum had come out and public curiosity was high. Some were curious about the Bairs. Others about the antiques. Others about the art work. When we combined the figures for the hospital fundraiser in 1995 with the 1996 season, the attendance was more than 14,000 but it declined each year after that. Director Render had warned us that this would happen—any new museum, he said, had

a large attendance the first year and then it declined for four or five years and then leveled off and began to climb back as the museum attained more exposure. He had anticipated that because of its location the top attendance would be about 2500 each year.

Following the appraisal done in 1995, Roger Sullivan (First Trust Co.) decided the Russell paintings were too valuable to leave in the house at Martinsdale and had photograph reproductions made, and not very good reproductions. The area residents were up in arms, and after a barrage of criticism, the paintings were returned. More security was installed, and the paintings were taken to Great Falls for each winter.

I tried unsuccessfully to schedule a board meeting in Martinsdale. Doug Jenkins was the only Billings member who took the time to go to the museum.

Our advertising was under funded, some of the best coming from articles written for various Montana magazines and papers. In the interests of saving money, we were told not to hand out brochures at the museum, but to save them for the tourist racks around the state. I asked permission to develop a small booklet on the house and collection, but it was only available for the last half of the last season.

In Lorne Render's 1998 report, he cited some recent museum changes, including the new video program about the Bair family and the new range tent and tepee that were displayed outside and the Navajo rugs and Bair clothing displays inside. He also mentioned the museum's inaugural membership drive, which he hoped would grow over time. He noted that while the attendance had declined from 7,737 in August 1997 to 6,505 August 1998, he felt that it was "tracking quite well" compared to other historical and tourist centers throughout the state…"in summary, I believe the Charles M. Bair Family Museum had a very productive and positive season."

In the meantime, the Board of Advisors began the gifting from the Trust. There were some small gifts, but also large gifts—a $550,000 gift to the Yellowstone Art Center and $1 million to renovate Rocky Mountain College's student union building. Sandstone blocks from Kimball Hall were incorporated in the renovation—blocks that had been quarried from the Rimrocks years ago.

At the ceremony celebrating the gift, I spoke on behalf of the Charles M. Bair Family Trust Advisory Board. I presented the gift and spoke briefly about how proud Alberta was to have received an honorary doctorate from Rocky Mountain College and touched on her other gifts.

"Children and young people were indeed Alberta's center of giving and this advisory board has tried to follow her guide lines and feeling in making the gifts since her death in 1993," I said. "With the exception of the Museum, Rocky Mountain College has received the largest gift from the Bair Family Trust. In total, fifty institutions and organizations have received money from Alberta's trust, enabling them to pursue their programs or begin new ones."

Changes, however, were afoot in the bank business and among the Charles M. Bair Family Trust Board of Advisors. First Bank became the U.S. Bank.

In 1998, the U. S. Trust Company converted the Bair Company into the Bair Ranch Foundation, the primary purpose of the Bair Foundation was to provide "educational and research opportunities" for "Montana educational institutions and various government agencies."

The purpose of this change, the article continued, was to allow three Montana colleges—Rocky Mountain College, University of Montana-Missoula, and Montana State University—Bozeman, to study the environmental science, forest ecology, wildlife and range issues, as well as animal science and grazing activities on

the 55,000 acre Martinsdale ranch.

"Our goal is to provide a real world, real life laboratory," said Darrel Tunnicliff, president of the Bair Ranch Foundation. Students were to map a section of the ranch to identify plant communities, noxious weeks and geological formations—to provide data which could be used by Montana ranchers and farmers as a model for ranch management.

What the paper did not report was that this new foundation would have a board of advisors from the bank and that it would control the Bair money. They could not change the directives of Marguerite's will, but they had a great deal of flexibility with Alberta's trust.

In 1998, when Director Lorne Render left the C.M. Russell Museum to take a position with the Marianna Kistler Beach Museum in Manhattan, Kansas, the Bair Museum became an orphan child as the Great Falls museum searched for a new director. They continued to handle the business end of the museum, but counted on me to take care of things on site. Without a "title" or more communication, I found myself in a sometimes uncomfortable situation of being ignored on some issues, and the situation became more profound when I went off the Board of Advisors.

The makeup of the advisory board continued to change as bank presidents and the representative from the Moulton Law Firm changed. Doug Jenkins and I had been on the board from the beginning but we were told that we would not be reappointed in 2001. To replace him, Doug suggested Jim Roscoe, an old friend and community leader, who later made the comment that he was on the board for a year before he even knew of the museum. I gave the Trust several names from Wheatland and Meagher counties and others offered their services. Louise Galt became the new representative. Penny Doak took over for Helen Hancock who retired

in the summer of 2002. In the fall, the advisory board members were Jim Roscoe, Louise Galt, Wayne Hirshe, Gerald Murphy and Glen Hough.

At this point, the story turned macabre. The familiar became unfamiliar; old friends became strange.

When the Harlowton High School asked me to research the Bair Ranch and Museum for the 2001-2002 project as part of the Montana Heritage Program, funded by Art Ortenberg and Liz Claiborne, I wrote a letter about the project to Gerald Murphy, then board chairman. I didn't get a response, but later learned that the bank had sent word that I was not to be allowed in the house unless a docent was with me at all times. The girls at the museum and the Harlowton teacher were too embarrassed to tell me.

In August 2002, I invited Inez Wolins, the new director of the C.M. Russell Museum on a tour of the Bair Family Museum. When we arrived at the museum, I was told that I wasn't allowed into the museum without a docent. I was amazed! I said Inez was the director of the museum that ran the Bair Museum and that should be docent enough and off we went. The next day I called Helen Hancock, who told me, "I'm not supposed to talk to you."

The Museum is Closed

In February, 2003, seven years after its opening, the advisory board closed the Charles M. Bair Family Museum after a short meeting at the Bair Home. Ostensibly board members were meeting to discuss the future of the museum, but they announced, instead, that the museum would close. According to board minutes, the decision had actually been made four months before on November 20, 2002.

When the announcement appeared in the next day's edition

of the *Billings Gazette*, public reaction was swift and furious. Letters started appearing in all of the papers across the state. Protest poured into the advisory board and to U.S. Bank decrying the action of the board.

Shortly after the museum's closing, Roscoe wrote an opinion piece that appeared in the *Billings Gazette* in February. As president of the Charles M. Bair Family Trust, Roscoe explained that the "fabulous, eclectic mix of Western art and artifacts" in Martinsdale… "is a great Montana story that ought to be told in Montana…but that the board was 'weighing the constraints of costs of maintenance and the challenges of having only about 5,000 visitors a year.'"

While he conceded that the collection should stay in Montana, he didn't say where in Montana. And, what he didn't realize was that the house and setting were a "part of the collection." Taken out of Martinsdale the story and collection would not be intact.

Letters continued to pour in to the newspapers and to the bank, all decrying the loss of the museum at Martinsdale.

Feeling the need of a more structured opposition, several of us got together and called ourselves The Friends of the Bair Museum, or more often just "Friends of the Bair." Our group consisted of Jamie Doggett from White Sulphur Springs, Peter Marchi from Martinsdale, Richard Moe of Two Dot and me. Royal Johnson and Jack Deitrich of Billings lent their time and expertise—and many others who gave us such great support. The people in White Sulphur Springs held a bake sale and gave us $1700 for any expenses.

We went to the Legislature in March of 2003. Courtney Lowery reported for the *Gazette* this time.

"Closing the Charles M. Bair Museum in Meagher County would be like closing a chapter of Montana history," supporters of the museum told lawmakers Wednesday.

"Prompted by news of the closing and the community response that followed, Senator Royal Johnson, R-Billings, has asked the Legislature to back a resolution asking the Bair Family Trust to keep the museum alive."

"The museum, in Martinsdale…was the family home of sheep rancher Charles M. Bair. Bair's daughter Alberta specified in her will that the home be turned into a museum. The facility opened in 1996."

"The 26-room house holds antiques, American Indian artifacts and paintings by artists including C.M. Russell and Joseph Henry Sharp."

"Senate Joint Resolution 27 would 'give a little boost to the board of trustees,' said Yellowstone County Commissioner Bill Kennedy. The board announced in February that the museum would not open this spring."

"Commissioners from Meagher, Yellowstone and Musselshell counties spoke in favor of the resolution, testifying that the museum is not only a packet of history, but a cultural jewel and an economic asset to their communities."

"The local people would do almost anything to keep it open," Johnson told the committee.

"Kennedy said that while lawmakers are focusing on a Butte development project called Destination Montana, they should also consider 'Destination Martinsdale.'"

"We need to keep our history intact," said Rep. Alan Olson, R-Roundup. "Let's keep it whole for Montana."

The Resolution read:

Senate Joint Resolution No. 27
Introduced by R. Johnson, Mahlum, Toole
By request of the

Senate Business and Labor Standing committee

A JOINT RESOLUTION OF THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF MONTANA URGING THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE CHARLES M. BAIR FAMILY TRUST TO KEEP THE CHARLES M. BAIR FAMILY MUSEUM OPEN AND OPERATIONAL AT ITS CURRENT LOCATION IN THE BAIR FAMILY HOME IN MARTINSDALE IN MEAGHER COUNTY.

WHEREAS, the Charles M. Bair Family Museum is a historical treasure to the State of Montana; and

WHEREAS, maintaining the Bair family collection at its original location in the Charles M. Bair Family Museum in Martinsdale, Montana, is vital in order to maintain the value and integrity of the collection; and

WHEREAS, because the Charles M. Bair Family Museum is a major resource, extending culturally and economically beyond Meagher and Wheatland Counties and the State of Montana.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF MONANA:

That the Charles M. Bair Family Trust be urged to keep the Charles M. Bair Family Museum open and operational at its current location at the Bair family home in the city of Martinsdale in Meagher County for the historical benefit and enjoyment of all citizens of the State of Montana, the nation, and the world.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Secretary of State send a copy of this resolution to the board of directors of the Charles M. Bair Family Trust.

There were meetings in White Sulphur Springs, Harlowton and Martinsdale as people gathered to discuss what could be done to keep the museum viable. In March 2003, approximately one hundred people gathered in the Youth Center in Harlowton to see what they could do to keep the "historical/cultural center" in Martinsdale up and running. Harlowton people were fearful of losing support for the hospital and scholarships if they pursued the museum battle.

The Advisory Board did not attend, but Roscoe said that Alberta's instructions concerning the museum were that it was to remain open for a minimum of five years.

"She was willing to finance that (the five years) regardless. After five years, business sense and horse sense was to prevail."

The Board of Advisors and the Trust Company continued to say it was of no concern to the people of Meagher and Wheatland Counties. However, in May of 2003, the Advisory Board agreed to a public meeting in White Sulphur Springs. Shirley Wegner of the *Times-Clarion* of Harlowton reported on the meeting.

"About 150 folks were in attendance at a public meeting in White Sulphur Springs last Tuesday, which exposed the Advisory Board for the Charles M. Bair Family Trust to public opinion concerning their closing and future plans for the Bair Museum at Martinsdale."

"The public came from Billings, Lewistown, Livingston, Helena, Havre, and all area towns, and were unanimous in their support to keep the museum open and operating in Martinsdale."

"Ginny Tribe of Missoula served as facilitator for the meeting. Jim Roscoe, chairman of the Advisory Board, led the delegation

for the U.S. Bank, and Jamie Doggett of White Sulphur was lead spokesperson for the proponents of the museum."

TV Channel 2 from Billings and the Associated Press covered the meeting, as well as area press representatives.

"Mr. Roscoe stressed the fact that the Advisory Board was not at the meeting to negotiate, but to hear public opinion, and to explain their actions."

"Mr. Roscoe said the board had closed the museum for the 2003 season to allow them time to begin a structured approach to making long range plans. First priority for the board is to hire a professional consultant to make a survey of the entire project, and submit recommendations to the board. The board is currently reviewing applications for the position and feel they have at least two qualified candidates, but no commitments as yet."

"Mr. Roscoe said the board had canceled advertising funding for the museum last November, and made the decision not to open for the 2003 season during a tour of the museum in February of this year."

"Many of the people at the meeting asked that it be reopened for this season, but did not receive any satisfaction."

"Roscoe stressed that the board is unanimous in their feeling that the Bair collection should remain intact and in Montana. Several spectators wanted to know if the board would leave it in Martinsdale, and he only stated that Martinsdale was a 'player.'"

"The audience raised some questions about the board's contract with the C.M. Russell Museum for operation of the Bair Museum. It was stated that the first two years of the contract had been very satisfactory in relations with employees, and their suggestions had been well received and considered. After a change of Management at the Russell Museum, there was a complete turnabout and it seemed that employee and local input was not well received."

"Mr. Roscoe also stressed that the Advisory Board was required to operate within federal guidelines in their handling of Trust Fund assets and their decisions would be in line with those responsibilities."

"He said the Bair Family Trust has grown over the years in spite of the $8 million in grants that have been awarded, including $2 million to the museum."

"Proponents of the museum have obtained a copy of the Trust Fund document which stressed that the museum was to be operated and dedicated to scholarly, historic and educational purposes. The document does include the stipulation that it had to be operated for five years and after that the board was entrusted to make decisions on future operations. The document did not state that the museum had to be profitable, but rather it should meet the three standards listed above."

"Jamie Doggett said she hoped for better relations between all parties and that everyone would be open to compromise in an effort to solve the situation."

"Mr. Roscoe had asked the group to 'trust' the Advisory Board in their actions. Jamie replied that the board had begun the process of closing the museum last November and made the decision to do so in February, but in all that time had not given anyone in the local area any indication of problems or pending action."

"Jamie challenged the Trust Fund to establish a $2 million endowment for partial permanent support of the museum, and challenged the 'Friends of the Bair Museum' to provide an additional $2 million endowment for their share."

"Barbara Roberts, a museum conservator from New York who had visited and worked with Alberta in establishing the museum concept, said Alberta understood the full obligations and responsibilities involved with opening a museum, including the high costs." [*Times Clarion,* May 2003]

Penny Doak brought as a hand-out, the graphed explanation of the Bair Trusts—the Charles M. Bair Memorial Trust, the Charles M. Bair Family Trust and the Bair Ranch Foundation, established in 1998 by the bank.

"While the Bair Ranch has historically distributed fifty-fifty to the memorial and family trusts, it is under no obligation to distribute to them in equal proportions or to them at all." Doak said crisply as she faced the crowd. "The Bair Ranch Foundation also has independent charitable purpose and income may be distributed outright at the discretion of the board of directors." I thought a chill went through the room!

The Bair Advisory Board that was so concerned with spending Alberta's money chartered a private airplane to fly to the meeting.

On April 2, 2003, when Stephanie Strom broke the story in *The New York Times*, the Bair battle went nationwide. Strom had combined a ski trip in Colorado with a visit to Martinsdale, but cautioned us that other Trust stories she had covered did not often have a happy ending.

In her article, she succinctly summarized the predicament:

"Martinsdale, which has about 60 full-time residents and is about 100 miles east of Helena, is home to one of this state's biggest fortunes, part of which was on display in the Charles M. Bair Family Museum, which holds more Hepplewhite and Louis XV furniture than a Manhattan antiques store… 'Was' on display because the museum, which was the home of Bair and his family until the death of his daughter Alberta M. Bair in 1993, is to be closed this year so the advisory board that controls her $40 million trust can consider ways to make the museum more self-sustaining."

A New York trust attorney with twenty years experience was incensed enough to write to Mike McGrath, Montana attorney general about the trust law. "While Montana trust law is, of course

unique, I cannot imagine that it deviates so far from general trust law as to permit what appears to be such a blatant disregard for the intentions of the settler, Alberta Bair," she wrote.

She went on to point out that Alberta's intention, as it was pointed out in the article, was to establish her home as a museum and suggested that McGrath, the attorney general, investigate.

"While it is certainly possible that there are inaccuracies in the article, the overall picture painted is of such glaring and gross mismanagement by the trust's board, that it would amount to libel if untrue. Consequently, I have to believe that there is truth in at least a good part, if not all, of the article and that an immediate and thorough review by your office is more than warranted…

Thus began the war of words over the purpose of the museum: was it to turn a profit? To serve the community? Or simply put: was it to be created to carry out Alberta's wishes?

When Attorney General Mike McGrath queried the board of advisors, Roscoe replied that the bank was concerned about the profitability of the museum. "The Board is concerned that the rural location of the Museum may be a significant factor in the declining attendance. The Board is also concerned that the Alberta Bair residence may not be suitable for holding, protecting and preserving the art and artifacts of the Bair family and may require substantial repairs and upgrades in order to do so."

Of course, what he did not add is that the board had also refused to make those repairs or upgrades.

Jim Roscoe, the chairman of the Charles M. Bair Trust Advisory Board, didn't anticipate the depth of feeling from the community and from the state and seemed to take the rebuke personally as a criticism of his judgment.

In May 2003 he wrote an editorial that appeared in the Billings Gazette, explaining his actions.

> Charles, Mary, Marguerite and Alberta Bair of Martinsdale left behind an incredible legacy of Montana history and philanthropy. The family passed into history when its last living member, Alberta, died in 1993. They left behind three foundation trusts, domiciled at U.S. Bank in Billings, that primarily benefit Meagher, Wheatland and Yellowstone counties with philanthropy aimed at health, education, cultural, civic and human service activities. In addition, these trusts operate the Bair Ranch and a house museum known as The Charles M. Bair Family Museum at Martinsdale. These trusts control assets comprised of land, buildings, art, antiques, investments and cash.

Roscoe was wrong. The Bairs left only two trusts—The Bair Foundation Trust was created by the bank.

Roscoe went on to reiterate that "he voted to close the museum for financial reasons and began developing a business plan to guide its future." Again, he stated declining visitation and rising costs were the reasons for the closure, but he complimented the C.M. Russell Museum complex for their "curatorship and management abilities."

He addressed what he called the "firestorm of criticism" in the upper Musselshell River counties of Wheatland and Meagher and other areas of Montana, and assured readers that "all legitimate concerns will be taken into consideration by the trust as it does its work in determing the future of the museum."

Then he made an interesting statement, essentially revealing the philosophy of the board, which was that philanthropy and the museum were in opposition:

> Alberta and Marguerite were tremendously fond of their

> family history and the memory of their father, Charlie. The task of perpetuating this memory ultimately fell to Alberta, the last surviving member of her family. She created The Charles M. Bair Family Trust and additionally tasked it with creating the museum and preached common sense for the management of both. She was aware that the trust could spend a dollar only once. If it goes to the museum, it will not go to philanthropy. If it goes to philanthropy, it will not go to the museum…
>
> Pitting big against little, emotion against fact, and sacrificing financial reality for sentimentality will muddy the waters and ultimately bring down a good thing,
>
> He preached "patience and rationality."

On *Face the State*, Jay Kohn interviewed Roscoe and Wayne Hirsch following the newspaper article. Roscoe reiterated his argument, stating that Alberta would want philanthropy to come first.

Those of us who had seen Alberta carefully watch her gifting would disagree.

The board of advisors never addressed the loss of an important historical legacy. Montana's history is not an old one compared to some areas, but it is equally important to preserve the historic past. Alberta and Marguerite's idea for a museum was not just to show off their art from Europe, but to tell the story of the Bair family and their place in Montana history. The people of Montana still smarted over the loss of the Mint Collection to Texas. This important collection of Charlie Russell's work was offered first to the state and when the money wasn't raised, it went to the Amon Carter museum in Fort Worth. People in Western Montana are still working to put the Daly Mansion back together.

Along with the barrage of letters to the advisory board, the

Friends had 30,000 small-format newspapers printed called "Save the Bair" which were distributed throughout the state. The flyer featured editorials and articles about the importance of the Bair legacy from a number of well-known westerners, including western artist Bob Morgan, Montana Historical Society Director Arnold Olsen, Western art historian Ginger Renner, and retired *Great Falls Tribune* editor, Bob Gilluly. People wanting to help, sent money to finance the fight, and all became "Friends of the Bair."

The advisory board continued to say the collection would be kept together, but not where.

One Story is Closed, Another Begins

With continued no response from the Advisory Board, the Friends of the Bair called Cliff Edwards of Billings for help. Edwards and his son John came to Martinsdale and visited with several of us and upon hearing the story of the Bair Museum agreed to represent us. He brought an associate in the office, Bobby Anner-Hughes to also work on the case. They not only presented a dynamic law assist to the cause, but became fervent believers in "Save the Bair." Their contribution was indeed, more than just financial.

Jamie Doggett told reporters the group thought it would be beneficial to work toward reopening the museum with the help of someone familiar with trusts and legal documents.

"Cliff Edwards is giving us advice, pointing us in a certain direction and helping us strategize ways to, hopefully, open the museum." His first advice was to withdraw the offer to match $2 million to develop a separate entity for the museum.

"We want to avoid the courtroom," Edwards said. "There is no

Let's Keep Montana's Heritage!

Save the Bair!

This publication is dedicated to preservation of the Charles M. Bair Family Museum at Martinsdale, Montana!

Alberta Bair

Visitors' comments:

"Great to see this wealth being shared with the people." — Bozeman

"Absolutely fascinating!" — Great Falls

"Excellent — unbelievable!" — Dillon, Montana

"Staff fully knowledgeable without reading scripts — artists etc., individual photos. Montana should be proud of this place and staff." — Scottsdale, AZ

"This is awesome! We're thankful it is preserved for the future. Hope it always remains as is." — Billings

"Just wonderful — a fantastic treasure for Montana." — Kalispell

Your help is needed to preserve this family's treasured heritage!

We are writing to report alarming news! The Charles M. Bair Family Museum, a legacy from Marguerite Bair Lamb and Alberta Bair to the people of Montana, has been closed for the first time in its' seven-year history. The reasons for this closure do not relate to the museum's popularity, its artistic merit, its historic significance, the desire of its neighbors or the terms of its donor's will. Instead, the decision to shut its doors was made by a Billings bank for reasons, we believe, that relate solely to the best interests of the bank.

We find the issues raised by the bank's shortsighted decision will have a grave impact on people, communities, counties, the state of Montana and the cultural history of America.

Is the museum's closing inevitable?

No. We are confident that *with your help* we can reverse this frivolous and ill-conceived decision. We know you receive endless financial solicitations — many very worthy. We feel this is one unlike so many others because, on the long-term endowment campaign, we promise fewer and palpable results. Or your money back.

The people of Meagher and Wheatland Counties have already been hard at work to save The Charles M. Bair Museum. They made the bank a proposal to allow a local organization to keep it open, supplying volunteer labor and financial help. This offer was rejected.

As an alternative, the "Friends of the Bair Museum" proposed the bank establish a separate and independent foundation for the museum and fund an endowment of $2 million, which the "Friends" would match. There has been no reply.

At this point we need your support for administration and legal fees.

Help us save this wonderful piece of Montana heritage! With your help, we are confident we can turn the lights back on, draw the curtains, and unlock the doors to one of Montana's great treasures. Its' importance lies in the fact that the items were collected by a single family, maintained in the home they lived in, and was "gifted" to future generations of Montanans to view and enjoy.

Marguerite Bair

Time is critical!

In carrying on the battle to reopen the Bair Family Museum, it is important to remember how critical timing is!

In November 2002 the Trust Fund Advisory Board refused to fund re-advertising budget requests from the C. M. Russell Museum to advertise the Bair Family Museum in 2003. It is believed this was the first official action taken to close the museum, although the closing was not officially announced until February 2003.

The Advisory Board then requested all plans to re-open for the 2003 season "become more water's enough time to advertise."

The C. M. Russell Museum is no longer under contract to operate the Bair Museum, nor does any one else have operating authority.

With the long range planning and budget requirements for advertising needed to take advantage of such items as the Lewis & Clark celebrations, and the Russell Country advertising members, it is imperative that work begins NOW to make it possible to have the Bair Museum open in the 2004 season.

If the museum remains closed two years in a row, the damage would be almost irreparable!

Visitors' comments:

"Fantastic — a priceless treasure." — Helena

"This was a very intriguing place to visit." — Hendersonville, NC

"Gorgeous. Well worth the detour to Harlowton." — Lake Villa, IL

"Wonderful to see and hear about Montana history and families." — Three Forks

"I'm a native of this state and area and was very proud to take out-of-state guests to the museum!" — Big Timber, MT

Note that organization is frequently vital for success. **Those of the book officials or members of the Advisory Board owes to see to secure the well-being of the museum.** They seemed to be waiting for that first crocodile, that they saw as a decline in the attendance — and they persisted, closing it for the summer without any attempt to visit with the local people about what could be done to improve the attendance.

History of the Bair Family Museum

1978 — At the death of Marguerite Bair Lamb, she left her estate to establish eight full-ride scholarships for students in Wheatland and Meagher Counties. Any remainder of the income was to go to the hospitals in White Sulphur Springs, Harlowton and the Deaconess in Billings. The Christian Science Church also received money. Her half interest in the family home and collections was to go to the State of Montana. After negotiations failed concerning the moving of the Home Museum, Alberta decided to buy Marguerite's interest from the state and set up her own memorial for a Home Museum.

Alberta moved to the bank that her father had been associated with for over 50 years as a director — The Midland Bank — and with the help of the bank officers and the family lawyer, drew up a document to establish the Charles M. Bair Family Museum. Those were friends of Alberta's who knew her wishes and were dedicated to carry them out. Unfortunately, when Alberta died, those directed to carry out her wishes had not known her, or only slightly, except for the representative from Wheatland-Meagher.

The Board of Advisors (in Alberta's estate) were to be the president of First Bank (now US Bank) or his assistant, the president of the trust department or his assistant, the president of the first city/Harlow, Bullingham, Lange & Mather, P.C. or his assistant, two residents from the counties of Meagher, Wheatland and Yellowstone. Each such member shall be appointed the Trustee-at-large and appointed for staggered terms of three, two, one or three years. Three members were not to come from the same county, so the practice of the bank has been to appoint one member from Yellowstone County and one from Wheatland-Meagher.

In 1988, Alberta decided to reconsider the possibilities of setting up the museum before her death. Through the Charles M. Russell Museum in Great Falls, she hired conservator Barbara Roberts to work on the furniture that had suffered from the violent changes in temperature when Kenyon had gone out in the winter. Ms. Roberts stayed in the Bair home and had many visits with Alberta about the future of her home.

Roberts told of her conversations:

Alberta had a great respect for the hunting profession and for persons in the hunting industry, including her father who had been involved with "The Bank" in Billings. She also had a clear understanding of how her own love of the arts, dance and cultural pursuits had enlightened her life and what it could do to open the minds of individuals. It was in this way she wished to repay the State of Montana and enliven the minds of those who live there. She knew very well that the trustees of the estate, with the majority appointed by "the Bank" would continue to oppose the concept of "the Museum."

I remember her clearly saying, and I paraphrase somewhat for I did not write down the conversation . . . "They are bankers and making money is their business, for me and for themselves. They have not had exposure to great museums and the private generation will not understand or believe it necessary to keep this place running as a museum. I have been well advised but I do not have to always take the advice. I am offered and maybe the players will change and be more receptive to the idea. Leaving a collection costs money. I agree a lot to buy art, you and I both what I am paying you! It will take a lot of persuasion to keep this place going in five years. Twenty-about that but there is a lot of money in "the bank" and this place and this idea are bigger than I am. I am very proud it is working out."

Alberta next hired Ms. Roberts again, along with two other conservationists and lots of basic sustenance, the task of re-hanging the Rollie Collection (replacing the nails in the walls with appropriate plastic cotton). The third conservationist worked on the rugs and other fabrics to give them appropriate care.

At this time Alberta also conferred with museum experts to draw up plans for her museum. Unfortunately, time was running out and Alberta died in the spring of 1993.

Alberta's most dominant said:

[redacted] life carrying out the charitable purposes of the Trust as aforesaid (charitable organizations) and without intending to limit the generality thereof, it has long been the cherished aim and fundamental desire of Grantor's parents and Grantor to establish a museum which would perpetuate the historic and artistic significance of the Charles M. Bair Ranch and the people associated with it. It is therefore Grantor's will that the Board of Advisors devote the Grantor's entire residence, together with all personal property of lasting theatrical and artistic value located therein, and together with surrounding grounds and outbuildings necessary for such purpose, to the established part of a museum to be named the **Charles M. Bair Family Museum** which shall be open for the educational benefit of the general public. If in its opinion the same shall be deemed necessary, the Board of Advisors shall have complete discretion and authority to establish a charitable entity, legally separate from the Charles M. Bair Family Trust for the operation of the museum and to transfer corpus and assets of the Trust to said entity, provided it shall qualify as a charitable organization under the laws of the United States. The Board of Advisors is directed to use whatever principal and income of the Charles M. Bair Family Trust that is necessary to establish, improve and maintain the museum, and shall have full discretion and authority to administer and manage the same.

The Charles M. Bair Family Museum created herein shall have first priority on income to be distributed from the Trust as the Board of Advisors, in fulfilling the purposes of operating the museum in the manner open to the scholarly, educational and historical purposes, the Board of Advisors shall have the authority to employ curators and librarians, and shall or maintain existing structures suitable to the operation of a museum, and may employ such person or persons necessary to the museum to assist with Grantor's wishes as contained herein as interpreted by the Board of Advisors from time to time.

The curators who have had her said this clause:

It, at any time following the fifth anniversary of Grantor's death, the Board of Advisors, acting in its sole judgment and discretion, shall determine that the said Charles M. Bair Family Museum has ceased to serve the purposes thereof as herein made known to the public or to the extent that it is no longer economically or consistent the museum for public and educational purposes . . . or . . . damaged by fire . . . then and in any such event the Board of Advisors is thereupon authorized and empowered to sell, transfer, relocate the museum, or otherwise dispose of all the property then held as part of the Charles M. Bair Family Museum.

In contrast with the C. M. Russell Museum, the museum was begun. The CTA architectural firm of Billings, known for their work with historic buildings, developed a plan for the structural renovations of the home, beginning with a new roof and new wiring. The fireplaces were put out of commission, and the plumbing finished in one of the small bathrooms in the home. Other improvements were planned as suitable to be done over the coming years.

The home was ready for opening in the summer of 1995, but the Visitor Center in the barn was not ready. However, the home was opened for viewing one day for a benefit for the Musselshell-Judith Medical Center. More than a thousand people were able to view the home.

A gala opening in 1996 saw another thousand gather to view this treasure, and the crowds continued to come. Lorna Rendes, Director of the CM Russell Museum, cautioned that all new museums have large initial crowds and then taper off for a few years before picking up again. "It happens to all of them."

The museum was hailed by all who came as a marvelous addition to the heritage of Montana. Not just a collection of antiques and artifacts, it was the story of an early Montana stamp (another title under his fortune in Montana and wanted to share it with the state he loved. It was the story of two sisters who wanted to share their love of antiques and travel with people who might not have the means to travel and collect for themselves. It was fulfilling its charge to open the museum to the general public *for scholarly, educational and historical purposes.*

Reader's departure from the Russell Museum left a void in the management of the Bair Museum. There was little direction in finalizing the Bair Museum as the parent museum worked to re-establish their own direction.

It was the employment at the Bair Museum and local people who continued to promote the Bair Museum. The popular weekend of celebrating Alberta's and Marguerite's birthdays in July was continued and Arts & Crafts Fairs were held a couple of years. Book signings were held and school trips encouraged. Local people were the ones who were after every survey and professional help to organize the archives. The security person from Great Falls was the only one to the barn was not ready. However, the home was opened for viewing one day for a benefit for the Musselshell-Judith Medical Center. More than a thousand people were able to view the home.

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Charles M. Bair as a young man

Alberta, Charlie, Mary and Marguerite Bair

Small-format newspapers printed called "Save the Bair"

reason why everyone can't sit down, reason together and get this Montana treasure open again. And, there is plenty of money in the trust to be used to honor the wishes of that family. A key wish was to preserve and display this unique part of Montana history—right there in Martinsdale where the Bairs built it, lived in it and gave it to Montana."

The controversy hinged on the trust document that specified the use of any money from either the principle or interest of the trust for the museum and the later words that allowed the Advisory Board to close the museum if it "failed to meet its purpose."

The first salvo was in February of 2004 when Cliff Edwards sent a letter to the trustee's attorney demanding that the museum be reopened in May and threatening a lawsuit if not. The Trustee decided a judge should determine whether the museum's advisory board had the authority to close the museum and decide on the fate of the contents.

March 2004—In order to squelch any more controversy, the U.S. Bank took the question to District Judge Todd Baugh to decide whether the board has authority over those matters under the trust agreement that Alberta Bair signed in 1990. They asked for the opinion of the Attorney General as well. Cliff Edwards asked for intervener status so first there was the court appearance to decide that issue.

April, 2004—When "The Friends" went to court for intervener status, Judge G. Todd Baugh's courtroom was filled with people from Meagher and Wheatland Counties, from Lewistown and Helena and Billings—some in red hats or jackets. Not all members of the Advisory Board were there, but Jim Gransbery was there to record the actions for the *Billings Gazette*. When the Judge granted status later in the afternoon, the courtroom broke into loud applause, causing Baugh to remark that it was the first time he had been applauded in the courtroom for a decision.

In order to calm the anger of "the people of Montana"—the rightful heirs of the Bair Museum and fortune—the bank did decide to hire museum consultant Peter Hassrick, and the CTA architectural firm to make a report on the viability of the museum.

Jim Gransbery reported this story.

"The trustees of the Charles M. Bair Family Museum have hired a renowned Western American art historian to evaluate the collections and the ranch home near Martinsdale," according to Gransbery of the *Gazette*."

"Peter Hassrick, former director of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyo., will spend the next five months evaluating the buildings, art and artifacts that make up an eclectic collection gathered by Charles Bair's daughters, Alberta and Marguerite.

"Hassrick, 62, of Cody, has had a 40-year career as a teacher, writer, curator and historian focusing on Western American art.

"There will be a number of options on how the collections should be cared for, and used for the public edification, education and enjoyment."

Hassrick emphasized that his goal is to "provide an objective view from a museum professional"

"I was not hired for a public relations or political job," he said. "I am not there to salve the political situation. That is not my expertise."

Jim Roscoe, chairman of the museum trustees, said, "Peter is to give us one or more options to preserve the Bair family legacy."

"We are very happy with him. We will sit down with him for a 'pre-construction' conference in a couple of weeks."

Hassrick said, "I will not embroil myself in local politics. I will be as candid as I can be. I will try to preserve the dream of the sisters in the best possible way."

The advisory board continued to insist that they wanted to "keep the collections intact."

"Friends" were pleased to see the hiring of an eminent consultant, but still harbored suspicions that the conclusion was already done.

Hassrick met with both Advisory board members and people from the community.

Everyone eagerly awaited the report, but when finished several months later, it was not released to the public. When we went to court and were allowed to read it, we discovered why. Hassrick had made two recommendations; the first recommendation was to keep the museum in Martinsdale, hire a professional curator, and improve the museum's structure and security. His second recommendation was to relocate the collection to the Yellowstone Art Museum in Billings.

Through all the barrage of letters, pleas from all over the state and newspaper articles, the advisory board continued on the course they had chosen. The Western paintings—Russell, Sharp, Ralston—and the entire Indian Collection, the Indian rugs, the Edward Curtis photographs and some of the silver were kept at the Yellowstone Art Museum and a special exhibit planned. The board paid out of Bair trust funds for the exhibit to be prepared and a catalog printed. Peter Hassrick was the consultant and editor for this project.

"Alleging that the overseers of Alberta Bair's trust are 'in breach' of the document that created the Charles M. Bair Family Museum in Martinsdale, Montana's attorney general Friday asked District Judge G. Todd Baugh to forgo a bench trial in August, and order the museum reopened and the overseers to provide $7 million for its support and continued operation.

"In a petition for a summary judgment filed with the District Court in Billings on Friday, Anthony Johnstone, assistant attorney general, asked the court to compel the board (of trustees) to establish a separate charitable entity dedicated to the…Museum,

and the trustee to convey the entire collection, its buildings and grounds, and $7 million to such entity."

"There is no dispute over the facts", Johnstone said Friday. "The issue, one the board raised itself, is: Does the board have the authority to close the museum?"

"The state believes the board exceeded its authority and unjustifiably closed the museum.

"Now that the board has decided to permanently close the museum, 'the court can decide if the board acted in accordance with the trust,' he said.

"The action is being taken by the attorney general's office because it represents the public, which has an interest in the museum because of its charitable trust status. The museum was created in part to be 'open for the educational benefit of the general public.'

"The state argues that the board did not use 'whatever principal and income of the trust that is necessary to establish, improve and maintain the museum' as required by the trust.

"We are seeking to enforce the public's benefit from the trust agreement," Johnstone said. "It has been closed for two years and it is time to get back on top of it.'

"Cary Matovich is the Billings attorney who represents the five-member board that advises the trustee, U.S. Bank, on the management and disposition of the proceeds of the trust of the late philanthropist Alberta Bair. She said she doesn't believe the matter can be resolved by summary judgment.

"There needs to be a trial before the final determination with a full exploration of the facts,' she said 'We're confident (Baugh) will find the board carefully, purposefully and tediously examined every option 'for keeping the museum open.'

In February of 2005, Friends filed a motion to extend discovery and request a status conference. During that month, Friends of the

Bair were taken through the house and the suggestion was made to the Friends to open the house without the pieces that had been removed to the Yellowstone Art Museum. The Friends wavered and considered accepting some quality reproductions, but could not accept the loss of entire collections. In May of 2006, the Upper Musselshell Historical Society was awarded a $150,000 grant to reopen the Bair Museum for the summer and possibly form an arrangement to continue to operate it as a house museum. Reproductions of the paintings were to be used, and the Indian artifacts would stay in Billings. Wayne Hirsch, vice chairman of the Bair Family Trust Advisory Board, announced shortly after the reopening that a temporary loan of the art and artifacts to the Yellowstone Art Museum was to be made permanent. The Trust would also donate $2.15 million to the Billings museum to create a separate gallery for the Bair items. The donation was contingent on the museum matching the funds with a $1 million dollar investment.

An agreement was signed between the Trust and representatives of YAM creating a "permanent loan" of the original artwork and Plains Indian artifacts. The agreement further stated that when the litigation regarding the museum was settled through all legal options the items would be gifted to YAM, changing the ownership of the Bair family treasures.

The agreement stipulated that YAM must display the articles at least six months of the year and the art and artifacts are to primarily remain in Montana.

The promised $2.15 million grant toward the facility renovation at YAM would still be given, regardless of the legal outcome. Indian artifacts would stay in Billings.

Friends of the Bair and the State of Montana filed a request for an injunction in District Judge Baugh's court against permanently moving the belongings from Martinsdale to the Billings facility. Al-

though Judge Baugh ruled in favor of the Board of Advisors as to the closure of the museum, he did not rule on the injunction request.

When the fight was again in Judge Baugh's court, both the Attorney General's office and Friends of the Bair asked for the opening of the museum. A question of having an arbitrator was brought up. Jim Gransbery reported in the *Gazette*:

"An attorney for residents of Meagher and Wheatland counties who want the Charles M. Bair Family Museum at Martinsdale reopened asked District Judge G. Todd Baugh Friday to appoint a special settlement master to resolve the case.

"Cliff Edwards, representing the Friends of the Bair Museum, suggested Baugh select either former Supreme Court Justice and retired District Judge Diane Barz or retired Supreme Court Justice James Regnier to resolve the case in a 'mutually positive fashion.'

"Attorneys for U.S. Bank, the trustee of the late Alberta Bair's charitable trust, and the trustee board of advisers both declined to comment on the motion until they had a chance to consult with their clients. John Crist, who represents the bank, said, he would 'resist delay in post-trial findings.' The judge said he would schedule for those findings, while considering Edwards' motion. Edwards told the judge that whatever decision he rendered in the dispute, there was a '100 percent chance it would be appealed to the Montana Supreme Court.'

Mediation was scheduled at a hotel in Billings. The Friends of the Bair proposed a plan whereby the museum could be opened using the help and expertise of the Art Department at Montana State University. Once again, the Advisory Board and the Bank refused to consider anything but their complete control and right of dispersion. The decision was back in Judge Baugh's hands. He ruled in favor of the Board of Advisors and the bank.

The judge's decision, July 5, 2006—

"This matter was duly tried to the Court on August 30, August

31, and September 1, 2005. Following trial the parties continued in their efforts to resolve their disputes. In mid-April 2006, the parties submitted their proposed findings and conclusions.

"Following Alberta Bair's death in 1993, her home near Martinsdale, Montana, was opened to the public in 1996 as a museum. It was open seasonably (May through September) each year through the 2002 season.

"In the fall of 2003, the Board of Advisors decided to temporarily close the museum. In the spring of 2004 demands were made to reopen the museum, and in March of 2005 the trustee of the Charles M. Bair Family Trust filed its petition with this Court, seeking to have this Court determine whether the board of Advisors created by the trust had the power under the trust to suspend operations of the museum, determine that the museum had ceased to serve the purposes for which it was created, and dispose of museum assets.

"To balance competing interests and cover differing viewpoints, this Court allowed 'The Friends of the Bair,' the Board of advisors and the State of Montana to intervene.

"…The Court finds and concludes that attendance at any level is but a factor to be considered and is not the sole factor which determines whether purposes are being met.

"The Court finds and concludes that the Board considered the money factors and the attendance factor, as well as other factors, including but not limited to the risks posed by fire and fire suppression, and those posed by theft and vandalism in reaching its conclusion as to whether the museum in its rural location had ceased to serve its purposes. It is evident from the trust agreement itself that Alberta Bair did not attempt to micro-manage the Trustee or the Board of Advisors. Rather, she placed in the hands of those she trusted the discretion to make decisions in good faith with fore-

thought and reason. This the Trustee and Board have done.

"One may always question the judgment of another. Depending on one's viewpoint, the decisions of the Board of Advisors may be seen as deficient or not. All that hear and see even the same evidence may disagree as to its meaning. While this Court has no viewpoint, based on the evidence before it, this Court finds and concluded that the Board of Advisors has acted reasonably." (Brief from Baugh , July 5, 2006)

As time went on, the Trust reiterated their reasons for closing the museum. The building, they said, needed a new roof, a new security system, repairs—at least $1 million, the board estimated. It seemed they were using the original estimates from 1993, since the museum had a new roof and new security system, and repairs had been ongoing since its opening.

The Friends and the State of Montana appealed the case to the Supreme Court of Montana in August with the U.S. Bank filing a cross appeal regarding the standing of the Friends to challenge. The Michigan Attorney General and 12 other states filed Amicus Curiae Briefs in support of the State of Montana. The contention of the other states is that the District Court's decision on the museum's status set a standard that puts in jeopardy enforcement of all charitable-trust law throughout the country

With the load of cases to be read by the Supreme Court, the Friends were prepared to wait to have their case reviewed. However, in August of 2007 the Supreme Court ordered an oral argument that was held on October 31, 2007.

Anthony Johnstone and Bobby Anner-Hughes argued the case for the museum in a fine and honest presentation, with the bank and advisory board lawyers arguing again that they had the right to destroy the museum. Cliff Edwards concluded the hearing by appealing to the judges' sense of history.

Photos by Edward Curtis on the Crow Reservation. It was at this time that Charlie Bair began running sheep on the Crow Reservation.

Chief Plenty Coup

"This is a case about a museum that is a national and international treasure that happens to be in Martinsdale."

The Supreme Court made its ruling in April of 2008, stating that the board of the Charles M. Bair Museum breached its fiduciary duties by closing the museum in 2002. In a 50 page opinion, the justices ordered the Bair Trust's trustees to replace the board members and the new board meet within six months. The

Supreme Court ruled unanimously that the board did not carry out its responsibilities to see that the Bair home would be properly prepared as a museum, and had not spent the money necessary to see that provisions for securing the museum had been met.

"The museum never received a fair opportunity to succeed," the justices wrote. "The museum was destined for failure, rather than success. The board's ensuing breaches emanated from this initial failure….

"The Supreme Court ruled that establishment of the museum was not discretionary- that the Alberta Bair Trust had clearly said that a museum would be established. It also said that as far as distributions from the trust were concerned, the museum had priority over all other charities. The museum was the primary purpose of the trust, the justices concluded."

A few people were concerned by a possible loss to the charities Alberta's trust financed, but the major reaction was similar to one comment:

> I knew Alberta and "Sister" personally and their house is truly a masterpiece that can match the White House. Nowhere else in the West can priceless artwork and photographs be seen. Also there is much western history in this house which should not be overlooked. Thank you to the "Friends of the Museum" who persisted to keep the Museum open.

Bair Family Tree

1 Margarete 1778-
  2 Adam Bair 1785-1814
    + Catherine Bowermeister 1808-
  2 Ruccion Bair 1757-1819
    + Barbara [Yenan]
      3 Ruccion Bair
      3 Christopher Bair
      3 Daniel Bair
      3 George Bair
      3 John Bair
        + Catherine Henning
          4 William Bair 1833-1875
            + Mary Ann Unkefer
              5 Charles Monroe Bair 1858-1943
                + Mary Jacobs
                  6 Marguerite Estelle Bair 1889-1976
                    + Dave Lamb 1893-1973
                  6 Alberta Monroe Bair 1895-1993
              5 Alvin Bair 1856-1933
                + Rose Catherine Murphy
                  6 Kathleen May Bair 1892-1976
                    + Roland Schumacher
                      7 Juanita Cioretta Schumacher 1905-
                        + Russell Leland Slater
                          8 Howard Lee Slater 1943-
                            + Sandra Elizathe Pezzoio
                              9 Michael Russell Slater 1983-
                              9 Ryan Joseph Slater 1985-
                  6 Lawrence Bair 1897-1939
                    + Josephine Dell Dralle
                      7 Joan Colien Bair 1930-
                        + John Kiemer
                          8 Lawrence Kiemer
                          8 Neal Keimer
                      7 Gerald Lawrence Bair 1926-
                        + Marcelina Mathistad
                          8 Nicholas Bair 1953-
                      7 Kathleen Mae Bair 1936-
                      7 Eileen Rae Bair 1936-
                        + Bisi
                          8 Michael Bisi
                          8 Robert Bisi
              5 Augusta Bair 1862-1911
      3 Susana Bair
      3 Elizabeth Bair
  2 Christopher Bair 1769-

Jacob Family Tree

1 Michael Jacobs 1827-1880
+Magdalene Hoffman 1827-1861
2 John Jacobs 1853-1860
2 Kathryn Jacobs 1855-1944
+Leonard P. Gemuend
2 Mary Jacobs 1858-1950
+Charles Bair 1857-1943
3 Marguerite E. Bair 1889-1976
+David Lamb 1893-1973
3 Alberta Monroe Bair 1895-1993
2 George Jacobs

William Bair (left) and Mary Bair (right)

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Lee Rostad and her husband Phil ranch in the northern foothills of the Crazy Mountains, not far from the Bair Ranch. For many years, Lee wrote the Social News for the county newspapers and a column, Cattlewomen's Column, telling the ranchers' story. Her first book was T*he Meagher County Sketchbook* with LaVonne Rice, followed by *Honey Wine and Hunger Root, Fourteen Cents and Seven Green Apples, Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass,* a history book of Meagher County and *Grace Stone Coates, Her Life in Letter.*

A graduate of the University of Montana, Lee did a year of postgraduate work as a Fulbright Scholar in England. She was recognized with a Governor's Humanities award in 2001, an honorary doctorate from Rocky Mountain College in 1994, and a Distinguished Alumni from U of M in 2004. She currently serves on the Montana Historical Society Board.