

**CHARITY DILLON GRAVE  
BROADWATER COUNTY  
BETWEEN RADERSBURG AND TOWNSEND, MONTANA  
OCTOBER 2006**

The grave is located next to the old stage road from Radersburg to Hog 'Em.

NAME	DEATH	REMARKS
Charity Jane Dillon aka Charity Allen aka Priscilla S. Allen alias Finn	1870/02/23	<p>Charity did not die in 1872, but in 1870, according to a squib in the <u>Helena Herald</u> of February 25, 1870, page 3, it read:</p> <p>“Found Dead. — We have received a letter from a well known citizen of Springville, Meagher County, stating that a man by the name of John Boyce arrived in town on the evening of the 23rd and reported he had found dead in her house, a woman by the name of Mrs. Charity Allen. No particulars were given as to the cause of her death. Mrs. Allen, for the past three or four months has kept the Summit House, which is about half way between Springville and Radersburg, on the main road. Robert Fisher, Esq., a Justice of the Peace at Springville, proceeded to her residence and took charge of the body as Coroner. An inquest was held yesterday at 10 a. m., but as yet we have not learned the verdict of the jury.”</p> <p>Aged 40 per the poem written about her.</p>

Observed by Charleen Spalding and John Stoner.  
Compiled by Charleen Spalding, Helena, Montana.

**CHARITY JANE DILLON** (AS TOLD BY ALBERT WARD IN 1930)

In 1930 Mr. Albert Ward of Townsend, aged 89, a pioneer of Montana, visited the Historical Library at Helena and he brought to David Hilger, librarian at that time, his own version of Charity Jane Dillon's death in 1872, and sketched her cabin as he had known it, including the road, creek and spring near which it stood. Here is the story as he related it:

“Travelers on the old Hog'em-Radersburg road will see from the top of the hill going toward Radersburg a white wooden cross, 4x6 feet that was not there last spring. Also an engraved marble marker which marks what has been known before only as ‘the Old Woman’s Grave’ with the name

of Charity Jane Dillon. A letter in Mr. Hilger's files, dated August 17, 1930 states that this cross was erected by Mrs. Flo Holling, Mrs. Roy Kingsley and Mr. and Mrs. Jesse Knight in deference to the memory of a courageous and kindly woman. Those whom human sympathy had moved to this commemoration of a lonely grave covered the sunken mound with the flat rocks characteristic of this region. As they dug down to set the foot of the cross they could see the corner of the coffin box in its shallow grave.

The letter states further that "The Vermont Marble Works, preparing for extensive development in this region, has offered at some future time to place a polished marble marker. The women of Radersburg hope later to place a similar white cross at the grave of a child on the other side of the hill. The rough board that once marked the grave has fallen. The child was buried there by members of an emigrant train. The train went on but the child's mother, leaving behind on the lonely hill the body of her baby, took with her the heartache only a mother could feel.

"Charity Dillon has become the subject of a legend. Her characteristics and even her name are matters of contradictory stories. An early account names her 'Dillon, alias Finn.' The story is that as a young girl in the east, she was engaged to a young man who came west to find his fortune. Losing track of him and waiting in vain for word, she found him — married, settled and happy. And Jane Dillon, with strength of character rare in any day, kept her own counsel, gave no hint of whom the man might be, whom she had come to find, but went her way and lived her own independent life, and never married.

"She died young; some accounts say 25, some 30, and some 32.

"Near a spring she built her a four-room cabin, a kitchen, a dining room and a bedroom; and at the opposite end of the house a public hall with a bar, for she kept an inn where travelers were welcomed and refreshed. It was not an over-night stop but a place where passersby could always be sure of a meal.

"So sturdily kind was she to everyone, so ready with good offices that some assert her name 'Charity' was given her in recognition of her qualities. But others remember that there were 'three cardinal gulches' here — Faith, Hope and Charity. There was the Charity Flume Company of the '60s, so those may be right who say the name is descriptive of her geographical location rather than her soul."

## DEATH REMAINS A MYSTERY

"Some persons who knew her say she drank. And that would not be strange if it were true, considering the defeat of her emotional life, and her grief and spiritual isolation.

"She was found dead in bed. A companion of Mr. Ward passing the house, found her body and notified those living nearest. Those who found her waited until others arrived. And there again the stories are contradictory. Some say her trunk and personal belongings had been ransacked, that she

was known to have money secreted in her trunk and that a hired man whom she had befriended was missing. Other gossips of the day made much out of the half empty demijohn of whiskey under her bed. But if it were there that, too, would not have been strange. She might have kept only enough for immediate use at the bar where casual strangers might be expected to drop in at any time and store the surplus in a less accessible place.

“She was dead, and her body was buried on a hillside where a slab, long fallen, marked the place.

“The determination of residents of Radersburg to keep alive incidents of the town’s early history is significant of the awakened interest in the vanishing pioneer period.”

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### **ANOTHER PIONEER GIVES VERSION OF CHARITY DILLON**

This manuscript was read by the late Thomas R. Moore, who was the first child in Radersburg, not born there, but came with his mother when he was three years old in May 1866. He spent many fruitful years and was one of the little town’s most respected citizens. As such he was often called upon to take a lead in public affairs and it was on an occasion of such that he addressed a group at the site of the grave of Charity Dillon, July 11, 1946. Mr. Moore’s words:

“Friends and Neighbors: We are gathered here this evening to pay homage and respect to a young woman by the name of Charity Dillon. This is indeed an unusual gathering because none of us will ever receive the honor and respect seventy-four years after our deaths. The one whom we are honoring tonight was a woman without selfishness of ambition for riches or fame and devoted the last years of her life to the service of mankind. She lived in a lonely cabin a short distance from here and the doors were always open to travelers and bull whackers who passed this way. She also developed a pond of water fed by a spring nearby to quench the thirst of man and beast. That is the way she received the name of ‘Charity’ Dillon.

“The history of her life before she came here is very meager but as far as we know she was born in Missouri in 1847. While still in grade school she fell deeply in love with a boy who later jilted her. The story goes that in those days a farm boy in Missouri received ten dollars a month eight months of the year, so being enticed by big wages in Montana he left for the west with a wagon train. Before leaving he promised faithfully to either come for her or send for her, but he did neither.

“After several years of waiting, one day she decided to start for the west with a saddle horse and pack horse. She found him not so very far away from this place, apparently happily married and the father of two children. In her grief she passed by without letting anyone know her identity.

Years later her 'intended' became a prosperous cattle man. He had friends in Radersburg but they never gave away the secret. There have been many arguments as to the cause of her death. The most logical cause was contaminated food which was responsible for the death of many pioneers.

"In preserving the history of Charity Dillon, we are seeking to preserve the history of some of the pioneers who did so much and paved the way for future generations to live here peacefully and comfortably."

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From Montana, the Magazine of Western History, Spring 1971:

"The passing traveler would be apt to miss it, were it not for an iron cross, four feet high, painted a glaring white. Almost hidden among greasewood brush and scrub pines, about 200 feet from the upper side of the old Corrine — Fort Benton stage road, is a lonely grave. It lies midway between the ghost town of Radersburg and the bridge spanning the Missouri at Townsend, 40 miles southeast of Helena. The grave is covered solidly with slabs of stone, evidently put there a century ago to prevent wild animals from digging up the body. It is the final resting place of a mysterious pioneer woman. The story, what we know of it, has overtones of faithless love, generously bestowed favors, and latter-day efforts to give recognition and meaning to a lonely life.

"Why was a woman buried alone on the desolate hillside instead of in the Radersburg cemetery? Did the citizens of Radersburg, once a booming mining town, conclude she was not the kind of woman who should be buried among good Christian folk? Was her name Charity Dillon, as the old headstone attests, or was it Priscilla Jane Allen, as some old-timers of Broadwater County still aver? A century later, nobody knows for sure.

"Women of the community who concluded that the grave deserved marking with a new cross and headstone believe that she was so gentle, kind and generous that she became known as 'Charity.' Others believe that because there was a gulch of that name in the vicinity, it was fastened upon her. Still others say freighters, bullwhackers and other travelers gave her the name because of extra-ordinary favors she bestowed on them without charge. One old-timer says there were plenty of them: 'Any time of the day,' he reminisced, 'you would see wagon trains that reached for a mile with horses, mules and oxen.'

"The lettering on the lonely headstone is blurred and unreadable until traced with a crayon, when it reads:

CHARITY DILLON  
DIED 1872  
KNOWN AS THE OLD WOMAN'S GRAVE

“There is also mystery on mystery. Was the hand that inscribed the old headstone the same hand that rudely carved the word MIZPAH on a cliff in a rocky canyon some distance away from the grave? In its issue of January 20, 1966, under the heading ‘History of Broadwater County,’ the Townsend Star includes the reminiscences of William Sherlock, born in California in 1870, who came to the Radersburg area as a youngster of nine years. He briefly mentions the lonely grave and continues:

“‘This story has to do with a strange marking carved in the rocky gulch about one-half mile below the old grave. I saw it as I rode horseback one day; just one word, something like MIZPAH. It was deciphered to me to mean “May the Lord watch between Thee and Me while we are separated one from another.” This expression comes from Genesis 31:49. Who carved it?’

“Was it the handicraft of Charity’s erst-while fiancé, stricken with remorse and a guilty conscience because he had not lived up to his promise to come back for her? Who else would have put that cryptic text from the Bible on the wall of a hidden canyon?

“But to return to the woman of mystery: ‘Charity’ did not die in 1872, but in 1870, according to a squib in the Helena Herald of February 25, 1870. It read: ‘Found Dead— We had received a letter from a well known citizen of Springville, Meagher County, stating that John Boyce arrived in town on the evening of the 23rd and reported he had found, dead in her home, a woman by the name of Mrs. Charity Allen. [No particulars were given as to the cause of her death.] Mrs. Allen, for the past three or four months, has kept the Summit House that is about half way between Springville and Radersburg, on the main road.’

“It would seem to be evident from the erroneous date on the headstone that whoever erected it was not in close contact with Charity, else the correct date of 1870 would have been chiseled instead of 1872. It may have been years after death that the grave was marked. Some think that after the wife of the man she loved died, he was responsible for the marker.

“In a letter to the Montana Historical Society, dated August 17, 1930, Mrs. Jessie Knight of Townsend tells about the cross over the grave: ‘The grave was known locally as “the Old Woman’s Grave.” Now, Charity was not an old woman; she was a broken-hearted, lone woman who tried to hide herself in a grave, known only to a few, who died at about thirty-two years of age, and for years laid in a grave alone and forgotten by all. No one placed a flower on that barren spot; no one to speak a kind word or tell of a kind act. Those things are forgotten. I have often been by the place and wondered why some one who must have known her did not fix the grave; if there was not someone who could remember. Evidently there was no one. I’ll tell you all I have found out.

“‘The story was told by some of the old timers, who as children, heard their folks talk. Many years ago, a young woman from the south, Missouri, Kansas or Iowa, joined an Oregon train, to marry the man she was engaged to, so she rode horseback out into the great unknown to find him. Radersburg was the place she was to find the greatest of all things, love, home and happiness. Arrived, she found him married to another woman

and had children. Being of a fine nature, she kept to herself the name of the man and no one to this day has any idea who he was. Just how she came to have a half way house across the road from where the grave is, I don't know.'

"Mrs. Knight's letter to the Historical Society went on to say: 'This lone grave always attracted me. I wanted to do something but didn't know what to do. Last winter, along in the night, I saw a white cross. I thought it a dream but afterward saw it twice again and was told to put a cross on the grave. This, to your way of thinking, may look like a fancy, but be that as it may, I tried to do this kind act and would like it to stand there while I live.

"So last year [1929] my husband made a rude cross of 2x4's and Mrs. Ray Kingsley and Mrs. Flo Holling and myself put it up over the grave. Would like some kind of marker if we could get correct information on name and age of this lone woman who lies in a lone grave.'

"Mrs. Knight made no mention of the old marker with its crudely incised lettering. Did she conclude, perhaps, that it had a ribald connotation?

"At any rate, seventeen more years passed. The frail wooden cross rotted still more, the old headstone sank into almost complete illegibility. Then in 1946 a group of Townsend women, representing the Broadwater County Federation of Women's Clubs had a cross fashioned out of a two-inch welded pipe, painted it white and on July 11, conducted a solemn ceremony at Charity's grave. At the same time they dedicated a new marble marker, the stone donated by the Vermont Marble Company. The legend from the headstone was copied on the new.

"Later Mr. Moore appended the following note to his eulogy: 'Just as the above ceremony was completed, three magnificent rainbows appeared in the sky. This was the first time that anyone of those present had beheld such an array of color in the sky at one time—the first time, in fact, in the life of the 'Old Man of the Mountains...'

"Charity Dillon remains a mystery. How long did she search for her lover? Where did it take her? How long did she live in the Radersburg area? What did she do for a living before she opened the Summit House? Why is hers a lonely grave?

"A woman of mystery in life, Charity Dillon remains so in death."

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The following is a ballad by Charles D. Greenfield, from Montana, the Magazine of Western History, Vol. XXI, No. 2, pp. 86-88. [Some of the stanzas are of questionable validity.]

### **THE GRAVE OF CHARITY**

Radersburg there still persists  
A very deep disparity  
About the fate of one it lists  
By the maiden name of Charity.

She lies, t'was said by Goody Knight,  
Lost in the Limestone Hills  
The victim of a lover's slight—  
That heartless wound that kills!

Her lonely grave seen but by few  
Gives Charity Dillon as her name,  
Her year of death as seventy-two,  
No word from whence she came.

Old Goody Knight told of her plight,  
How, from her lover parted,  
She hid her hurt deep out of sight  
And died quite broken hearted.

While still a maid, Good Goody said,  
Miss Allen (or was it Dillon?)  
Fell deeply for a poor young blade  
Who proved a faithless villain.

To the West he went on fortune bent  
Insisting she must follow.  
As soon as hopeful news was sent —  
A promise that proved hollow.

The months did fly, the years dragged by  
While Charity fondly waited.

No word did come, no fond reply —  
A maiden state seemed fated.

On trusty mare she headed West  
Intolerant of more delay,  
To find the man whom she loved best  
And marry right away.

Tom Moore recalled she found him wed,  
With children by a clinging wife,  
And turned away and quietly fled  
To Summit and a loveless life.

She hid her hurt behind the bar  
At the lonely Summit Road House,  
Caring for those who traveled far,  
With sorrow as her only spouse.

The Summit House soon spread her fame  
For generous treatment at the bar—  
And some dare hint, to lasting shame,  
Her charity exceeded that, by far!

There Boyce of Springville found her dead  
Untended where she'd fallen,  
And Helena's Weekly Herald said  
She was really Mrs. Allen.

Did Charity die of too much rye?  
Did ptomaine make her deathly ill?  
Or was she foully murdered by  
A hand that robbed the till?

In name and date, as maid or mate,  
Or one who lived in sin?  
No one with surety can relate  
What really did her in.

Her name was Allen, the Census said:  
Priscilla S., aged forty years,  
And eighteen seventy found her dead—  
No kith or kin to spill their tears.

Missouri was not her home, but California,  
A pauper she — no life of ease  
To help her on her lonely way.  
Her death? It's cause? Of course, D.T.'s!

Reprise:

In Radersburg there still persists  
A very great disparity  
About the fate of one it lists  
By the gracious name of Charity.

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**Legend's new chapter**

*By MARGA LINCOLN - Independent Record - 06/20/08*

TOWNSEND — Called both Old Woman's Grave and Lone Woman's Grave, the burial site of Charity Jane Dillon high above Canyon Ferry Lake is apparently anything but lonely.

Some say it's the most visited gravesite in Broadwater County.

One thing is for certain, Charity Dillon's legend has attracted a circle of Charity well-wishers in Broadwater County and far beyond over the years.

And recently John Stoner, a local self-taught historian who's written a history of her life, came across yet another puzzle — a time capsule in the metal cross marking her grave.

And, as is typical in the saga of Charity Dillon, it raises more questions than answers.

Dillon first rode into Diamond City mining camp in Broadwater County between 1864 and 1867. Alone and on horseback, she was described as being heavily veiled and carrying a dagger in her belt. The evening she stayed in Diamond City, she carefully watched each man entering the hotel.

Dillon, whose real name was Priscilla Jane Allen, was on the trail of either her errant lover or husband who had disappeared several years before.

Legend holds that she eventually found him living in the Radersburg area, happily married and father of two children.

Dillon came to reside on the nearby stage route running from Helena to Gallatin City. She earned the name Charity for her kindness to wayfarers stopping at her place, Summit House.

That stage route now cuts across National Guard and BLM land and is known as Old Woman's Grave Road in Dillon's honor.

In April, Stoner was contacted by Rick Leavell, 64, of Seattle, who told him of the time capsule placed inside the white metal cross when it was installed at Dillon's grave 61 years ago.

Made from plumbing pipes, the cross and metal capsule had been constructed by his father, John Leavell, who owned City Plumbing and Heating in Helena years ago.

The father and son were apparently the only ones who knew of the capsule's existence.

With permission from the National Guard and the Bureau of Land Management, Stoner recently recovered the metal canister, and it will be displayed in the Broadwater County Museum and Historical Library in coming months.

However, time and weather had taken their toll on the contents of the metal tube.

Stoner and Rick Leavell said they believed the capsule would hold a list of the names of those attending the July 11, 1946, ceremony, when the white metal cross was dedicated and information about the event.

But much of the material in the capsule had been water damaged. Some are just paper pulp pieces.

One sheet was a torn copy of a speech by Thomas Moore, a Radersberg historian of the time known as the Old Man of the Mountains, who spoke at the dedication.

Other contents were a thin, copper postcard-sized invitation urging tourists to visit Montana, a buffalo-shaped paper windshield decal and a disintegrating copy of a Montana tourism flyer.

Rick Leavell, who was 2 1/2 years old at the time of the ceremony, knows he attended it because of a family photo of the event.

Both Stoner and Rick Leavell are at a loss to explain why a plumber from Helena constructed the metal cross made of plumbing pipes. There were certainly plumbers in Townsend who could have made it, said Stoner.

Stoner said the Broadwater County Federation of Women's Clubs organized the installation of the metal cross. Several wooden crosses had preceded it.

Leavell said in a phone interview that he thinks the capsule was probably an idea that his parents cooked up.

"I'm sure it was an off-the-cuff idea."

They probably did it in the spirit of "let's do a little extra.

"Unfortunately, it didn't survive," he said. "But it's been fun pursuing it."

Rick recalls hearing about the cross's contents as a child when accompanying his father on hunting trips in Broadwater County. John told his son that when the time capsule was finally discovered, Rick would likely be the only one still alive who had attended the 1946 ceremony.

At that time, historian Moore spoke of Dillon's journey to Broadwater County, her search for her lover, and her early death.

At the close of the ceremony, "three magnificent rainbows appeared," according to notes left by Moore.

"This was the first time that anyone of those present had beheld such an array of color in the sky at one time," he wrote.

Moore blamed Dillon's death on food poisoning. But her death certificate states delirium tremens, according to Stoner — a condition brought on by alcoholism.

Legend attributes her death to a broken heart.

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