

Fieldwork and Public Interpretation in an Ethnic Enclave:
The Temple Project in Butte, Montana

By
Victoria Peck

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Thesis Committee:

Dr. Carroll Van West, Chair

Dr. Brenden Martin

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ABSTRACT

Butte, Montana was once a bustling city of over 100,000 citizens with people from over nineteen different ethnic backgrounds, now the city is down to a declining population of 34,000. The mark these ethnic communities left on the city still shapes the current landscape and culture of the city. Within Butte, the oldest continuously in-use Jewish reformed Temple in the state of Montana has shifted from existing as solely a place of worship and is transitioning into an ethnic heritage center to highlight the history, impact, and stories of all the different groups that made Butte, Montana the thriving mining city it once was. The B'nai Israel Temple will become a space in Butte to give a large voice to the stories that are underrepresented within the public interpretation in Butte. There is a preconceived notion in Butte that the harshness of the frontier and mining culture level the playing field for those of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds for those who moved to the city, but while true for groups such as the Jewish who were treated with less antisemitism than elsewhere in the world, the same cannot be said universally for all whom lived in the city. The African American, Indigenous, and Chinese populations all still faced heavy persecution and mistreatment within the city like they were elsewhere across the country.

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CHAPTER 1: BUTTE, JEWISH HISTORY, AND OBJECT INTERPRETATION

The center of Jewish heritage and religion geographically is Israel, but Jewish people can be found all over the world living in different countries. The diaspora of the Jewish people contributes to the diversity of methods of practice and backgrounds. Unlike other more traditional ethnic groups that all have the ability to bond over a common regional similarity, those of a part of the Jewish ethnicity cannot always rely on that fact. Throughout history Jewish people have faced harsh ridicule and persecution. Jewish people living in Eastern Europe in the late eighteenth century were terrorized under anti-semitic policies put in place by the Russian government. These policies would include the denial of civil rights and citizenship. In these areas Jewish populations were halted from participating in full in the modern world and had to deal with economic restrictions, limitations on accessible knowledge, and poverty.¹ These harsh conditions contributed to the appeal of the to the American West during the years of 1848 to 1890 to Jewish people who had been living under such difficult conditions and restrictions. Many Jewish settlers moved to the American West to escape old prejudice and to start a new life, not to repeat the patterns of the past.²

Early Settlement

In many cases the Jewish settlers were able to find a higher level of acceptance in the West and were granted advanced forms of social participation compared to the

¹ Pamela Tollefson, *Myron Brinig's Butte: Jews in the Wide Open Town*, MA thesis for University of Montana, 1994, 7.

² *Ibid.*, 17.

east and in previous countries of occupation. The American West was more welcoming to Jewish populations. It was suggested that the pioneer experience and challenges faced on the frontier discouraged discriminatory behavior. This trend stayed relatively true in relation to the Jewish experience in Butte early on but, the same tolerance was not given to all the ethnic groups in the city.

Jewish people began to come to Montana as early as 1862. They, like most the other groups who came to Montana and the West during this time, were enticed by the financial possibilities created through prospecting and trading at mining camps. Many of the early travelers to Montana were single young men attracted to the potentials of the area and the spirit of adventure. While mining was the draw to Montana, many Jewish settlers choose not to travel that path and instead made names for themselves through business. The early Jewish people to come to Montana tend to be Ashkenazi or Jewish people from Eastern Europe and out of this group a heavy population of them were from Germany. These early settlers tended to have easier times assimilating into Western American culture would eventually prefer a more reform form of Judaism. The second wave of Jewish settlers of the West would come in the twentieth century and would bring Central and Western European Jews who tended to be more orthodox. This geographical split combined with difference in time of arrival would later influence decisions surrounding proper worship methodology in Butte.

The early mining camps that Jewish people arrived at in Montana were in Bannack and Virginia City. A majority of Jewish People in Montana were German

American.³ It would not be until 1875 when the first record of a Jewish person moving to Butte would exist. The first two Jewish settlers in Butte were Sam Alexander and David H. Cohen. Mercantilism became the preferred job occupation for Jewish people in Montana. In Butte, many of the Jewish settlers set up business on Park Street. In six years, by 1881, there were enough Jewish settlers in Butte to hold High Holy Day services. In the same year Henry Jacobs, David Cohen, and Henry Frank organized the Hebrew Benevolence society in Butte. The Butte Hebrew Benevolence Society was modeled off the Benevolence Society that existed in Helena, Montana.

Jewish Community in Butte

The Hebrew Benevolence society initially consisted of around 50 members, in 1936 the B'nai Brith Lodge played host to the annual District 4 convention. This convention would bring in visitors from across the West to Butte just to attend. B'nai Birth would be active as a fraternal organization in Butte for over 80 years. The Benevolent society would eventually go through a split over the conflict between reform and orthodox. This split would lead to the creation of three separate Jewish congregations, one reformed and two orthodox. B'nai Israel was the reform congregation, while Adath Israel and Montefiore were the orthodox congregations.

Fifty members formed Adath Israel on October 6th, 1901. At the time of formation, the president of the congregation was Max Freid and vice president was Benjamin Epstein. Adath Israel worshiped at a synagogue called the House of Israel until

³ Ibid., 21.

the 1940s when they were forced to move and sell the building to the Anaconda Company due to damages caused by mining underneath the ground the building occupied. They would move two more times leading up to a merger in 1969 with B'nai Israel and the Montefiore orthodox congregation. This merger occurred due to declining membership of all the congregations. Retaining and attracting members was especially difficult for Adath Israel and Montefiore congregations being Orthodox, which tended to lack the ability to draw in younger groups due to their stricter nature.

Rabbi Ehrich led the Montefiore Congregation and they would meet at the Knights of Pythias Hall on south Main Street. Rabbi Ehrich owned and operated a kosher butcher shop on South Main street. The Montefiore congregation would endure the same struggles faced harshly by the orthodox congregations and thus would also go on to merge with B'nai Israel and Adath Israel in 1969.



Figure 1.. Historic view of Jacobs House from corner of Granite and Montana streets. Taken 1915, located in the Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives



Figure 2. Photo of the Jacobs House taken November 2019 by Christine Brown of the Montana Historical Society

The first elected mayor of Butte was a Jewish German immigrant named Henry Jacobs. He came to Butte as a merchant in 1876 and opened a store located at the intersection of Park and Main Street. He was elected as Mayor in 1879 and held office for one year. The Jacob's house still stands today and represents the rich Jewish history in Butte along with the opportunities Butte offered the Jewish community. The City of Butte owns the Jacobs house, and it is available to guest for lodging. It is located centrally within historic uptown Butte, making it the ideal place to have visitors stay. The Jacobs house has two notable claims to the city, first being that it was the home of the first mayor of Butte and the second being that it was the first brick home in Butte.



Figure 1. B'nai Israel Cemetery Entrance Gate and Archway. Photography By Victoria Peck, MTSU 2021

B'nai Israel Cemetery is the only Jewish Cemetery in Butte and is still currently in use. The B'nai Israel cemetery was created by the Hebrew Benevolence Society when the Northern Pacific Railroad company verbally gifted the land to them in 1881. It was not until Dec 28th, 1885, when the official papers had been filed that the 10 acres of land used for the cemetery were officially bought by the Hebrew Benevolence Association for five dollars. In 1905 the control of the cemetery would go from the Hebrew Benevolence Society to the B'nai Israel congregation. The cemetery is still in use today and includes notable community members such as Henry Jacobs and William Gallik, the first president of B'nai Israel. It also houses notable families that still makeup the current congregation such as the Cantys and Radfish. The cemetery means is just as important to the city historically as it is to those who still remain.



Figure 2. Framed Photo of William Gallik located in Coat Room of B'nai Israel Cultural Center, Photo by Victoria Peck, MTSU, 2021.

The congregation of B'nai Israel was formed in 1885 when a split occurred in the Butte Hebrew Benevolence society over reform versus orthodox teachings. Members of B'nai Israel followed the reformed belief system, which meant that they followed less strictly to the direct words of the Torah and would allow for changes such as having female Rabbis, which is not allowed in Orthodox congregations.

The first officers of the congregation were William Gallick, Abe Wehl, and Moses Linz. It would not be until the arrival of Dr. Maurie Eisenberg that the Congregation B'nai Israel would regularly hold services. The congregation initially did not have its own synagogue or worship space, instead it used various locations such as a boarding house on West Granite street, the carpenters union hall, and the Mountain View Methodist Church to hold meetings and services.⁴ In 1897, architects presented a building plan for the temple. An official building fund was started on October 5, 1902.⁵

In 1903 the B'nai Israel Temple was constructed at the corner of Galena Street and Washington Street. 1903 would also bring the congregation's first full time Rabbi, Rabbi Harry Weiss. The construction of the Temple cost anywhere from \$18,000 to \$25,000⁶ and had initially put the Temple into debt. Through the work of the Ladies' Auxiliary of B'nai Israel the debt was paid, and the mortgage title was given to the Congregation. A dedication ceremony was held on February 26-27, 1904, shortly

⁴ Dick Gibson, "Mining City History: Historic B'nai Israel Synagogue was built in 1903," Montana Standard (Butte, Montana), May 13, 2019, pg. 2.

⁵ Tollefson, "Myron Brinig's Butte," 90.

⁶ Ibid.

following the completion of the Temple. Rabbi Harry Weiss led the ceremony and included speakers such as William Gallik who was the current President of Congregation B'nai Israel at the time. Gallick is credited with being one of the driving forces behind the creation of the B'nai Brith fraternal lodge. The dedication ceremony received news coverage from local Butte newspapers such as the *Butte Miner* and *Butte News*, and it also drew attendees from a variety of religious and ethnic backgrounds acting as a community event not just a gathering for the Jewish population. The early congregation at B'nai Israel was majority Ashkenazi Jews who moved to Butte, Montana from the late 1800s to early 1900s. The Ashkenazi Jews often preferred reformed Jewish teachings in America.

At the height of Butte's growth in the early twentieth century, there were hundreds close to a thousand Jewish people living in Butte. By the 1970s there were less than 40 Jewish families remaining in Butte. By the mid 1960's there was no full time Rabbi and services were led by dedicated congregation member Avron Canty, father of current active congregation member Dave Canty. Dave recalls the times in his childhood when his father would be the one leading the congregation in worship.

The congregation continued to lead themselves in worship until the present. Members would hire Rabbis to officiate special events and for the Jewish High Holy Days. The High Holy Days consist off Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Years) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). In 1989 the Temple began participating in a student rabbi program from Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles. This program sent seminary students to

congregations in the west to for one-year terms to lead services in those communities. B'nai Israel participated in this program for over 14 years, assisting in the education of many young seminary students. Today B'nai Israel exists as the oldest continually operating Synagogue in Montana but its congregation has dwindled to 14 members. The Temple is no longer used for weekly services but instead exists for major ceremonies or holidays. Of all the Jewish spaces that had once existed in the city of Butte, only a handful are left, including B'nai Israel Temple, The Henry Jacobs House, and the B'nai Israel Cemetery.

Interpretive Jewish Objects in a Jewish Space for the Public

Specific objects of cultural and historical significance are at the Temple. These objects help physically represent Jewish religious practices and thus will be analyzed and interpreted based around what they would have been used for in the Temple and their role in the Jewish religion. It is integral to use the B'nai Israel Cultural Center as a space to interpret the material cultural objects available to the cultural center. These objects can be best interpreted within the space where they were used. Artifacts being studied include Prayer books, organs, typewriter, the Torah, Rams Horn, the Ark, and the Mezuzah. A combination of oral histories with primary and secondary sources uncovered the practical and religious uses of these objects in the B'nai Israel Temple. The objects show how the temple played a role in every aspect of the life of its congregation members.

Prayer Books and Worship Literature

Based on my June and July 2021 object inventory, there are over one hundred twenty prayer books and other related literary documents held within the B'nai Israel Temple. They are held in wooden cases, in what used to be the coat room near the main entrance to the B'nai Israel Temple. The prayer books range from 1908 as the oldest and 1987 being the most recent. Most of the books in the collection were published in the mid- twentieth century and were published under the title of Union Prayer Books. Prayer books were personal items. Devoted attendants often had their own prayer books; some with their names engraved on the front cover. Prayer books were also often gifts to those in within the Temple as thanks or as coming of age presents.

The Central Conference of American Rabbis published the first Union Prayer book in 1896. The first Union Prayer book "is primarily based on Rabbi David Einhorn's, Olat Tamid."⁷ David Einhorn wrote Olat Tamid and he relied heavily on early reform prayer books from German authors.⁸ The book was mainly published in English and placed emphasis on the morals and reformed thoughts. Most Union Prayer books were read from left to right and do not come with a Hebrew translation of the book. This design was to make the books more accessible to a growing population of reformed Jews who could no longer read Hebrew.

⁷ "Our History: Roots of Reform Judaism." Roots of Reform Judaism. Accessed November 20, 2021. <https://www.rootsofreformjudaism.org/ourhistory>.

⁸ "Early American Reform Prayer-Books" Hebrew Union college Jewish Institute of Religion, 2021, <http://huc.edu/research/libraries/guides/earp>.

The majority of the collection of Prayer Books at B'nai Israel Temple are Union Prayer Books that are published by the Central Conference of American Rabbis, a reformed Jewish rabbi institution. But that is not the case for all the books. The oldest book in the collection was published in 1908 and is a Prayer for the Day of Atonement that the Hebrew Publishing Company published with an English translation. The book reads from right to left and favors Hebrew as the primary language used. Another popular prayer book publisher that appears in the B'nai Israel collection is Prayer Book Press.

Congregation member Dave Canty recounted a time in the early 2000s when a handful of the existing prayer books were decommissioned. He stated that due to the lack of members and the decreased number of members who could comfortably read Hebrew, they took some of the prayer books to B'nai Israel Cemetery and buried. According to the Jewish religion prayer books are holy objects and thus cannot be regularly disposed of like a normal book.⁹ When Jewish institutions have excess prayer books in their collections, one of two things usually occurs. First many institutions will try and search to see if any other organizations such as seminary schools or other Jewish synagogues are interested in the books. If not, they will ceremonially bury the books in a Jewish Cemetery.

⁹ Chavie Lieber, "Awash in new prayerbooks, synagogues ponder how to dispose of old ones," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, 2013, <https://www.jta.org/2013/02/10/lifestyle/awash-in-new-prayerbooks-synagogues-ponder-how-to-dispose-of-old-ones>.

Organs in B'nai Israel Temple

B'nai Israel currently has two organs housed in their temple. The oldest is a still functioning pipe organ situated on the upper level of the temple where the children's choir would have been placed. This organ was donated to the B'nai Israel Temple in 1911 by the Women's auxiliary of the Temple B'nai Israel. While it has not been played during service in decades, a test was run in June of 2021 to confirm that the organ was still functioning. A framed poster sized document commemorates the installment of the first organ and memorializes important members of the community. It states;

The Organ in This temple was installed Friday Evening, September 1st, 1911 and was donated by the Ladies' Auxiliary [which] donated the organ in memory of the following; Isaac Bank, Sarah R. Bank, Caroline Blum, Isaac Blum, David Cohen, David H. Cohen, Gertrude Cohen, Hannah Cohen, Ida Cohen, Ester Cohn, Gotlieb Cohn, W. Copinus, amelia engel, Henry L. Frank, Bettie Gerzberger, Leopold Genzerberger, Simon Genzberger, Henry Heilbronner, Henry Jacobs, Anna Katzenstein, Ricka Kranskonf, Bertha Kohn, Joseph Kohn, Isaac Listman, Henrietta Levy, Seligman Oppenheimer, Sela Oppenheimer, Ester Miriam Pincus, Fred Pincus, Sarah Lisman shoenberg, Solomon Rosenstein, Mathilda W. Sheuerman, Ruby Saboltsky, Isaac Wise, Louis wise, and Max W. Michaels.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ladies Auxiliary of B'nai Israel, Installation of Organ in Temple, Framed dedication poster, September 1st, 1911, B'nai Israel Synagogue.



Figure 3. First Organ of B'nai Israel Temple, located on Choir loft of main level. Photo by Victoria Peck, MTSU, 2021.



Figure 4. Electronic Organ donated by congregation members to the Temple. Photo by Victoria Peck, MTSU, 2021.

The second organ in possession of the Temple is an electronic organ. This organ is also located in the choir loft of the Temple. A plaque located on the main worship floor of the temple attributes the donation of the electric organ in the honor of Sigmund and Emma O. Schilling by their children Raymond E. Helen S. Schilling and Harold O. and Madeleine J. Schilling. The organ was dedicated on November 7th, 1952.¹¹

Jewish worship and music go hand in hand. Traditionally synagogues would have a Hazzan, in English this translates to a Cantor. This person would have been in charge of chanting worship services at the synagogue. The placement of organs in the Temple is evidence of the reformed nature of the Temple and the cross culturalism between religious practices. Organs were a practice brought in from Christian churches to Judaism. To reformed Jewish congregations the organ “brought order and decorum to the worship and was a foil to the excesses of the hazzan.”¹² For reformed Jewish congregation the organ became a vital medium between keeping and connecting with the innate and historic music influence that has been imbedded in Judaism while also modernizing and adapting services to their preferences.

¹¹ Schillings Family, First Electronic Organ, 1952, Engraved Plaque, B’nai Israel Synagogue, Butte, Montana.

¹² Eric Rosenstein , "A Symbol and Tool of Hybridity: The Organ and its Role in Reform Judaism" (2010). Dickinson College Honors Thesis, 4.

Typewriter



Figure 5. Underwood Typewriter located in Rabbi's office of basement level of B'nai Israel Temple. Photo by Victoria Peck, MTSU, 2021.

Located in what used to be the Rabbi's study in a room that is now mainly used for storage is a No.5 Underwood Typewriter. The patent dates located on the back of the typewriter date this model from 1909 to 1926. The serial number is 2269582-5 and the typewriter has a regular carriage size of ten and a half inches.¹³ The Rabbi of the Temple used the typewriter to write a variety of documents such as correspondence with congregation members, announcement of special events, as well as official letters from the Rabbi of the Temple to other Jewish religious organizations and boards. The typewriter was integral aspect of congregation record keeping and according to Congregation B'nai Israel member Dave Canty, he recalls this typewriter being used occasionally during his time as a child while attending events at the Temple.

¹³ "Underwood Typewriter Serial Numbers", Typewriter Database, <https://typewriterdatabase.com/underwood.4.typewriter-serial-number-database>.

The Mezuzah



Figure 6. B'nai Israel Mezuzah in main entrance way to first floor interpretation level. Photo by Victoria Peck, MTSU, 2021.

The word Mezuzah translates from Hebrew to mean doorpost. The mezuzah is made to be attached to the doorpost at the entrance of a home and Jewish religious space. Inside the mezuzah is a k'laf or piece of parchment with passages from Deuteronomy on them. The object placed at the entrance fulfills the command outlined in the Bible, (Deuteronomy 6:9), to write the commandments upon the doorpost of the house and gates. There is a ceremony that goes along with the placement of the Mezuzah. It starts with a blessing and then the Mezuzah must be placed on the right

side of the doorway two thirds of the way up from the bottom of the post.¹⁴ The parchment inside the mezuzah was not something that would have been made locally, mezuzahs are considered holy objects and the parchment on the inside with the passage from Deuteronomy to be kosher would have had to come from Israel and must be handwritten.

There have been cases of printed mezuzas being bought and sold by Jewish practitioners and the Central Conference of American Rabbis have strictly condemned this act as a sin.¹⁵ The metal casing protecting the parchment would not have necessarily come from Israel because many later period Mezuzah casing were created in the United States or other locations outside of Israel, Jewish families would just have to import the parchment with the “Keriyas shemah- the essential prayer given in Deuteronomy VI, 4-9 and XI, 13-21.”¹⁶ It is required in the scripture that all Jewish households have their own mezuzah.

¹⁴ “What is a mezuzah? Why and how do we use it?” Reformedjudaism.org, Union for Reform Judaism 2021. <https://reformjudaism.org/beliefs-practices/lifecycle-rituals/what-mezuzah-why-and-how-do-we-use-it>.

¹⁵ “Mezuzah Archives,” The Central conference of American Rabbis, 25-27, <http://www.ccarnet.org/mezuzah>.

¹⁶ Joseph Jacobs, *Your Jewish Heritage: Questions and Answers on Traditional Jewish Life and Law for children and their parents*, New York: Kraft Foods, 1962, 7.

The Shofar



Figure 7. Shofars held in B'nai Israel displayed on the Beema. Photo by Victoria Peck, MTSU, 2021.

The shofar is a ceremonial object used during services on special holidays. The shofar is an ancient musical horn usually made from ram's horn. It is blown during services for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It is also used on weekday mornings during the month from Elul to Rosh Hashanah. Shofars come in a variety of sizes and shapes, depending on the choice of animal and level of finish. Some congregations will use a mouthpiece along with the Shofar to make it easier to use the instrument, although this practice is not kosher. B'nai Israel as a reformed congregation does not emphasize using the shofars without the assistance of the mouthpiece. Instead the congregation includes a mouth piece to increase the ease of blowing the shofar.

Torah

B'nai Israel had at one point held five Torah in its collection, and currently it houses two. The Torah is the main literary text used in the Jewish Religion. It includes the five main books of the Hebrew Bible. The Torah is also "known as the Five Books of

Moses or Pentateuch.”¹⁶ These books are: Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Leviticus, and Numbers. The Hebrew name for these would be Be-reshit, Shemot, Devarim, Va-yikra, and Be-midbar. Having physical kosher copies of the Torah requires extreme care and comes with guidelines with how to use and storage the scroll. All kosher torahs come from Israel and are handwritten by a scribe. They cost thousands of dollars to obtain so the fact that at one point the B’nai Israel congregation was in possession of five Torah speaks to the flourishing economic past of the Jewish communities and the centrality the Butte synagogue held for Jews in the greater region. The number of Torah also documents the merger of the Butte congregations in 1969. The Torah from the other two congregations were brought to B’nai Israel. No photographs were taken of the Torahs at B’nai Israel out of respect for their sacred affiliations.

In the collections of B’nai Israel left from the merger is the Ark that had once belonged to Adath Israel. The Ark would have been used to house the Torah during worship, but it is now in the basement level of the B’nai Israel as a reminder of the orthodox congregation Adath Israel of Butte. under and it ultimately stayed that way until they merged with B’nai Israel.



Figure 8. Adath Israel Ark located in basement level of Temple B'nai Israel. Photo by Victoria Peck, MTSU, 2021.

Community and the 2001 Renovations

In 2001 the B'nai Israel Temple underwent a major renovation project to preserve the Temple. During this time contractors repaired cracks in the walls along with other vital restoration to the exterior brick and foundation of the building. The residing Temple President at the time of the renovation was Paul Blumenthal. Exterior brick walls were repaired and restored along with improvements to the lighting, painting, and doors. The restoration was held in preparation for the Temple's centennial celebration which took place in May of 2003. The community of Butte celebrated the



Figure 9. Congratulatory Card from Butte Catholic High school on Renovations. Photo by Victoria Peck, 2021.

restoration with an open house held after the work was completed and general community celebrated over news of the restoration. Butte Central High celebrated B'nai Israel and the completion of their renovations with a large congratulatory card signed by approximately one hundred and ten students who attended the school. The card depicted a large cross and star of David on the front cover. The two symbols were meant to show the unity and acceptance of both groups despite having different religious beliefs.

B'nai Israel Temple is the perfect example of how the Jewish community adapted to the changing landscape of Montana and melded its culture, practices, and heritage with more modern American views. The people themselves who made up the congregation were involved members of the community and existed as business owners, miners, and civic leaders of the community. Community has always been important to B'nai Israel and a leading principal written into the morals of their practices of reformed Jewish practice. Judaism also puts a highlight on education. Using the B'nai Israel Temple as a place to interpretive the ethnic diversity of the city is an appropriate next phase of the synagogue's history. The space is inclusive, and the Temple has been opened to the public numerous amounts of times in hopes to create a more accepting and knowledgeable public.

Chapter 2: Communities of Butte: A city of all Nations

The Butte-Silver Bow County Archives established the All-Nations project to document the 17 most prevalent ethnic groups in the history of the city and county. Project leaders understood that they did not capture the stories, places, and objects of all possible ethnic groups, but they wanted to broaden the typical storylines about Butte from the traditional focus on Irish, mining history, and environmental history. The archives captured the diversity of the city's ethnic past by creating 17 separate exhibit panels, which could be displayed at locations throughout the city. These panels are the foundational block for the initial interpretation within the B'nai Israel Cultural Center.

The Irish and people of Irish descent living in Butte made up a majority of the population for most of the city's history. On Butte's modern landscape the remnants of the heavily Irish population can still be seen through the multitude of Irish pubs, restaurants, and businesses. Butte is often referred to as "One of America's most Irish cities."¹⁷ A few key events played a role in the appeal of Butte to Irish immigrants. These pulls to Butte can be broken down into three main groups. First, the Irish came to the eastern United States, fleeing from social, cultural, and political pressures caused by the great famine in 1820. Second the mining boom in Butte coincided with the decline in mining production from the Beara Peninsula in Ireland.¹⁸ Finally, opportunities in the American West became a way to escape the persecution and mistreatment of the Irish

¹⁷ Harry Dunleavy, "My trip to America's "most Irish" Town," Irish Central, August 25, 2021.

¹⁸ Irish in Butte," Butte, Montana: A City Born of All Nations, Butte-Silver Bow Archives, 2019.

immigrants within America in the East, where by law and custom Irish Immigrants were treated as second class citizens. They were excluded from jobs, not allowed into certain stores, and faced daily discrimination. The city of Butte had a different sentiment towards Irish immigrants. Copper King Marcus Daly, leader of the powerful Anaconda copper Company, was an Irish born American. He, unlike other employers, saw the benefit of hiring Irish workers and offered them fair wages to work in his mines. Key scholarship about the Irish community in Butte include *The Butte Irish* by David Emmons¹⁹, *Irish Butte* by Debbie Bowman Shea²⁰, *James A Murray: Butte's Radical Irish Millionaire* by Bill Farley²¹, and *Butte's Irish Heart* by St. Mary's Neighborhoods Reunion Committee.²²

British Islanders includes the grouping of those from England, Wales, and Scotland. Immigrants from these locations came in much smaller amounts than the Irish. One of the most prominent British families to live in Butte was the Lutey family. The family would run "13 grocery stores and employed 350 people in Butte."²³ The Lutey stores shut down in the 1920s due to a boycott of the stores by the Butte Irish after William Lutey refused to donate \$150 to the free Ireland cause in 1923.²⁴ The Welsh

¹⁹ David Emmons, *The Butte Irish* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

²⁰ Debbie Bowman Shea, *Irish Butte* (Mt. Pleasant: Arcadia Publishing, 2011).

²¹ Bill Farley, *James A Murray: Butte's Radical Irish Millionaire* (Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 2018).

²² St. Mary's Neighborhood Reunion Committee, *Butte's Irish Heart* (Helena: Riverbend Publishing, 2015).

²³ "British Islanders in Butte," Butte, Montana: A City Born of All Nations, Butte-Silver Bow Archives, 2019.

²⁴ Pat Kearney, *Butte Voices: Mining, Neighborhoods, People*. (Butte: Skyhigh Communications, 1998), 137

that came to Butte mainly worked in the smelters. By the 1880s Butte had nine open-air smelters in town.²⁵

The Finnish community of Butte resided in an area that was nicknamed Finntown. The neighborhood was located on East Granite, Broadway, and Park Streets.²⁶ The neighborhood was known for its saunas and boarding houses. In 1900 there was only a recorded 96 Finns living in Butte, this number jumped to over 3,000 by 1917.²⁷ The influx of Finns to America is attributed to the need to escape Tsar Nicholas II and his army.²⁸ A majority of the Finnish population worked in the mines. Many of them were part of the Butte Miners' Union and worked hard to fight for better pay and safer working conditions.

The majority of Butte's Hispanic population came to the city for one of two reasons, the first in the 1880s to work with copper smelters of Copper King William a. Clark, and the second in the 1920s to work for both the Sugar Beet industry in growing season and then as part of the track crew of the Northern Pacific Railway during off growing seasons.²⁹ The Hispanic community has dwindled in Butte significantly since it reached its peak in the 1930s. It has been said that the Hispanic community of Butte felt that they faced less discrimination than they had elsewhere in the United State.³⁰ This

²⁵.Ibid.

²⁶ Aubrey Jaap, "Building a Longer Table: The Contributions of the Immigrants to the Heritage and Traditions of Montana and the West," Montana Folk Festival, May 21, 2022, 4.

²⁷ Kearney, 138.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Hispanics in Butte," Butte, Montana: A City Born of All Nations, Butte-Silver Bow Archives, 2019.

³⁰ Ibid.

resulted in them having a better relationship with other immigrants to Butte at the time than the more heavily and openly discriminated groups such as the Chinese and African American populations.

One of the groups to face to most discrimination in Butte was the Chinese. The Chinese had been in Montana since the 1860s, when they moved into Butte they tend to take jobs as laundry workers, cooks, and household servants, they also would run business such as general goods and restaurants. By the late 1800s Butte had accumulated a bustling China town located just south of main street. One of the oldest businesses located in China town is Pekin Noodle Parlor, it was opened in 1911 and is the oldest continually operating Chinese restaurant in all of America. During its over 110 years of operation, it remains in the ownership of the same family who initially opened it. In 1884, just a few years after the Chinese Exclusionary Act of 1882, the citizens of Butte blamed the Chinese community in the city for a drop in the economy. This prompted an order for Chinese immigrants to leave the town. For the following decades, whenever the economy dropped in Butte, the Chinese were blamed, and their businesses were boycotted.³¹ The boycotts led to the 1898 court case of *Hum Fay, et. al. Vs. Baldwin*. The court case resulted in the Unions being ordered to cease boycotts of Chinese business and became known as one of the most important legal court cases regarding the Chinese community in 19th century America.³²

³¹ Tim Greyhavens, "Buildings from the original Chinatown," The No Place Project, 2022.

³² Ibid.

Before colonialization and the 'discovery' of America, the continent of North America was home to thousands of indigenous tribes. Many of these had been wiped out or forced to go under mandatory assimilation thus causing in the physical and cultural genocide of the first peoples across the country. There are eight federally recognized indigenous tribes in Montana, they are: The Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation, the Blackfeet Tribe of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation of Montana, the Chippewa-Cree Indians of the Rocky Boy's Reservation, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation, the Crow Tribe of Montana, the Fort Belknap Indian Community of the Fort Belknap Reservation of Montana, Little Shell, and the Northern Cheyenne Tribe of the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation.³³ The indigenous groups in Montana, like many places elsewhere across the United States were harshly discriminated against and then forced onto reservations. The Chippewa tribe faced extended discrimination by the people of Butte since they lived close to the city and often going into disagreements with Butte citizens over land and property rights.³⁴

A large number Italian immigrants moved to Butte in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many of which from the cities of Turin and Rome. They mostly settled in the Meaderville neighborhood, which at one point was known as Little Italy.

³³ Martha Saenz, "Federal and State Recognized Tribes," National Conference of State Legislatures, <https://www.ncsl.org/legislators-staff/legislators/quad-caucus/list-of-federal-and-state-recognized-tribes.aspx#mt>.

³⁴ "Native Americans in Butte," Butte, Montana: A City Born of All Nations, Butte-Silver Bow Archives, 2019.

The Anaconda Copper Company's decision to dig the Berkeley Pit in 1964 destroyed Meaderville. Like other immigrant groups worked in the mines, but they also operated businesses. Savin Lisa, for example, moved to Butte in 1879 from his home in Turin, Italy. He started off his life in the city as a miner but shortly after would leave the mines to open the Lisa Cash Grocery located on East Park Street. As a proud Italian, pasta making ran through his blood, as it was the profession of his father, and Savin would open operate and open his own pasta factories in both Great Falls, Montana and in Butte. He would spend the rest of his life as a successful businessman running factories with the capability to create thousands of pounds of pasta each day.³⁵

The Italian community established two organizations. The first was the Knights of Columbus Lodge. The lodge was founded in 1884 and would meet two times a month at 24 South Main.³⁶ Prominent Catholic Italian men in the community led the organization's activities. The goal of the lodge was to help foster a strong Catholic Italian community in Butte and offered assistance to the Italian Immigrants in the city. people find employment, assisted with the naturalization process to America, and provided support programs to help with translation between Italian and English as well as financial support for those in need. The second organization was the Italian American Club located in the Meaderville neighborhood. The Italian American club was short lived and was replaced by the Cristoforo Colombo Club.³⁷ The Cristoforo Colombo Club

³⁵ "The Imperial Paste Manufacturing and Mercantile Company," *Anaconda Standard*, April 14, 1924.

³⁶ "Italians in Butte," Butte, Montana: A City Born of All Nations, Butte-Silver Bow Archives, 2019.

³⁷ Brian James Leech, *The City That Ate Itself: Butte, Montana and Its Expanding Berkeley Pit* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2018), 34.

secured funding to provide financial support to Italian families who were affected by mine related accidents.

Some of the first Germans to come to Butte were miners, the Germans had a long history of mining dating back centuries. The influence the German population in Butte's mining could be seen through the initial motto for the Montana School of Mines which was "Gluck Auf", which translates to mean good luck.³⁸ By 1900 there were over twelve hundred immigrants from Germany living in Butte. A large portion of them worked as miners, smelters, bakeries, or brewery workers and lived in the Williamsburg Neighborhood on the south side of Butte. This history is remembered in the current landscape of Butte through the use of street names within the Williamsburg neighborhood such as "Munich, Berlin, Bavaria, Leipzig, and Stuttgart."³⁹ During both the times of World War I and World War II there were recorded instances of repeat discrimination against people of German and German descent living in Butte. Given the nature of the World Wars, citizens of Butte were fearful that their neighbors and friends who were of German descent were actually still supportive of their home country's actions.

The French community in Butte mainly settled downhill of the city on an area known as 'the flat'. They supported the mining industry through the harvesting of lumber that would then be used to power the smelters needed to process the mined

³⁸ Chere Jiusto, "Germans in Butte" Butte: A City Born of All Nations, <https://www.butteallnations.com/german-overview>.

³⁹ Ibid.

raw materials.⁴⁰ Butte was home to both French Canadians and French from France. While some worked in the mines they also participated in other occupations as well.

The Greek population in Butte arrived in the 1800s with many of the men going to work in the mines. Most of the Greek population in Butte practiced the Greek Orthodox faith, but unlike many of their neighbors, the Greeks did not have their own Greek Orthodox worship space in the city for many years. Instead, they would have to hold worship inside other buildings. It would not be until later into their time in Butte that they would finally have their own Greek Orthodox worship space.⁴¹ The Greeks did not have their own official neighborhood but instead many opted to live in or around the main business district. Many of the Greek immigrants ran shops in the district and would live in the space about the shops.

Norwegians left their mark in Butte through their strong Lutheran belief system. Peder Pedersen founded The Norwegian Lutheran church in Butte was founded in 1892. The church would go through multiple name changes during its first twenty years of existence and ultimately it was decided to be The Gold Hill Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church.⁴² Outside of their devotion to Lutheranism, the Norwegians of Butte were best known for their expert needlework ability and unique cooking.

⁴⁰ "French in Butte," Butte, Montana: A City Born of All Nations, Butte-Silver Bow Archives, 2019.

⁴¹ "Greeks in Butte," Butte, Montana: A City Born of All Nations, Butte-Silver Bow Archives, 2019.

⁴² "Norwegians in Butte," Butte, Montana: A City Born of All Nations, Butte-Silver Bow Archives, 2019.

Serbian immigrants moved to Butte in the 1800s in large numbers, at its peak there was over 2,00 Serbians living in Butte. Religion and the Church was the center of life for the Serbian community. They practiced Eastern Orthodox and built their first worship building in 1906, it wouldn't be until 1965 when another Eastern Orthodox church was built and called the Holy Trinity Orthodox Church.⁴³ The new worship shape was built after the first received damage from an earthquake just a few years prior.

Early immigrants from Croatia and Slovenia first arrived in Butte during the 1880s and settle in neighborhoods on the eastern side of Butte. Several different churches and parishes served the Croatian and Slovenian populations, including Holy Savior Church, Sacred Heart Church, and St. Joseph's Parish. The Croatians and Slovenians organized fraternal organizations to offer support for new immigrants to the city and acted as a means to help them setting into housing and gain employment.

Lebanese immigrants migrated to Butte in the 1890s. Lebanese immigrants worked in the mines, but many were gifted salesmen who also worked door-to-door to sell clothing and groceries. The Lebanese Peace Society was formed in 1908 under its initially name as the Syrian Peace Society, this group still exist in Butte in modern times.⁴⁴ The Lebanese Peace Society Hall was constructed in May 1929 and was used for

⁴³ "Serbians in Butte," Butte, Montana: A City Born of All Nations, Butte-Silver Bow Archives, 2019.

⁴⁴ "Lebanese in Butte," Butte, Montana: A City Born of All Nations, Butte-Silver Bow Archives, 2019.

organization meetings, weddings, concerts, and special events.⁴⁵ The structure stood for 40 years before being torn down in the 1970s by the Anaconda Company.

The Cornish community brought expert hard rock mining methods. Around 2000 Cornish miners moved to Butte to work in the mines. The Cornish would also bring with them what would become one of the signature culinary dishes of Butte, the pasty. Miners liked pasties because of their blend of meat and potatoes in a cooked pastry shell. Pasties could be easily held and places that miners touched the food with their dust and dirt covered hands could be broken off from the rest of the pasty and still eaten. The Cornish fraternal lodge in Butte was formed on May 24, 1890 and was called The Sons of St. George. This lodge, like many others at the time, was created to help foster a strong bond of ethnic heritage with the immigrants who were adjusting to living in a different country, while also suppling necessary aid to other Cornish people in the community.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Kearney, 150.

⁴⁶ "Cornish in Butte," Butte, Montana: A City Born of All Nations, Butte-Silver Bow Archives, 2019.

Chapter 3: The African American Community of Butte: A Case Study

There is not much left of the African American community that once lived in Butte. Most of the community members have passed on or moved away. However, their impact and history in the town is significant. This chapter will highlight the depth and impact of the African American community and culture in the city of Butte to express the importance of having a space to further share these stories of the past in a public space within the city. The B'nai Israel Cultural Center would act as a space within Butte where histories such that of the African American community can be shared to the Butte public and visitors.

Historic sites such as one of Butte's African American Churches like Shaffer's Chapel AME church still exist and has been put on the National Register of Historic Places. Copies of both of Butte's black newspapers can be found in online databases, and finally evidence of black organizations like women's clubs had impact that stretched passed Butte throughout the state of Montana. Butte, Montana was a city that had been previously described in its early years as a place for opportunity. The 'richest hill on earth' had made several men extremely wealthy thus the city in its early stages drew in people from all different cultural backgrounds. A city built and ran by immigrants flourished in the early twentieth century. The narrative exists that Butte was mostly tolerant because here there were immigrants of different nationalities while the mining culture recognized and valued work. Thus, inhabitants of the city interacted with each

other on equal footing socially and economically. This statement is true for many of ethnically European immigrants such as the Irish and Italians who may have found more difficulties and prejudice elsewhere, the same sentiment was not true for the Indigenous, Chinese, and African American communities. The African American community established newspapers, organizations, churches, and neighborhoods which all became places of mental and physical support for the community while simultaneously working towards civil rights and the betterment of the African American Community. By carving out their own separate place, they could survive the Jim Crow era.

“I believe there is room enough, justice enough, and good sense enough to enable the two races to live here side by side and work out their own destinies,”⁴⁷ said by Booker T Washington as he visited and gave speeches throughout the state of Montana, including the city of Butte, in 1913. Even before his visit, the African American community in Butte idolized Booker T. Washington. The African American newspaper in Butte described Washington as “the Negro Moses”⁴⁸. Booker T. Washington represented the ideals and beliefs surrounding Black and White race relations shared by many of the African Americans in Butte. When Booker T. Washington visited Butte in 1903, the Colored Progressive League greeted him and then following his speech,

⁴⁷ Julia C. Sherman, *African Americans and Montana’s Criminal Justice System: A Historical Timeline*,

⁴⁸ *The new age. [volume]* (Butte, Mont.), 30 May 1902. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84036148/1902-05-30/ed-1/seq-1/>

honored Washington with a banquet held at the AME Church. “Both politically and socially, Washington preached a philosophy of self-help and accommodation in regard to racial uplift, with an emphasis on economic opportunity.”⁴⁹ Booker T. Washington’s ideals were reflected in the people of Butte, Montana through their organizations which all in some form focused on social reform, African Americans uplifting and supporting each other, the spread of culture and ideals, and a more equal relationship with their white counterparts. The organizations included clubs, societies, churches, and newspapers.

“Mining towns were cosmopolitan places. The miners, generally poor or unpretentious, tolerated most ethnic groups, with the glaring exception of Indians, Negroes, and Chinese.”⁵⁰ African Americans in the west still faced the same struggles, hardships, and prejudice found in the American South. Montana became a territory during the Civil War, but it wouldn’t be until after the emancipation proclamation of 1865 that African Americans moved in much larger numbers to Montana. From 1870 to 1890 the population of African Americans increasing by over 800% from 183 to 1,490 residents.⁵¹ African American people living in Montana worked a variety of jobs including “laborers, porters, blacksmiths, barber, cooks, servants and other service

⁴⁹ Julia C. Sherman, “*African Americans and Montana’s Criminal Justice System: A Historical Timeline*,” University of Montana and the Montana Historical Society, 33.

⁵⁰ Michael P. Malone and Richard B. Roeder, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, University of Washington Press: Seattle and London, 1976, 65.

⁵¹ Sherry Teal, “Shaffer’s Chapel AME Church, Butte, Montana,” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Montana State Historic Preservation Office, 2016, pg. 8,

industry roles.”⁵² But Black leaders also were journalist and the city’s Black newspaper contributed to the sense of community for the African Americans of Butte and Montana.

African American Newspapers

The Butte *New Age* was Butte’s first and only African American newspaper. Published between May 30, 1902 and February 7, 1903. The publishing office was located at 220 South Idaho Street. Although short lived, it proved significant. John Walter Duncan and Chris Dorsey, both of whom had previously worked as barbers in the city, established the newspaper. The subscription price for the paper was \$2.00 for a whole year and a paper was published every Saturday.⁵³ The motto of the *New Age* was that the newspaper was “published in the interest of colored people,”⁵⁴ and was the “leading race journal of Montana, Utah, Idaho, and the Northwest. The official organ of the colored people of Montana.”¹⁰

The *New Age* documented Black community events. A recurring column titled “Women’s Club News” shared the readings and music of interest to the Women’s Club and key to the expression of culture and arts to African American Women in Butte. The *New Age* was also political. Its September 20, 1902 edition included a headline that stated “The Colored Vote 2140 Strong.”⁵⁵ It stood as a reminder to the two political

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³ John W. Duncan, “The New Age” The New Age publishing co; Butte, Montana, January 31st, 1903. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84036148/1903-01-31/ed-1/seq-4/#date1=1900&index=7&rows=20&words=AGE+Age+NEW+new+New&searchType=basic&sequence=0&state=Montana&date2=1903&proxtext=The+New+Age&y=12&x=15&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=1>.

⁵⁴John W. Duncan, “The New Age,” Butte, Montana, May 29th, 1902, Vol 1. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84036148/1902-05-30/ed-1/seq-1/>.

⁵⁵ Ibid

parties how many Black male voters were in Butte. The Editors Emphasized the power of the 'colored vote' and that black people should be thoughtful who they supported in the city and state. The editors called for Black block voting so that that "the victorious party will realize its obligation to the race that we can any of the fruits of the victory."⁵⁶ The *New Age* used its platform to try and unite the Black community as a way to make a stand against prejudice in Jim Crow America.

The *New Age* published headline columns that spoke to its time. Featured stories included "Woman's Club Notes," "Danish West Indies: Interesting Facts Concerning the Effect Upon our Race Problem," "Booker T. Washington and His New Home". Some of the briefer stories on the front page were "Among the Lodges," "The Household of Ruth," "Young Peter Jackson Wins," "New England dinner," "The Race question," "Graduate with Honors," and "Negroes Becoming a Factor in Organized Labor."⁵⁷ The very last column on organized labor discussed a walk out held by Black molders in Chattanooga, Tennessee who struck due to poor working conditions, revealing that they organized into a Union in secret and are currently being supported in the walkout by the white union.⁵⁸ The *New Age* makes sure to highlight the events on-going in Butte that will be most relevant to the readers such as the "Notes from the Afro-American

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ "The New Age," Butte, Montana, May 29th, 1902, Vol 1.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84036148/1902-05-30/ed-1/seq-1/>.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Woman's Club" but also combines it with topics of interest, race and labor related events, as well as uplifting stories about black success.

African American Women Organizations

Butte women established the Afro- American Women's club in 1902. It is believed to be the first Black women's club in Montana. The Afro-American Women's Club worked for the betterment of Black women and their families; members sought out ways to advance culture, music, industry, homelife, and the social level of women. They were very active in acknowledging racial discrimination and fighting back against it. "The late census declares that nearly seventy out of every one hundred colored women in America go out to work by the day or week or take work into their homes, but this honest toll does not tell more against our worth and welfare than the luxurious ease and idleness of the multiplied thousands we might name."⁵⁹ To handle the issues thrust onto the African American women, the Women's Club actively sought countermeasures such as initiating the establishment of kindergartens, day nurseries and industrial classes in an attempt to help supplement some of the child care and education needs. "No class of women in America have made such sacrifice under such impediments for the culture and education of their children as have ours."⁶⁰ Groups such as the women's club help create a support group for women of color.

⁵⁹ *The New Age*, (Butte, Mont.), 30 May 1902. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84036148/1902-05-30/ed-1/seq-1/>

⁶⁰ John Duncan, "The New Age," *The New Age* Publishing Co. 30 May 1902., Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84036148/1902-05-30/ed-1/seq-1/>.

The Pearl Club began in 1918 and was named after Dr. Frank C. Pearl, a physician from Butte who served overseas during the war. The Pearl club was initially the Pearl Unit and was “a group enlisted by the Red Cross to raise funds and resources for all ethnicities of American soldiers during WWI.”⁶¹ The Pearl Unit would become the Pearl Club in 1919 when the Red Cross officially disbanded the Pearl Unit. The main goal of the Pearl club would be the education and advancement of African Americans living in Montana. The Pearl club would be instrumental in the organization of the Montana Federation of Negro Women’s Clubs. Many of the women from the Pearl Club participated in the MFNWC.

⁶¹ Shaffer’s Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church,” National Park Services, U.S. Department of the Interior, December 13th, 2018, <https://www.nps.gov/places/shaffer-s-chapel-african-methodist-episcopal-church.htm>



Figure 10. The Montana Federation of Negro Women's Clubs, Butte, August 3, 1921. From the Montana Historical Society.

The Montana Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs was founded on August 3, 1921, with the intent “to encourage true womanhood and to promote interest in social uplift.”⁶² “ Mrs. Mary B. Chappell, Mrs. Armeta Smith Duncan, Mrs. Frances Mayfield, Mrs. M. Brown, Mrs. Sarah Davis, Mrs. Angie mills Arnold, Mrs. Lottie Foreman, Mrs. Ophelia Fenter, and other women from clubs around Montana”⁶³ established the organization. These Butte women were all involved in other organizations such as either through attending Shaffer Chapel A.M.E church or Bethel Baptist church, being a part of the Pearl Club, or other Black focused organizations. They worked hard to promote the increasing importance of education for Black women, the role of Black women in a family setting, and worked to enhance the role of Black women both in the community and in the home.⁶⁴ The club was initially named the Montana Federation of Negro Women’s Club but at the annual meeting in 1948 they voted to change their name to the Montana Federation of Colored Women’s Club.⁶⁵ Established at the height of Black population in Montana, The Montana Federation of Colored Women’s Club actively fought prejudice in Montana while fighting for civil rights legislation across the state.

⁶² Marilyn Grant, “ Montana Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs Records , 1921-1978,” Archives West, Orbis Cascade Alliance, 2005, <https://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv10265>.

⁶³ Teal, 15.

⁶⁴ “African Americans in Butte: Butte, Montana: A City Born of All Nations,” Butte Silver-Bow Archives, 2022.

⁶⁵ Marilyn Grant, “ Montana Federation of colored women’s Clubs Records, 1921-1978,” Archives West, Orbis Cascade Alliance, 2005, <https://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv10265>.

Through fundraising and other club activities the Montana Federation of Colored Women's Club was able to cover the cost for dozens of African American students to go to college.⁶⁶ The MFCWC created the Claudia Bivens Scholarship Fund to support the students. The founding of the Montana Federation of Colored Women's club coincided with the height of the African American population in Butte.

At the time of the founding of the club there were a recorded 1,658 African Americans living in Montana; it wouldn't be until the 1970s census when Blacks surpassed this number.⁶⁷ When the first meeting of the Montana Federation of Negro Women's Clubs was held in Butte in 1921 there were a total of nine active African American Women's clubs across the state. Out of the nine women's clubs, seven sent representatives to the meeting.⁶⁸ Some of the early Women's clubs involved with the Montana Federation of Colored Women's Clubs were The Mutual Improvement Club from Kalispell; The Pleasant Hour Club from Helena; the Pearl Club from Butte; The Phyllis Wheatley Club from Billings; the Dunbar Art and Study club from Great Falls; and the Clover Leaf Club from Butte.⁶⁹ Clubs like these were especially important for African American women living in the West because it became a way for them to provide mutual support for each other in a majority White surrounding.

⁶⁶ "African Americans in Butte: Butte, Montana: A City Born of All Nations," Butte Silver-Bow Archives, 2022.

⁶⁷ Barbara Behan, "Montana Federation of Colored Women's Club (1921-1972)," BlackPast, August 8th, 2018, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/montana-federation-colored-women-s-clubs-1921-1972/>.

⁶⁸ Marilyn Grant, "Montana Federation of colored women's Clubs Records >, 1921-1978," Archives West, Orbis Cascade Alliance, 2005, <https://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv10265>.

⁶⁹ Ibid.



Figure 11. Convention Ribbon donated by Mrs. Alma Jacobs located in the Montana Historical Society

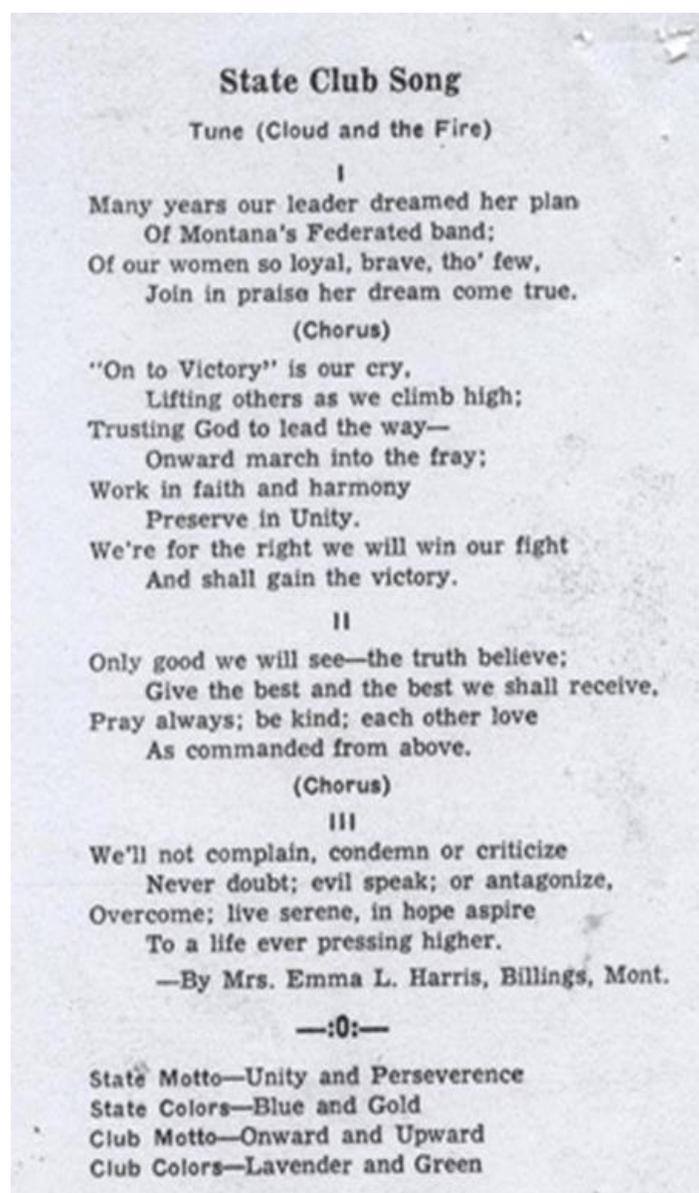


Figure 12. 1947 MFCWC Organization State Song on Convention Program, Montana Historical Society Ephemera Collection

The Montana Federation of Colored women’s Clubs stands out because it existed as one of the few state level organizations that represented the women of color across the state of Montana. In June of 1972 the Montana Federation Board voted to disband following the decrease in Black women’s organizations.⁷⁰

The Duncan Family



Figure 13. 711 West Broadway, first owned home of the Duncan Family from the Montana Historic Property Record form

One of the most influential African American families in Butte were the Duncans. They lived in Butte for many generations starting around the time Montana first became

⁷⁰ Barbara Behan, “Montana Federation of Colored women’s Club (1921-1972),” BlackPast, August 8th, 2018, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/montana-federation-colored-women-s-clubs-1921-1972/>.

a state in 1889 and continuing to the end of the twentieth century. Three generations of Duncans would come to live at the first property owned by John and Armeta Duncan located at 711 West Broadway. The house was a place for their familial interactions for years.

John Walter Duncan was born March 29, 1873 in Avenger, Texas.⁷¹ Duncan, based on oral tradition, is believed to have moved to Butte the same year it became a State in 1889. During his early years in Butte, he along with Chris Dorsey ran *The New Age*, Butte's first African American Newspaper. After the end of the publication of *The New Age*, Duncan worked as a barber from his home at 114 South Wyoming Street.⁷² During his time as a barber, Duncan found ways to continue his activism and involvement in his community. He served as secretary of the African American Mining Company, a fraternal organization dedicated to "the betterment of blacks in the mining city."⁷³ While working as a barber he would meet his future wife Armeta Elizabeth Smith; they married on November 12, 1907. After years of renting property John Duncan and his wife Armeta Duncan, in 1913 bought a home at 711 West Broadway. The house had been built sometime in the 1890s. The home is designed in the Folk Victorian style, with a wooden frame, one and one-half stories, all set upon a concrete wall foundation.⁷⁴ A Sanborn Map from 1900 shows the location what would become

⁷¹ Ancestry.com. *Montana, U.S., County Births and Deaths, 1830-2011* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2017.

⁷² Hampton, 5.

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ Hampton, 3.

the Duncan home where it lays on W. Broadway street near the intersection of W. Broadway and N. Columbia street. At the age of 46 John Duncan would make the decision to go back to school and to continue his study in the medical field. He had previously studied medicine as a young man but did not complete his studies or receive a degree. He attended the University of Massachusetts School of Podiatry and Orthopedics at Emerson College. Duncan only took one year to pass the program and immediately afterward he returned to Butte to open his own practice as Dr. John Duncan.⁷⁵ Due to the success of his medical practice in Butte, the Duncan family moved into another home, one larger for the growing family of six.

⁷⁵*Armeta Duncan Interview*," The Butte Daily Bulletin, Butte, Montana, October 8th, 1919. *Chronicling America*, <http://vhronicalingamerica.loc.gov>.

Historic Maps/Site Map/Aerial Photo

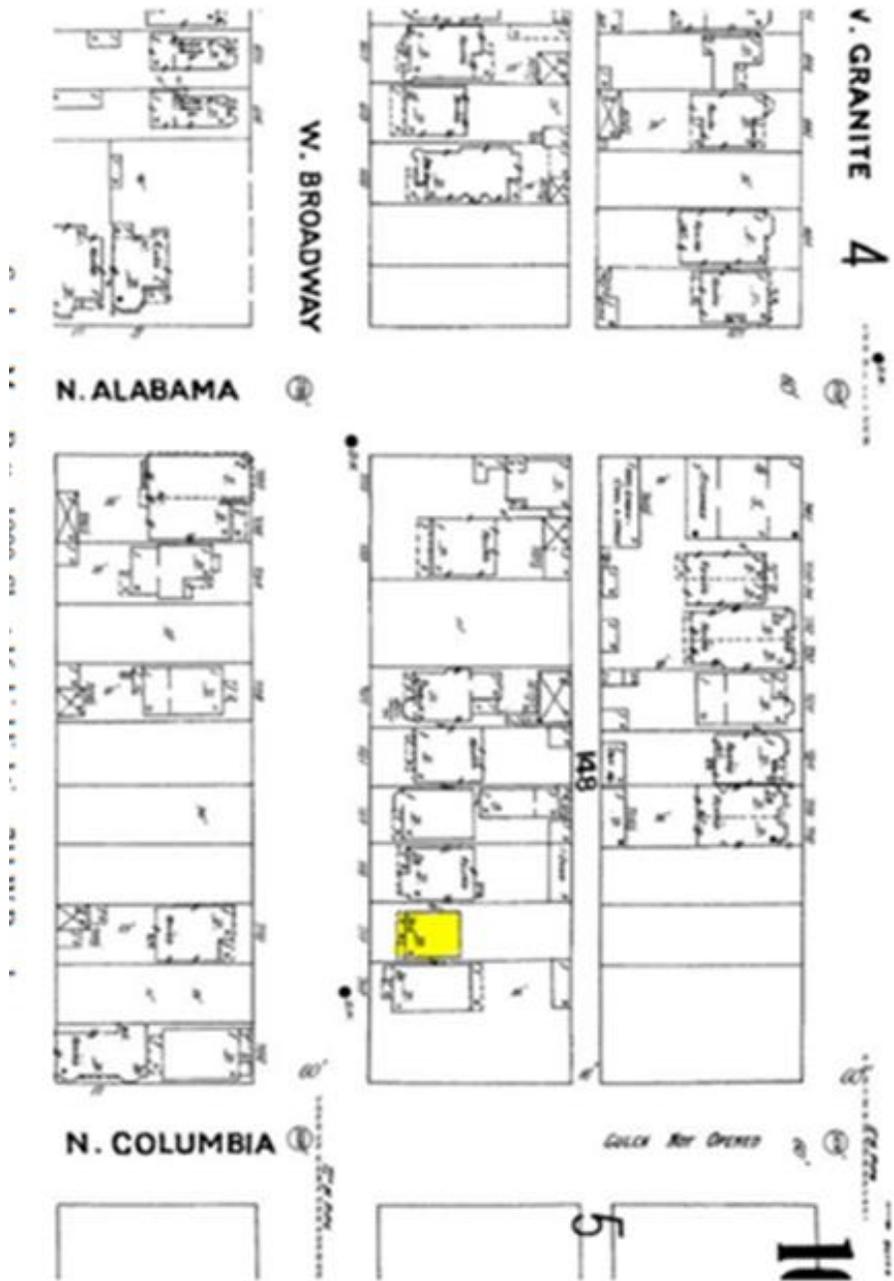


Figure 14. Sanborn Map from 1900 of W. Broadway Street. From the Montana Historic Property Form

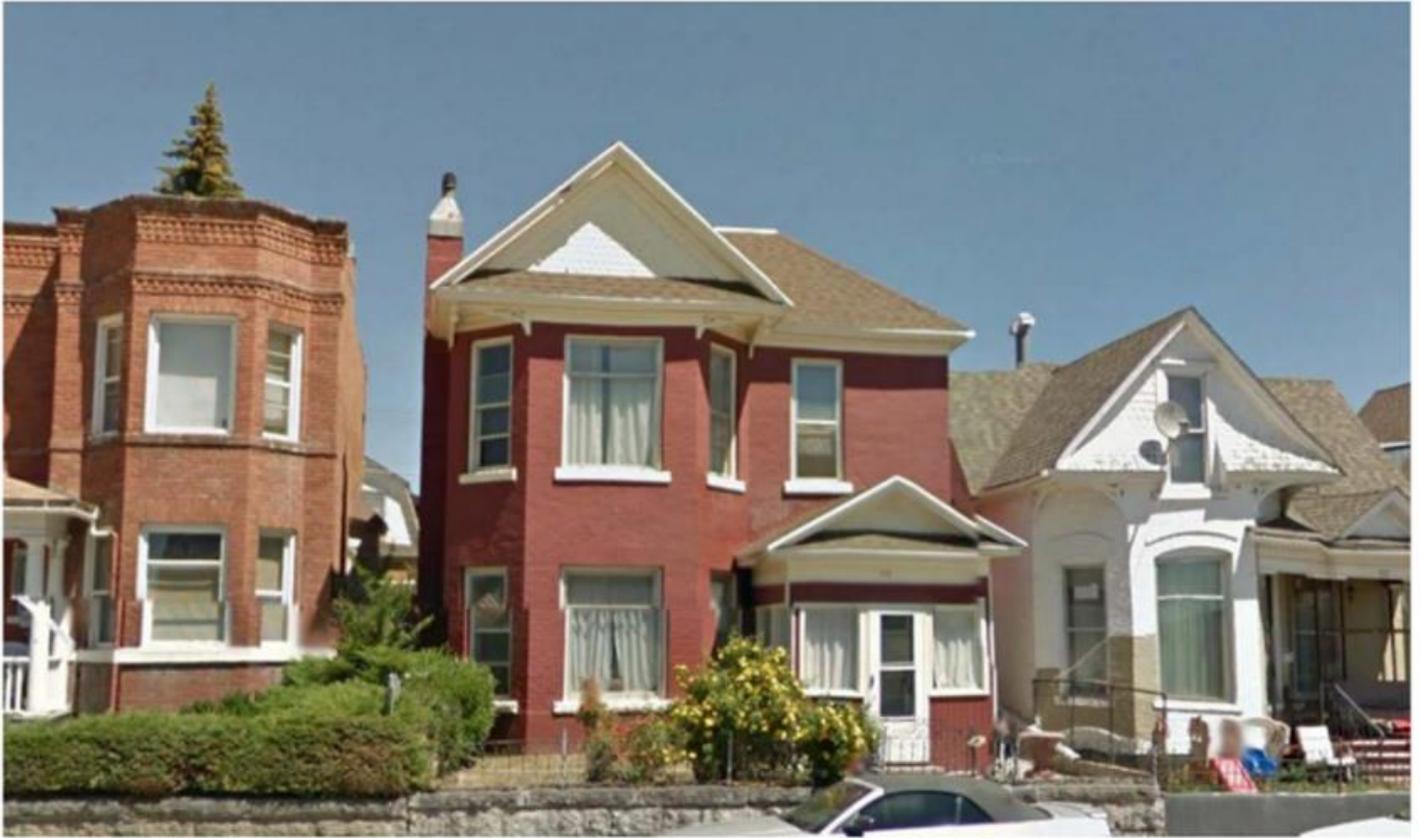
The Duncans had four children, two daughters and two sons. Respectively their names are Perdita, Mary, Walter, and John. Walter is the oldest, followed by Perdita, then John, and finally Mary. Walter followed in his father's footsteps and also got his medical degree in Podiatry. Perdita attended Oberlin College, most known for being the first university to admit African American Women, where she obtained a degree in sociology. She took a position for the New York Department of Social Services in the law department while also writing for a newspaper in New York as a music critic.⁷⁶

The 1930 census listed the value of the Duncan home at 715 Park Street in the 6th ward as \$6,000. Dr. John Duncan is also listed as being a doctor in the Chiropractic industry at the time.⁷⁷ This home was located in the more affluent middle class African American Neighborhood which existed uptown on West Park and West Broadway streets.⁷⁸ John Duncan would live at that residency until his death on February 23, 1958.

⁷⁶Perdita Duncan, interview by Mary Murphy, "Perdita E. Duncan Interview, March 18th, 1980," Butte Oral History Project, University of Montana, Missoula, March 18th, 1980, https://scholarworks.umt.edu/butte_oralhistory/9/.

⁷⁷ Ancestry.com. *1930 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2002.

⁷⁸ "Shaffer's Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church," National Park Services, U.S. Department of the Interior, December 13th, 2018, <https://www.nps.gov/places/shaffer-s-chapel-african-methodist-episcopal-church.htm>, 8.



John and Armeta Duncan Residence
South Façade, Facing: N
Google Earth, 2014

Figure 17. Armeta and John Duncan Second owned Home, Photo from the Montana Historic Property Record Form

Armeta Elizabeth Duncan was born Armeta Elizabeth Smith on April 12, 1885 near Appomattox, Virginia.⁷⁹ One of her greatest achievements was her support as a co-founder and eventual president of the Montana State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. After graduating from the Ingleside Seminary in Virginia at the age of 18, she taught at a school in Delaware for a year before taking the position as a home assistant for a couple. According to an oral history given by, Perdita Duncan, her oldest daughter,

⁷⁹ Hampton, "Montana Historic Property Record: Walter and Alyce Duncan Residence," 5.

Armeta took up the job as a traveling companion for the wife of the affluent couple to avoid pressure from her family to marry a wealthy man in Delaware whom she did not want to be with.⁸⁰ The wife that Armeta worked for would travel often, taking Armeta with her. Armeta would spend most of the 1904 and 1905 traveling through the west and even parts of Canada with this woman.⁸¹ These travels led to her move to Butte, Montana because the women she worked for had relatives in the city.

In Butte Armeta met John Duncan. She left her job as a personal assistant to pursue her relationship with Duncan, while working as a waitress in a variety of different restaurants and clubs in the city, most of which were located off Broadway Street.

Armeta knew instantly that John Duncan would be her husband: “she saw him on the street, she didn’t know who he was, but she said to be ‘woen’” And she stated that “I’m ‘gonna’ marry that man.”⁸² When Armeta introduced herself to John Duncan, she came to find out that he was engaged to another woman, but shortly after their introduction there was a street car accident that took the lives of a number of people, one of which being the previous fiancé of Duncan. John Duncan was also present at the time of the streetcar accident but obtained minimal injuries that he was able to recover

⁸⁰ Perdita Duncan, interview by Mary Murphy, “Perdita E. Duncan Interview, March 18th, 1980,” Butte Oral History Project, University of Montana, Missoula, March 18th, 1980, https://scholarworks.umt.edu/butte_oralhistory/9/.

⁸¹ Hampton, “*Montana Historic Property Record: Walter and Alyce Duncan Residence*,” 6.

⁸² Perdita Duncan, interview by Mary Murphy, “Perdita E. Duncan Interview, March 18th, 1980,” Butte Oral History Project, University of Montana, Missoula, March 18th, 1980, https://scholarworks.umt.edu/butte_oralhistory/9/.

from.⁸³ Her pursuit of John Duncan would end in success on November 12, 1907 when they got married at Shaffer's Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church.⁸⁴

Armeta was self-taught in all the positions she held in Montana. Her daughter Perdita states that her mother's traditional upbringing did little to prepare her for the rough conditions of the West. She taught herself how to wait tables and to sew. Armeta worked consistently during the time when John when back to school for the year for his medical degree, after he returned to Butte Armeta was able to stop working and she went to focusing on raising her children.



Figure 18. Shaffer's Chapel AME Church, Photo from the Montana Historic Property Record

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ancestry.com. *Montana, U.S., County Marriage Records, 1865-1993* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2016.

Shaffer's Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church

Shaffer chapel sits at the intersection of South Idaho and Platinum Avenue at 602 South Idaho. The A.M.E congregation had initially built a worship building at the intersection of South Idaho and Mercury Streets in 1892 but within the span of a decade they grew out of that building due to the increase of African American people moving to Butte.⁸⁵ "The church was a locus for political activism, benevolent work, and educational outreach in the south-central Butte community of Emma that soon influenced other communities in Anaconda, Helena, Missoula, Bozeman, and Great Falls."⁸⁶ The dedication ceremony for the church took place on Sunday, August 31st, 1902 and the dedication ceremony speech was given by Reverend Cornelius Thaddeus Shaffer, a prominent bishop at the national A.M.E Church in Philadelphia.⁸⁷ As a thank you present for Shaffer the church honored him by naming the church building Shaffer Chapel. Another notable individual involved and interested with the building of the A.M.E. church, was Copper King William Clark. This trend continued, after the construction of the church building, Edith Roosevelt donated a globe in honor of the church so that it could be auctioned off during the opening celebrations of the Church to help support fundraising.⁸⁸ The community was involved every step of the way with the building of

⁸⁵ "Teal, 11.

⁸⁶ Shaffer's Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church," National Park Services, U.S. Department of the Interior, December 13th, 2018, <https://www.nps.gov/places/shaffer-s-chapel-african-methodist-episcopal-church.htm>.

⁸⁷ "Teal, 12.

⁸⁸ John Duncan, "Mrs. Roosevelt's Present," *The New Age*, Butte, Montana, June 13, 1902.

the church. The Shaffer A.M.E. Church would open its doors for the citizens of Butte and become a social hub for the Black community.

Many of the communities' African American leaders who were involved in organizations focused on the betterment of African American people attend this church. Shaffer's Chapel also frequently hosted organization meetings for groups such as the Pearl Social Club, the Montana Federation of Negro Women's Clubs, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.⁸⁹ "Some of the oldest Black families who settled in Butte in the early 1880s were parishioners, who continued their strong ties to the community and these organizations into the 1970s, even as Montana's African American population waned."⁹⁰

The neighborhood area between Shaffer Chapel AME and Bethel Baptist Church was largely African American. Many congregation members of both Churches lived in this area. Bethel Baptist would also become a place of similar use as was Shaffer A.M.E. Many of the congregates from both churches would intermingle through shared participation in African American organizations. African American churches such as Shaffer and Bethel in Butte were places where political aspirations were fostered and "manifested in the creation of plethora of black masonic lodges and other fraternal

⁸⁹ Shaffer's Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church," National Park Services, U.S. Department of the Interior, December 13th, 2018, <https://www.nps.gov/places/shaffer-s-chapel-african-methodist-episcopal-church.htm>.

⁹⁰ "National register of Historic Places Registration Form: Shaffer's Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church," National Park Services, United States Department of the Interior, https://mhs.mt.gov/Shpo/AfricanAmericans/AfAm_docs/ShaffersChapel.pdf

organizations, women's clubs, benevolence societies, and activist groups"⁹¹ across Montana. These religious spaces became same places for the African American citizen of Butte to counteract racism and to support each other.

The US Government Census Bureau states that as of 2021 around .3% of Butte, Montana identifies as African American.⁹² Taking into account the total population in the city as of April 1, 2020 being 34, 494 means that there are around 104 African American citizens left in Butte today. This number is a stark change from the two thousand who called Butte home in the early twentieth century. Yet, Black influence on the culture and land of Butte remains. The African American community of Butte has a rich history that has been largely ignored. They had captured the attention of many notable figures such as Booker T. Washington, Theodore Roosevelt, and Edith Roosevelt. The west was not as kind and opportunistic for the African American community as story may suggest but they persisted through the support of their community. They relied on newspapers, organizations, and churches to help share beliefs and as places to encourage activism.

⁹¹ Anthony Wood, "African American Churches of Montana," Montana Historical Society, https://mhs.mt.gov/Shpo/AfricanAmericans/AfAm_docs/CITATION_History_of_Churches.pdf.

⁹² "Butte-Silver Bow, Montana Quick Facts," United States Census Bureau, census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/buttesilverbowbalancemontana/RHI225220#RHI225220

Chapter Four: Transforming the B'nai Israel Temple to the B'nai Israel Cultural Center

“Do America’s older churches, synagogues and temples have a value that transcends those who worship there? Do they have a larger cultural and civic importance that is vital to the health of our communities? And if so, should religious leaders anticipate the death or merger of congregations well before buildings are vacated? Should they, working with the local community, ascertain that community value, consider alternative ways to sustain that value when congregations leave, and collaborate to pursue the best way forward?”⁹³
-Robert Jaeger, Partners for Sacred Places

Across the United States dwindling congregations are faced with the dilemma of what to do with historic worship structures after the congregations have dwindled pasted the point of possible revival. The discussion surrounds what should be done with the worship structure when religious use is no longer a viable option. The book *Transitioning Older and Historic Sacred Places* by the Partners for Sacred Places organization outlines four main categories methods for a congregation to discuss in regards with how to handle a sacred space when sole religious use is no longer an option. The first category given is the idea that a congregation can keep a religious building as is, with them still in charge, by the selling of non-essential assets within the space and/or finding a new use for the building. This method is popular with groups who don’t prioritize the need to access the space for worship but instead want to would rather repurpose the estate while still maintain ownership over the building. Category two is to have congregations maintain a presence at the site but ultimately still commit

⁹³ Rachel Hildebrandt and Joshua Castano, *Transitioning Older and Historic Sacred Places: Community-Minded Approaches for Congregations and Judicatories*. Philadelphia, Partners for Sacred Places, 2021

to a change in ownership. Third is finding and using all financial and development incentives to stay, this approach includes methodology such as the use of ground leases, transition of development rights, or using grants or tax right-off to help make the site for financially beneficial. The final main category of suggestion for how a congregation could deal with their worship space is through the encouragement of new use.⁹⁴ This approach is the most hands off method out of the three and comes into play when congregation members do not want any responsibility in sustaining the worship space.

B'nai Israel Synagogue Architectural Description

Temple B'nai Israel is a reformed Jewish worship space with a building that dates to 1903. B'nai Israel Synagogue is located at the intersection of South Washington Avenue and West Galena Street. In Butte, Montana the B'nai Israel Temple stands as the sole surviving Jewish place of worship. Thanks to continued

efforts of its congregation, the B'nai Israel Temple building stands in good condition.

Through efforts made by the B'nai Israel Congregation, Preserve Montana, the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, and the Butte Silver-Bow Archives it was decided that



Figure 19. B'nai Israel Cultural Center Logo

⁹⁴ Ibid, 37.

to best protect the future of the Temple building, considering the aging and dwindling congregation, that the Temple would be turned into a multi-cultural center.

In the summer of 2021 Architect Leslie Gilmore of Gilmore Franzen Preservation worked with the non-profit preservation organization Preserve Montana to complete a structure condition report on the B'nai Israel Temple. This report was used as the base line for the architectural and structural interpretation of the B'nai Israel Temple. The report covered code requirements, accessibility, use-based needs, the identification of structural damage alongside methods of repair and urgency of damage.

The B'nai Israel Temple is a single-story brick building with an onion dome, front gable roof, with brick towers on each side of the street facing façade. Temple B'nai Israel was built in a distinctly noticeable Moorish style that includes Middle Eastern elements such as arched bricks surrounding windows and entries, and the iconic onion dome which sits on top the southwest tower prominently above the main doorway entrance and street access.

The Temple consists of two main building spaces, the first being the first floor, which includes both the main floor level and the balcony level. The main space of the first floor of the Temple has an occupant load of 128 guests, and the balcony level has an occupancy load of 14,⁹⁵ combining for the allowance of 142 guests on the first floor at one time. The lower level has an occupancy load of 93 occupants. Depending on its official use this number may change and be lower but if it is used as an undefined space

⁹⁵ Leslie Gilmore, *Temple B'nai Israel Reuse Study Butte, Montana*, (Helena: Preserve Montana, 2021), 14.

with tables and chairs it will be allowed to hold 93 people safely.⁹⁶ The total maximum occupancy for the B'nai Israel Cultural Center based off its planned usage is 235 guests at one singular time. The importance of knowing the available space within a building according to building code regulations is immensely important for planning future events within the Temple.

The anticipated use of this level falls under classification A-3 under the International Existing Building Code regulations. This rating means that the use of this space will be for "assembly use intended for worship, recreation, or amusement, including exhibition halls, libraries, and museums."⁹⁷ The uses and classification of a space changes the code and requirements that space needs to meet to be able to operate in that way. Located on the east elevation of the building are three brick chimneys, one of which acts as a flue for the boiler located in the lowest level of the building.

The exterior of the Temple walls is a combination of solid masonry with a wythe brick wall located on top of a stone foundation.⁹⁸ The Temple building material consists of materials from the 1890s, most of which stand in good condition thanks to proper continual care and upkeep of the structure. Over the years numerous repair projects had taken place, the largest and one of the most recent being in 2002. During this time

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 13.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 31.

major necessary repairs were made to the roof through the installation of asphalt shingles to the roof.

Accessibility



Figure 20. B'nai Israel Temple Photo by Victoria Peck, MTSU, 2021.

The B'nai Israel Temple has varying levels of accessibility compliance. With the shift from private religious use to a public open space adjustments will need to be made for the Temple to sustain its prolonged use and future as a cultural heritage center. With historic buildings there needs to be a balance between making the necessary adjustments and changes to make the building meet accessibility requirements and while also maintaining the historical and architectural significance of

the building. The B'nai Israel Temple already meets accessibility compliance levels in certain areas in its current state. Most significantly is that all the door entry ways meet the minimum accessibility requirement of 32" wide.⁹⁹ The main aisle way between the pews also meets accessibility requirements through the allowance of space for wheelchairs.



Figure 21. Main aisle of the B'nai Israel Cultural Center. Photo by Victoria Peck

⁹⁹Ibid, 18.

The primary area where the Temple does not meet required accessibility needs come from the lack of accessible friendly options for entering the Temple through any of the entryways. Based on the regulations put in place by the 2018 International Existing Building Code access to the lower basement level of the B'nai Israel Temple is not required because it is not on the same level as the main accessible entrance. As of current there is no ADA compliant access path to the basement level of the Temple and thus it will not be a main space for interpretation but instead can be used by staff for other purposes such as storage or workspaces. This issue will need to be addressed in the future as the plumbing and bathrooms are located on the basement level. The goal for the future is to include accessible bathrooms in the basement level as well as the inclusion as an accessible method for guest of all different abled states to access easily.

Adaptive Reuse of Structures in Butte

The city of Butte is a National Historic Landmark District which maintains hundreds of buildings both residential and commercial. Most of the historic buildings that exist in the town span from the time of the late 1800s to the mid-1900s. The concept of adaptive reuse is visible throughout the city. Butte has multiple examples within the city of transformation of historic buildings into sites of interpretation. These range from the history of brothels and the red-light district in Butte, to the history of the Chinese experience in the city.



Figure 22. Dumas Brothel, Photo by Anne Pentilla of the Montana Standard, 2018.

The Dumas Brothel is located at 45 E. Mercury Street in Butte and held the title as the longest continually active brothel in the United States. The Dumas building architecture is unique to the city. It resides as “a three-story Victorian brick building with distinguishing projecting bays and an elaborate metal cornice” and is “the last example of a parlor house brothel in Butte.”¹⁰⁰ It was opened in 1890 and remained open until 1982. Dumas Brothel is open for tours and during the month of October volunteers hold events such as Spooks and Spirits, and Paranormal investigations. Also, throughout the year they hold special paranormal Ghost hunting events. Dumas Brothel

¹⁰⁰ Veronica L. Sales, “The Last House on the Block: Preserving the Dumas Brothel in Butte, Montana: 1890-2016,” (ProQuest, 2016)

attracts dark tourism using the building's history as a brothel to tell ghost stories as a primary interpretive focus. The Dumas Brothel is an example of a historic building in Butte being bought over and run by a for-profit organization and then profits from dark tourism through sharing the narrative of the Brothel as haunted building and combining it with the stigma around sex work.

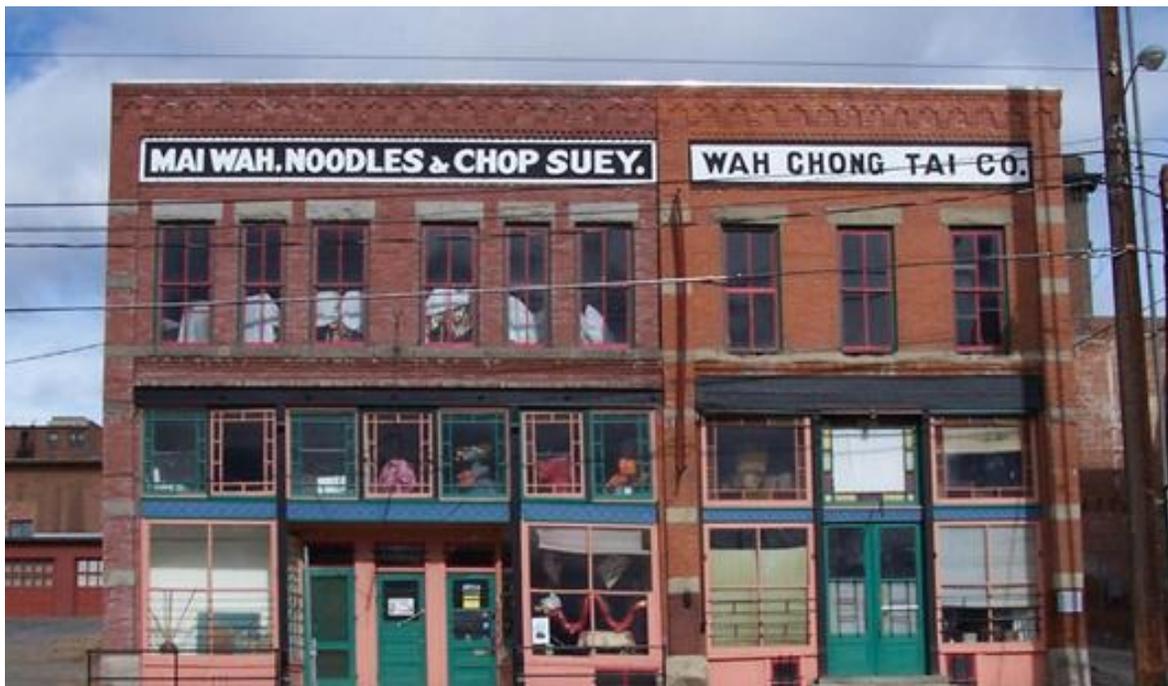


Figure 23. Front entrance to the Mai Wah Museum. Photo from visitMT.com

The Mai Wah Museum consists of both the Wah Chong Tai Co. Building and the Mai Wah Noodles and Chop Suey building. The Wah Chong Tai Mercantile was the premiere Chinese general store in Butte Montana for decades following its initial opening in 1894.¹⁰¹ The Mai Wah Society was formed in 1991 and is a 501 (c) (3) not-for-profit organization. It was established “for educational, charitable, and scientific

¹⁰¹ “The Wah Chong Tai Mercantile,” Mai Wah Society and Museum, <https://www.maiwah.org/explore/the-wah-chong-tai-mercantile/>.



Figure 24. Mother Lode Theatre. Photo by Gregg George Everett

purposes, including research and public education about the history, culture, and conditions of Asian people in the Rocky Mountain West.”¹⁰² The Mai Wah Museum most closely relates to the adaptive reuse that the B’nai Israel Temple is undergoing and acts as a good reference for the success of turning historic buildings into a site of public interpretation that related to the initial use of the original structure within the city of Butte.

¹⁰² “About US,” Mai Wah Society and Museum, <https://www.maiwah.org/about/>.

Located behind B'nai Israel Temple is The Mother Lode Masonic Temple and Temple Theatre. The building was built in 1923, in a striking Beaux-Arts style¹⁰³, with the purpose to service as a space for ceremonial services for the Masons. Since then, it has gone through shifts in use and ownership. In the 1980s' the Masons donated the building to the city of Butte, by which leased it the Butte Center for the Performing Arts. After \$3 million in repair the theatre is now a working community theatre and music venue thanks to fundraising from a non-profit in the 1990s.¹⁰⁴ It is currently still in use as the city's theater offering performances of all types throughout the year including children's theatre summer camps with performances open to the public.

St. Lawrence Catholic Church is located in the Walkerville neighborhood of Butte. It was built in 1897 and at the time stood at Butte's second largest Catholic parish. The construction was funded through community efforts of miners using subscription on land donated by mining companies.¹⁰⁵ By 1988 the congregation had left the church, but the St. Lawrence Preservation Committee was created, and they maintain the structural integrity of the building so that it can be rent out for weddings, event space, and other ceremonies. As of current the church is sustained through fundraising efforts of the St. Lawrence Preservation Committee and money used from renting the shape out for events or private use.

¹⁰³ Montana Historical Society, "Masonic Temple Annex / Mother Lode Theatre," *Story of Butte*, accessed October 2, 2022, <https://storyofbutte.org/items/show/2035>.

¹⁰⁴ "Theatre History," Motherlode Theatre, Accessed July 21st, 2021, <https://buttearts.org/about-the-mother-lode-theatre/>

¹⁰⁵ The Montana National Register Sign Program, "St. Lawrence O'Toole Church," *Historic Montana*, <https://historicmt.org/items/show/1978>.



Figure 25. St. Lawrence O'Toole Church, Photo by Historic Montana.

The B'nai Israel Cultural Center

The B'nai Israel cultural center opened its doors in June of 2022. On its opening weekend almost one hundred visitors came to explore the Cultural Center. Visitors were that they were intrigued to enter the Temple building and see what its interior appearance. There was specific interest in the history of the Jewish community in Butte. The inclusion of interpretation on the other ethnic groups in Butte was taken well. A majority of the guests who visited during the opening month local residents, many of which had familial ties to the city for generations. Feedback included an appreciation of the use of the space to share the Jewish history alongside the multi-cultural community history of the city.

Almost all visitors came with an interest to know more about the architecture and history of the building along with the Jewish community in Butte and about the Jewish objects on display inside the Temple. Visitors during opening weekend ranged from Jewish people from different states to Mormon missionaries who were traveling Montana. Through guest experiences and expectations from opening weekend of the B'nai Israel Cultural Center it was evident that the most prominent attraction of the space was the Temple architecture and the unique Jewish history of the city. Guided explained how the interpretation of all groups within the Temple aligns with the long-time views of the congregation on the importance of sharing cultures and education. The Temple and its interpretation also in some ways mimicked in one singular visually

impactful instance the true diversity of Butte as an ethnic enclave which in other circumstance in modern times is not as easy to visualize.

An issue that was notable was the lack of walking space to view interpretive panels due to the limited size of the side isle from the length and number of pews. In the future, to increase both the space for interpretation along with walking space for guest, the removal of some of the pews has been discussed. This will allow more room for extra paneling and make it easier have to the necessary space to comfortably read the interpretive panels from top to bottom.



Figure 26. Victoria Peck Standing next to Interpretive panel in B'nai Israel Cultural Center. Photo by Emily Huffer.

One of the goals of the B'nai Israel Interpretive Center is to use minimally invasive interpretive formats. Currently displayed in the Cultural Center are individual pop-up panels from the All-Nations exhibit that was shared to the Cultural Center from the Butte Silver-Bow Archives. These panels are lightweight and easy to move; this non-invasive interpretation also allows for the creation of more panels and increased ease in ability to change interpretation for events such like Black history month, or the Montana Folk Festival, held annually in Butte.

Just like in the streets of what is now considered Uptown Butte, visitors will be able to experience the different ethnic cultures that helped to cultivate the city within a defined area. In the historic shopping district, there would be Jewish owned butchers



Figure 27. Photo from Choir loft of interpretive panels and pews in the B'nai Israel Cultural Center. Photo by Victoria Peck

across from Finnish owned hotels along with consumers from all backgrounds. All had the common goal of earning a sustainable and fulfilling life for themselves. Their interactions created a cross cultural hub where they could each display and share their culture. The Berkeley Pitt had destroyed many of the ethnic community neighborhoods and took away their ability to be represented on the landscape, but there is the potential for the B'nai Israel Cultural Center to interpretive the groups together again in the same space.

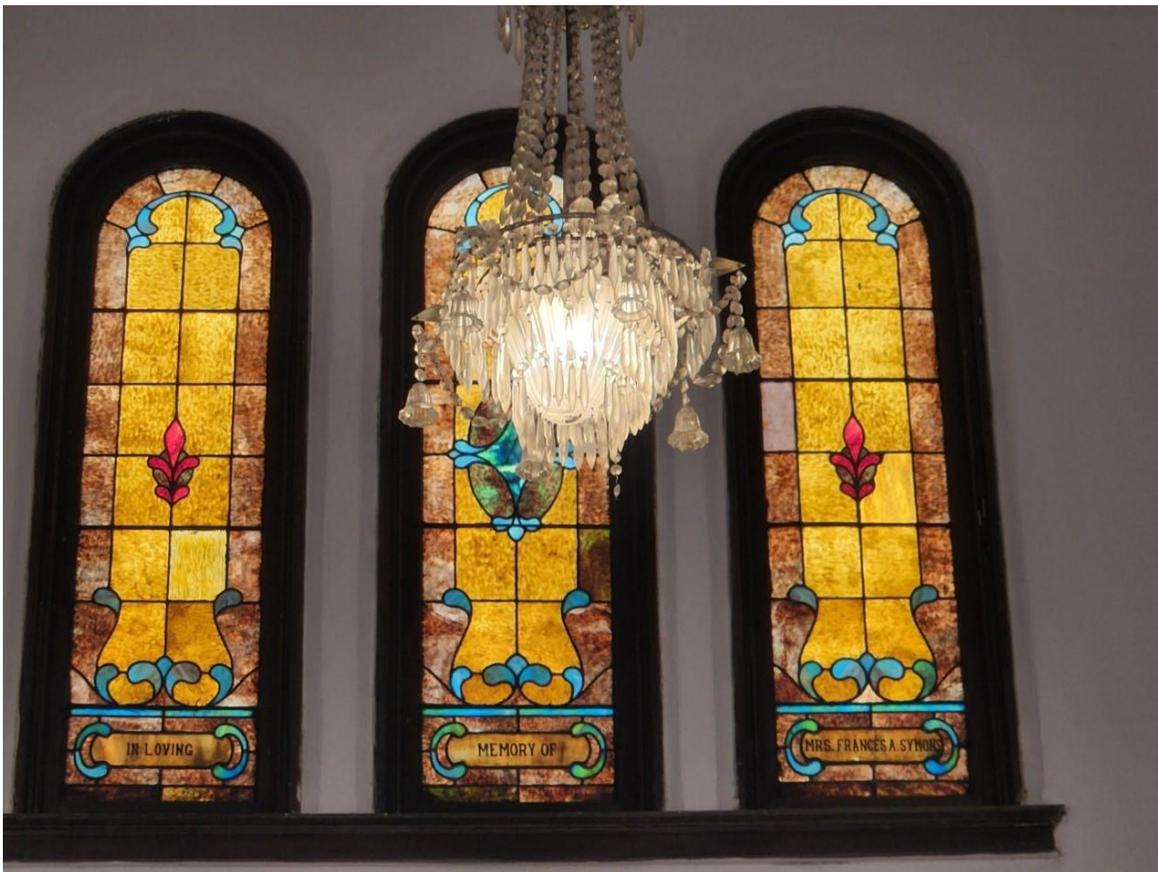


Figure 28. Stained Glass above the Beema, Photo by Victoria Peck

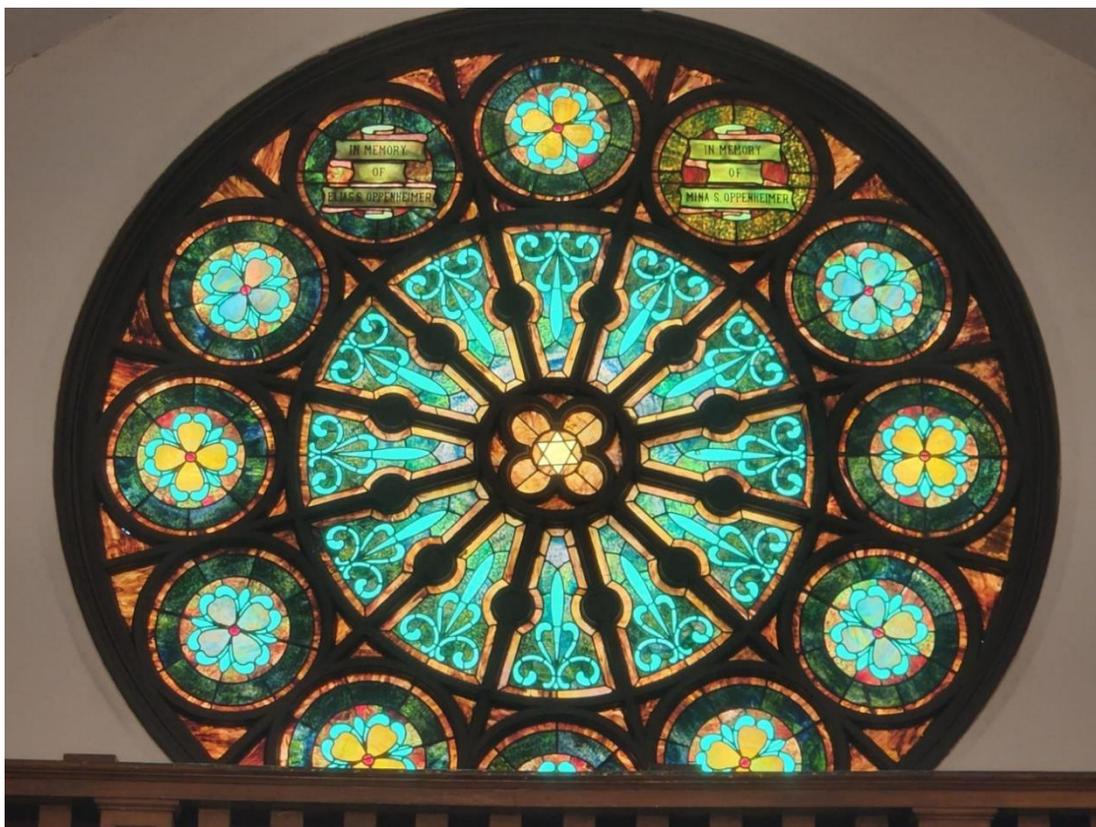


Figure 29. Stained Glass Window located above the Choir Loft in B'nai Israel Temple. Photo by Victoria Peck

According to the initial Articles of Incorporation of the Congregation B'nai Israel, under article two, it is stated that the B'nai Israel Congregation was formed with the goals to maintain a space for Jewish worship, offer a space of learning of the Jewish religion, to help enhance the learning and social skills of members, and for doing charitable work within and outside the Jewish community as to better the city of Butte without religious prejudice. Now more than ever the city of Butte is crying out for an interpretive space that can educate visitors on the Jewish religion through the experiences and history of the Jewish community in Butte. The B'nai Israel Cultural Center creates space for religious tolerance and education by also including the

interpretation on many of the different groups who lived in Butte along with their religious practices. In May of 2022 there was an instance within the city of Butte where anti-Semitic messages were shared throughout the neighborhoods of Butte including the ones directly surrounding the B'nai Israel Temple. Rocks with anti-Semitic speech and symbolism were placed on the properties and by the front doors of people across the city. In response to this direct announcement of discrimination and hatred towards the Jewish community in Butte the community of Butte stood together for the Jewish community. A local elementary school took counter actions to this event and students went and wrote messages of love and tolerance on rocks and shared them across the city. Other religious institutions within Butte publicly demeaned the hate filled actions taken against the Jewish community and promised to stand in solidarity with them. The B'nai Israel Cultural Center will act as a public space that can help dismantle discriminatory thoughts through education and shared experiences.



Figure 30. Photo of street facing façade of B'nai Israel Temple. Photo by Victoria Peck

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