by Guy Rocha, former Nevada State Archivist

One of the most conspicuous women in Nevada's history is Comstock prostitute, Julia Bulette. In her brief lifetime, the "soiled dove" was a colorful, minor figure in Virginia City's early heyday. However, with her brutal murder in 1867 and the hanging of the alleged killer the following year, Julia became a bigger-than-life legend. The myth-making and "fakelore" continues today in spite of the facts.

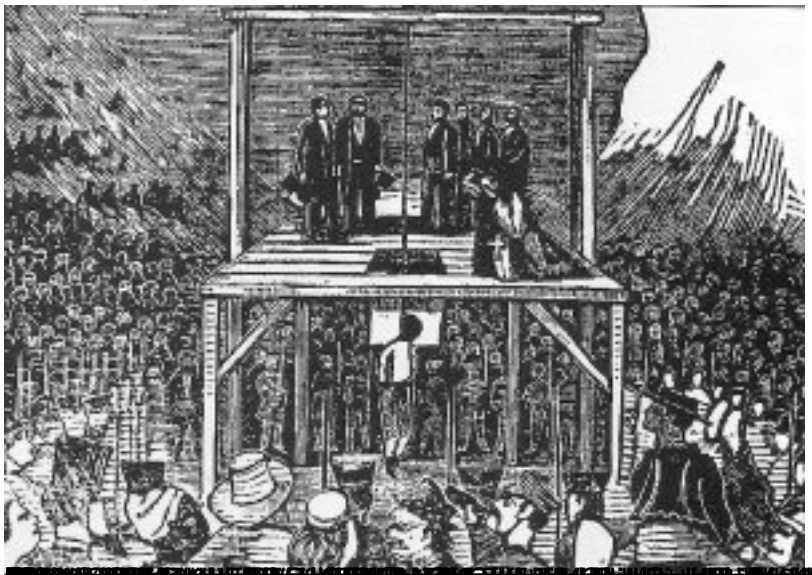
Author Marla Kiley, in her article "The Immoral Queens of the Red Light District," has filled the pages of the July 1997 issue of *True West* magazine with the accumulated fiction and fable associated with Julia Bulette. "Almost instantly," Kiley writes, "Julia was wearing silk, velvet, and sable furs. Shortly after her arrival on the scene she was making $1,000 a night and also accepted payment in the form of bars of bullion, diamonds, or rubies." Absolute nonsense and pure poppy-cock! While Bulette had seen better days, she died in debt, according to estate records, her bills exceeding her assets. Kiley then describes Julia "as a beautiful and willowy woman who seemed to float as she walked," when in fact she was neither wealthy, beautiful, willowy, nor did the rather heavy-set woman seemingly float when she walked.

Kiley's imagination runs wild in painting an exaggerated, glamorized portrait of Julia Bulette's life. We know that in the some four years that Julia lived on the Comstock she was a well-known prostitute and had worked in the best brothels, however she was certainly no rich, gorgeous courtesan. Earlier writers even elevated her to the position of madam and "the 'queen' of Virginia City's sporting row".

Kiley claims Bulette's two-room crib near the corner of D and Union streets in Virginia City was a small parlor house "referred to as Julia's Palace." Then in a flight of fancy we are told that Julia rode "around town in a lacquered brougham with side panels emblazoned with a crest of four aces, crowned by a lion couchant" and attended events "at the Opera House cloaked in a floor length purple velvet cape lined with sable..." Nothing could be farther from the truth!

So who was this woman who looms larger than life some 140 years after her untimely demise? Like most prostitutes now and then, there is much mystery to Julia Bulette's life. Some versions of her life story have her as an Englishwoman who immigrated to Louisiana where she married, then left her husband and entered prostitution, although she may have come to New Orleans from France where she had been recruited as a prostitute. Recent research indicates she was actually born near Natchez, Mississippi, and worked as a prostitute in New Orleans. Julia would travel to northern California to ply her trade before arriving on the Comstock by 1863.

We do know she quickly became a favorite among Virginia City's Fire Engine Company No. 1. According to contemporary accounts, the firemen elected her an honorary member "in return for numerous favors and munificent gifts bestowed by her upon the company." Other accounts in the *Territorial Enterprise* noted Bulette's enthusiastic support of the fire department and her presence at fires where she worked the brakes of the hand-cart engines. Fire Engine Company No. 1 participated in Julia's funeral procession through the streets of Virginia City in January 1867.



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