Document 1: Mattie Gunterman Biography

**Ida Madeline Warner (Mattie) Gunterman** was born sometime during the spring of 1872 in La Crosse, Wisconsin.

Mattie is described by her friend Kathleen Goldsmith as "delicate" suggesting that she was often sick as a child but from her earliest days she exhibited an extremely strong sense of self-identity choosing to be known as Mattie as opposed to Ida or Madeline. The most convincing evidence of her sense of self appears through her photographs; she appears in more than half of them When, in the late 1880s, Mattie left her home town and headed west for the booming city of Seattle, and she took her snapshot camera with her.

*VPL-2215 Mattie Gunterman c.1900*

**From Seattle to Beaton**

Mattie developed trouble with her lungs (TB) which worsened in the damp climate and constant rain of Seattle. Mattie wanted leave the wet autumns and winters of Seattle behind for a drier home, so in the spring of 1897 Mattie, her husband William, and their 6 year-old son Henry, headed for the semi-arid climes of eastern Washington. The family eventually decided to visit Mattie's cousin Hattie Needman in the small British Columbia mining community of Thomson's Landing, later known as Beaton. Mattie had written Hattie to enquire whether Bill might be able to find work there.

The three, including her horse Nellie and their dog Nero, walked a total of 600 miles, with Will looking for work in sawmills along the way. As they travelled, Bill worked in sawmills and Mattie took in laundry.

It was during this trek to better health that Mattie took the first photographs attributed to her using the Bull’s Eye camera.

**Mattie’s First Camera (No.2 Bull’s Eye) & Early Pictures**

The Kodak Bulls Eye was one of the very early Kodak cameras, and Mattie was one of its very early users. First produced in 1896 (and made until 1913). The top of the camera box would pull up to a beautiful wooden interior containing two rollers designed to take 3.5 x 3.5 inch images on a 12 exposure roll of film. It had a simple spring controlled rotary disc shutter and rotating disc stops controlled by pulling up a lever on top of the camera. It also contained a built-in mask that offered the option of taking round or square photos.

*Kodak Bulls Eye Camera, c. 1897*

With her Bull's Eye camera, commonly known as a box camera, she snapped pictures of friends, her family's campsites, trappers; prospectors; miners; packers; pioneer dreamers; and wilderness activities along backwoods trails.

**Beaton: A New Beginning**

The Gunterman family arrived in Beaton, BC in June of 1898 to find that the discovery of many rich silver-lead deposits in the West Kootenay District provided much opportunity for prosperity, not just getting by.

Bill had not originally been too pleased to be relocating to the isolated community of Beaton instead of the excitement of the growing city of Seattle, but he had done so knowing that Mattie would be delighted with the semi-

*VPL-2222-Gunterman's homestead in Beaton c.1900*

wilderness of the area. Bill easily found work, and Mattie’s health improved greatly in the new environment.

**Mattie’s Second Camera (Glass-Plate) & Later Pictures**

By early 1898, Mattie's interest in photography had expanded. With the family now financially secure, she could now afford a 4"x5" plate camera that offered ground glass focusing, and a multispeed shutter.

This allowed her to keep a more detailed photographic journal of her new life. Mattie usually spent winter months developing her plates and making prints. She kept two albums: one for herself and one for Henry, a practice which she continued until he was a grown man. It is partly thanks to Henry's album that examples of Mattie's early work exist today, because Mattie's own copies were destroyed in a fire when the Gunterman family home burned down in 1927.

Curiously, Mattie appears in many of her own photographs. She made this possible by using a long piece of rubber tubing which was attached to her camera's pneumatic shutter at one end with a rubber bulb at the other. Squeezing or stepping on the bulb released the shutter and made an exposure. Many of her Beaton photographs record pioneers and camp workers and their lives in interior British Columbia.

**Significance of Mattie’s Pictures**

Her photos provide a visual history of working peoples, not only in the camps and the Nettie-L Mine, but also the social aspects of community: the results of hunting expeditions; women and children skating on frozen ponds; family picnics; masquerade parties; and humourous activities in the cookhouse. She had no pretensions about creating art, she wanted to record the people and places that had meaning for her.

In 1927, a rancorous neighbour burned down Mattie's house, causing her to lose all her photographs, apart from the ones in Henry's keeping. She lived on, past Will's death in 1937, until the end of the war (in which her grandson, Avery, was serving), She died suddenly at the age of 73 in 1945.

**The Re-Discovery of Mattie’s Photos**

Incredibly, what was left of Mattie's photograph collection was found buried under a rat's nest! In the summer of 1961, Ron D'Altroy, former historical photograph curator at the Vancouver Public Library, drove into the Lardeau River Valley with two associates to conduct research into the ghost towns of British Columbia. Ron took a side trip to the deserted town of Camborne then drove on to a local bar at the Beaton Hotel.

Following is a quote from Ron ***(From: Flapjacks & Photographs: a History of Mattie Gunterman, Camp Cook and Photographer by Henri Robideau, p. 194)***

**“**I think I heard about Henry Gunterman the first time in the beer parlour, having a couple glasses of beer at Beaton, and somebody in there said, "Ahhhhh-boy, you guys should talk to old Henry Gunterman... his mother took a lot of old pictures on glass"...Well boy, my heart stopped beating right there. So we started to look for them... I went up a ladder, it was about sixty percent broken, up into a hole, into a loft, in the back, in the shed, and found this box of glass plates...refuse from the packrats had fallen and put a dome on it...great many of the plates were stuck together...And OHBOY! I took one look and I knew exactly what I had.”

***(From: Flapjacks & Photographs: a History of Mattie Gunterman, Camp Cook and Photographer p. 194)***

 An aging Henry Gunterman felt that his mother’s photographs would be safer in the Vancouver Public Library than in his loft where they could become the booty of thieves, and the bed for rodents. As a result, he donated the entire collection of plates to Ron to bring back to safety in Vancouver to preserve and eventually make available to the public. There are almost 300 images in the Ida Madeline Warner (Mattie) Gunterman Photograph Collection, one hundred and fifty of which have been digitized to date.

*VPL 2225 Three women on horseback, c.1900*

*Written by Gavin Hainsworth*

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