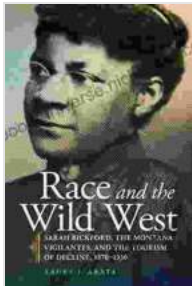


# Sarah Bickford, the Montana Vigilantes, and the Tourism of Decline (1870-1930)



## Race and the Wild West: Sarah Bickford, the Montana Vigilantes, and the Tourism of Decline, 1870–1930 (Race and Culture in the American West Series Book

17) by Beca Aberdeen

★★★★☆ 4.6 out of 5

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In the late 19th century, the mining towns of Montana were booming. But as the mines played out, the towns went into decline. One of these towns was Bannack, Montana. In 1862, Bannack was a bustling town of over 10,000 people. But by 1870, the population had dwindled to just a few hundred.

One of the most notorious residents of Bannack was Sarah Bickford. Bickford was a madam and alleged murderer. She was also a symbol of the decline of Bannack and other Montana mining towns.

In 1870, Bickford was accused of murdering a local miner named John X. Beidler. Bickford was acquitted of the murder, but the case cemented her reputation as a dangerous woman.

In 1871, a group of vigilantes known as the Montana Vigilantes was formed. The vigilantes were determined to clean up Bannack and other Montana mining towns. They targeted criminals and other undesirables, including Bickford.

In 1872, the vigilantes hanged Bickford from a cottonwood tree. Bickford's death was a turning point in the history of Bannack. The town continued to decline, and by the early 20th century, it was a ghost town.

### **Sarah Bickford: A Complex Figure**

Sarah Bickford was a complex and controversial figure. She was a strong and independent woman who lived in a time and place where women were expected to be subservient. She was also a ruthless businesswoman who was accused of murder.

Bickford was born in Maine in 1834. She came to Montana in 1862 with her husband, George Bickford. George was a miner, and Sarah worked as a cook and housekeeper. The Bickfords had four children, but they all died in infancy.

In 1866, George Bickford was killed in a mining accident. Sarah was left alone with no means of support. She turned to prostitution to make a living.

Bickford was a successful madam. She opened a brothel in Bannack in 1867, and it quickly became one of the most popular in town. Bickford was known for her beauty and her business acumen. She was also known for her temper and her violent outbursts.

In 1870, Bickford was accused of murdering John X. Beidler. Beidler was a local miner who was found dead in Bickford's brothel. Bickford was arrested and charged with murder, but she was acquitted of the crime.

The Beidler murder case cemented Bickford's reputation as a dangerous woman. The Montana Vigilantes were formed in 1871, and Bickford was one of their targets.

In 1872, the vigilantes hanged Bickford from a cottonwood tree. Bickford's death was a turning point in the history of Bannack. The town continued to decline, and by the early 20th century, it was a ghost town.

## **The Montana Vigilantes**

The Montana Vigilantes were a group of vigilantes who operated in Montana from 1871 to 1873. The vigilantes were formed in response to the rise of crime and lawlessness in Montana mining towns.

The vigilantes' targets were criminals and other undesirables, including Sarah Bickford. The vigilantes hanged Bickford in 1872, and her death marked a turning point in the history of Bannack.

The Montana Vigilantes were a controversial group. They were often accused of abusing their power and of hanging innocent people. However, the vigilantes were also successful in reducing crime and lawlessness in Montana mining towns.

The Montana Vigilantes disbanded in 1873, but their legacy continues to this day. The vigilantes are a reminder of the challenges that early settlers

faced in the American West. They are also a reminder of the importance of law and order.

## **The Tourism of Decline**

The decline of Montana mining towns led to the development of a new form of tourism: the tourism of decline. Tourists flocked to these towns to see the remnants of the mining era. They visited abandoned mines, ghost towns, and other historical sites.

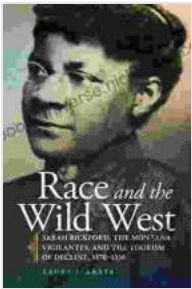
The tourism of decline was a controversial form of tourism. Some people argued that it was disrespectful to the people who had lived and worked in these towns. Others argued that it was a way to preserve the history of the mining era.

The tourism of decline continues to this day. Bannack, Montana is now a state park, and it is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Montana. Tourists come to Bannack to see the town's historic buildings, learn about its history, and experience the atmosphere of a bygone era.

Sarah Bickford, the Montana Vigilantes, and the tourism of decline are all interconnected stories. Bickford was a symbol of the decline of Montana mining towns, and the vigilantes were a response to the rise of crime and lawlessness in these towns. The tourism of decline is a reminder of the challenges that early settlers faced in the American West, and it is a way to preserve the history of the mining era.

The stories of Sarah Bickford, the Montana Vigilantes, and the tourism of decline are all fascinating and complex. They are a reminder of the

challenges that people have faced in the past, and they are a reminder of the importance of history.

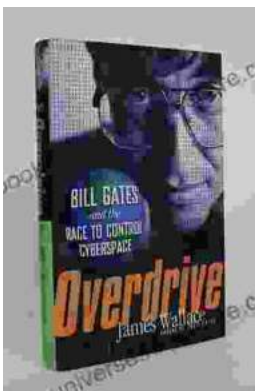


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