



## *Mary Gleim (1849-1914)*

*A woman with a more controversial role in Missoula's history. Mary Gleim was known as the Madame of Missoula and a business woman "suspected" of some businesses slightly on the verge of legality.*

- **1849-Birth.** 1849 to Irish parents. Her father was a 'squire' landowner, but not of the nobility kind.
- **Marriage.** John Gleim from St Louis Missouri
- Highly educated in England. Conversant in all of the Latin languages and liberally educated in English.
- She came to Missoula in 1888 with her husband to begin a new adventure.
- Picturesque, unforgettable figure, full-figured woman. Few persons in Missoula had not heard of her and to the old-timers, she was very well known. She was a very large woman and it was rumored she could – and did – whip any man or woman that crossed her.
- She was a woman of mystery. She was of the underworld from the time of her arrival in Missoula until her death.
- Mr. Gleim was interred in St Louis near his family homestead. Mary Gleim sought to establish a right of inheritance, however, the will stated that 'in case he left no issue, the property should revert to other relatives'. They had no children so Mary Gleim lost the suit. Her husband's family homestead was one of the picturesque points in the city of St Louis. The property was in the Gleim family by Indian inheritance. Mr. Gleim's grandfather had married a Wisconsin Indian and this property was her share of a tribal allotment. At the time of the suit, the old homestead stood in the business district of St Louis, surrounded by lofty business blocks.
- She was extremely wealthy, over \$100,000 at the time of her death. She handled and invested all of her husband's money, which, of course became HER money upon entering into marriage. Mary did have money of her own prior to the marriage. She owned much property, not only in Missoula, but in outlying western Montana.
- **"Alleged" Business Ventures.** (not all inclusive)
  - Standard Brick Company – was the only business investment where she lost money (approx. \$135,000 lost at that time)
  - Smuggling laces and diamonds
  - Brothel Madam indulging in 'rollicking sin'.
  - Underground railway transporting Chinamen and their opium into this country
  - Real estate throughout all of Western Montana
  - Twice tried to get a footing in Alaska and left here to engage in business there, but as she was under suspicion of the British and American customs officers, she was unsuccessful.
- **1894.** Accused of hiring two hit men to blow up Bobby Burns in his residence. One of these men squealed and was released. The other went to prison for 14 years. Mary, lacking \$15,000 bond, was thrown into the Missoula jail (Sheriff Ramsey's boarding house) with enough booze to keep her happy for a few days. She promptly drank it all and spent the night hollering at another female prisoner confined in the cell opposite her own. Mary then railed against the judge that this was a conspiracy by her enemies to get her. Once she found her manners, she was allowed to be escorted by deputy during the day to attend to her business affairs. Found guilty by jury trial, she accepted a 14 year prison sentence. 'Took it like a man', 'the Heavyweight Champion of Gleimville', it was reported. Thirteen months later, she returned to trial by the Montana Supreme Court. The Missoulian doubted she could be convicted again because the evidence against her, "came from a class of people who have no particular homes." According to record, some of Missoula's leading citizens came up with the money for the \$7,000 bond. It is rumored 'she must have had something on everyone'. Before the re-trial even took place, she was charged with second-degree assault on French Emma, one of her girls. She won both cases as in Bobby Burn's instance, two of the original jurors were convicted felons and were of questionable sincerity, and in French Emma's case, a \$100 fine plus court costs were found sufficient.

- **Very charitable.** It was rumored that Mary was very generous to most causes. However, she also was a 'relentless hater'.
- **Monument Legend.** It is legend that Mary's will stipulated her monument must face the railroad tracks so she could 'wave to her boys' as they went by. The railroad 'boys' were her best customers. The Gleim monument is extremely large and is the only one to face East and West in the cemetery. However, it is believed that her only known survivors (a niece, Elizabeth Gibson and a nephew, Bennie Bown purchased this huge monument for \$700 and it was simply too large to place on a grave normally so had to be turned sideways to fit. Mary left no will of record.
- All her holdings were shared between her niece and nephew. Bennie, however, married a woman who set out to 'steal his money'. She claimed abuse and due to her physical handicaps was able to convince a judge it was true. Bennie and Elizabeth were forced to liquidate almost all of the asset holdings and the money was ordered to go to Bennie's ex-wife. Bennie worked until the day he died at the Missoula Mercantile. Elizabeth Gibson and members of her family are buried in the Gleim plot.
- Benjamin 'Bennie' Bown and his second wife, Ella, are buried elsewhere in the Missoula Cemetery. Bennie's first wife, Catherine Somers, who ran through all his money in the early years, is also buried in the Missoula cemetery in a plainly marked grave.
- **1914-Death.** February 22, 1914 from 'Influenza' (rheumatism was also thought to be a contributor)



*Information researched by Kim Kaufman, historical re-enactor.*