



Mine near Virginia City, Montana, showing mill and ore cars on dump.
(Photograph by Charles W. Herbert, Tucson, Arizona)



Looking down on Virginia City from the surrounding hills.
(Photograph by Martin Bovey, Jr., Concord, New Hampshire)

Weaving In The Far West

IN VIRGINIA CITY, Montana, the new home of The Shuttle-Craft Guild, visitors walk into a Gold Rush camp of the eighteen-sixties, a restoration so realistic that if William Fairweather, who washed the first pan of gravel in Alder Gulch, were to return he would feel quite at home. Streets look much the same as when miners and prospectors swarmed in from the Gulch, following the fabulous gold strike, and when Vigilantes pursued and hanged "road agents" who preyed upon the miners.

The University of Montana students and the tourists, who now share the streets in the summer with present-day miners, doubtless would surprise the nineteenth century visitor, as well as the neat markers in the cemetery for the road agents' graves, many of which have for their only epitaph, "Hanged."

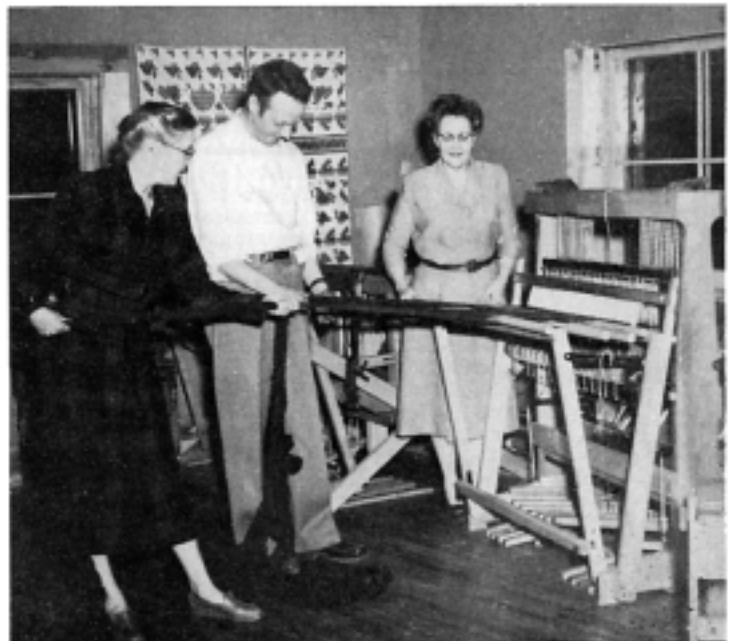
The town, however might be less crowded than when "99 per cent of the territory of Montana" followed Fairweather and his five friends back to the Gulch, after their discovery became known, and started the camp that became Virginia City. The discovery was almost an accident. In 1863, Fairweather and his friends were attacked and robbed by Indians as they were returning from a prospecting trip. On broken-down ponies, contributed by their captors, they started back to Bannack, the nearest mining camp. Exhausted, they made camp at the Gulch and from force of habit Fairweather washed a pan of gravel. He found pay dirt richer than he ever imagined existed.

Today Fairweather and his friends could stop at the restored Fairweather Inn, perhaps less expensively than when miners paid their bills with gold. They would find the same board sidewalks and "false fronts" although the merchandise shown in those "false fronts" might surprise them. The looms which Martha Colburn of The Shuttle-Craft Guild will operate in one of them this summer would be, however, a familiar

note. She will establish a "weave-it-yourself" and handicraft shop where visitors may stop in and throw a shuttle on their own account.

In the Old Stone Barn Theater, now conducted as a dramatic workshop by the University of Montana, students present plays for an interested summer audience. More familiar to Fairweather, however, would be the melodramas produced by The Virginia City Players, with handbills run off on a handpress and type surviving from his own day. They would find buffalo, elk, and venison served in the Wells Fargo Coffee House, Rank's drug store looking much as it did

Mrs. Harriet C. Douglas, Martin Tidball and Miss Martha Colburn in the new Shuttle-Craft Guild Studio.



when it was opened in 1864, although the original building houses a modern pharmacy. The busy barber shop still has its plush chairs and rows of ornamented shaving mugs, no hindrance to dispensing shaves as well as local color; many old time objects Fairweather saw in use can now be seen in the museum.

Placer mining still continues in Alder Gulch—the world's richest placer gold stream which has produced more than \$200,000,000 in gold dust. Although changes have taken place in both placer and lode mining, miners still wash gravel in pans and prospectors still roam the mountains, looking much as their predecessors did, since styles in prospectors' wear haven't changed. They have proved that there is still gold in the hills and the new methods have brought old lodes back to life.

Come summer, the 19th century visitors could take a horse-drawn stage to Nevada City, two miles away, where the first Vigilante hanging took place. The Vigilantes, however, have now become the Vigilance Club, a civic organization keeping a keen outlook for Virginia City's interests, who pride themselves greatly on the fact that they stem from the original organization which eliminated the notorious "Plummer gang" and other "road agents" and made Montana safe for progress.

Visitors can still find sourdough biscuits and sage brush honey in Nevada City. An old prospector has promised that he will serve all comers in his cabin.

This former Ghost Town has been restored largely through the efforts of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Bovey. Mr. Bovey came to Montana shortly after he finished college to manage family wheat interests. He took an active interest in the life of the country, entered politics and was elected to the state senate. The longer he lived in Montana the more fascinating he found the state's pioneer history, which is so close to its present. And then he began to collect antiques.

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Lou Romey, born in Virginia City 82 years ago, who is still prospecting for gold. He's getting a shoeshine in front of the historic barber shop, now operated by his son. He wears the characteristic prospector's outfit. (Photograph by Martin Bovey, Jr.)



"False Fronts" along Main Street. (Photograph by Ernest Peterson, Hamilton, Montana)



Fabrics from The Shuttle-Craft Guild Studio. A comprehensive exhibition has been on tour among weavers' guilds this spring and will be available for fall showings. (Shuttle-Craft Guild photographs by Martin Tidball)

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When he saw the famous old Fairweather Inn at Virginia City, rapidly falling into decay, he succumbed to its charm and decided he would purchase and reconstruct it chiefly in order to provide a setting for his antiques. As the restoration went on he discovered so many other absorbing aspects of local history that he decided upon reconstruction of the entire town, which has been accomplished largely in the last three years. Much of the actual work he has done himself, including digging in the town dump where he found the original street lamps, street signs and other relics.

The Shuttle-Craft Guild, a pioneer organization in its own right, last year "moved on" from its former ranch location near Basin, Montana, to new and spacious quarters in Virginia City. Founded in the early twenties by Mrs. Mary M. Atwater, it was said to be one of the first organizations, in that period, to offer a modern service to handweavers. At that time they were relatively few, although deeply interested in reviving an old art. The Shuttle-Craft Bulletin, which has appeared monthly for 27 years, is the oldest current publication for handweavers.

Mrs. Atwater directed the Guild until 1946, when she sold her entire interest to Mrs. Harriet C. Douglas, who had been associated with her for some time. With the rapid increase in interest in handweaving, the Guild outgrew its "one-woman" organization and Mrs. Douglas is now assisted by her husband, Martin Tidball, who brings to the Guild

a versatile background, and Miss Martha Colburn, former college teacher, occupational therapist and crafts director.

With the demand for personal instruction increasing, and with weaving finding a place in college curriculums, the old headquarters on the ranch proved inadequate. Virginia City was picked for the new location and the new studio was opened late in 1949, with classes offered the year round.

The new studio at Virginia City, says Mrs. Douglas, is a "weaver's dream"—at least, she says, it is the Shuttle-Craft Guild's dream. It is built of logs taken from the main house at a nearby mine which was built more than 50 years ago. The wide windows look out at the spot where the original Alder Gulch Gold strike was made and by the stream in the "back yard" a small ore crushing mill still stands which was used in the sixties and seventies. Beyond the creek are wonderful mountain views. The studio was designed for efficiency of space and arrangement, has good fluorescent lighting, and an adequate and well-filled stockroom. Twenty looms are available, up to 12-harness.

Full credit for the Shuttle-Craft Guild's six-week summer course from June 19 through July 28 will be given by the extension division of the University of Montana, although non-credit students will be accepted. It is, however, recommended especially for teachers and those who need college credit. It will include large projects in clothing and interior fabrics, as well as loom and weaving techniques, considerable drafting and analysis and textile designing. Linens and smaller articles will be planned and executed according to the interests of individual students. The regular summer course will not be open to beginners unless they wish to enroll for a week's advance training in basic work.

Mrs. Douglas is a member of the regular extension faculty of the University of Montana.

A special two-week class for beginners will be held from August 21 through September 1 for which college credit also may be arranged. During the first three weeks in August and the month of September advanced students will be taken for personal instruction in their special interests. Students also are taken for instruction at any time for which they can arrange in advance, with courses continuing in winter.

The Guild also has been approved by the Veterans' Administration for professional training in handweaving and offers a 20-week concentrated course. The summer course is approved as part of the training period, which may be continued through two more summers or until the end of the year. A group of veterans will start on the 20-week course in September.

Enrollment in all courses is limited. For more detailed information all prospective students should write directly to Mrs. Harriet C. Douglas, The Shuttle-Craft Guild, Virginia City, Montana. Application for credit should be made through the Registrar, University of Montana, Missoula.

Montana University offers a course for beginning weavers on the campus at Missoula which does not duplicate in any way The Shuttle-Craft Guild courses. It is given as half-time work during the regular six-week summer session. Information may be obtained from the Registrar, Montana State University, Missoula. • • •