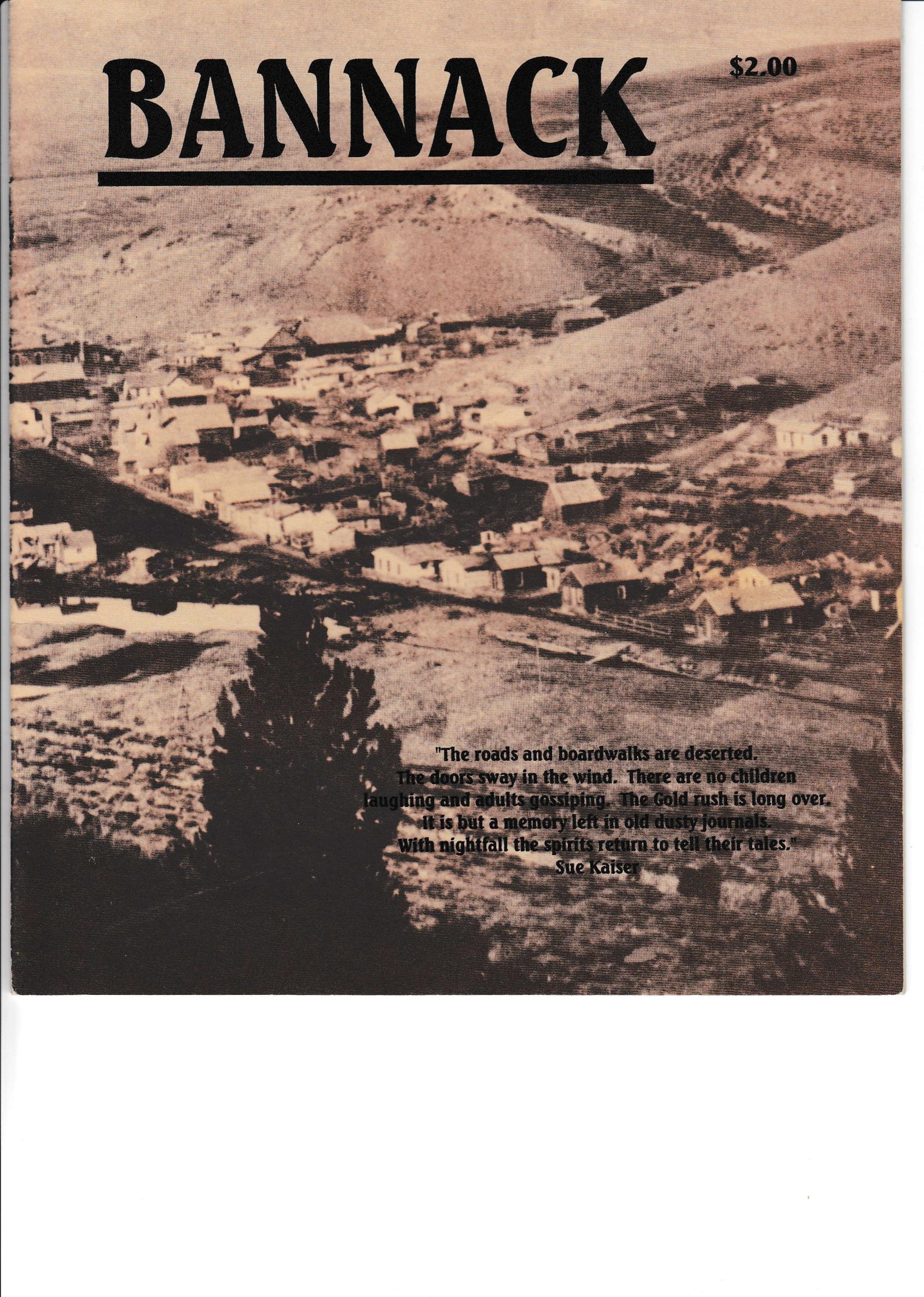


# BANNACK

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\$2.00



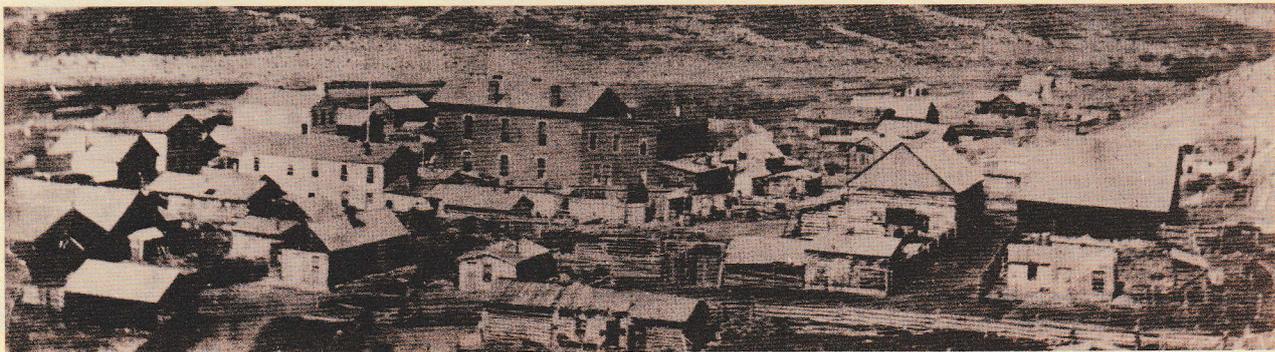
"The roads and boardwalks are deserted.  
The doors sway in the wind. There are no children  
laughing and adults gossiping. The Gold rush is long over.  
It is but a memory left in old dusty journals.  
With nightfall the spirits return to tell their tales."  
Sue Kaiser

# WELCOME TO BANNACK

Bannack has a rich and colorful history. Since the first gold was taken from the gravels of the Grasshopper Creek to the present day, Bannack has touched the lives of many. We hope she will touch yours. As you walk the streets and boardwalks and explore the buildings that once were filled with laughter, gossip and greed, try to imagine what life would have been like in this early day mining town.

In order to preserve and protect Bannack for your children and their grandchildren, please observe the following rules and courtesies:

- ▶ Do not write on walls, carve in wood or remove any part of a building.
- ▶ Smoking is allowed ONLY in the designated smoking area in the main parking lot.
- ▶ Metal detectors may not be used.
- ▶ Every can and rusty nail adds to the story. **DO NOT REMOVE ANY ARTIFACT.**
- ▶ Keep your pets on a leash.
- ▶ No discharge of firearms or fireworks.
- ▶ Please close the doors after you leave a building.
- ▶ Pack litter out.
- ▶ Gold panning in the creek is prohibited.



Bannack, Montana ~ 1891

## THE GUIDE

This guide is designed to help you get the most out of your visit to Bannack. In the middle of this book you will find a map of the town the way it is today. Throughout town there are certain vantage points that enable you to get an overall view of a group of buildings or interesting areas to help you see and understand Bannack's past and present. You will find numbers engraved in the boardwalk throughout town that correspond with this guide. Please close the doors behind you when leaving the buildings. There are three houses located within the town site which are used for employee housing. Please respect their privacy. This guide is provided for your convenience while visiting the park. Please return it to the box or the visitor center. If you wish to take it home with you for a souvenir, we ask for a \$2.00 donation to help with reprinting costs.

Rest Rooms are located in the middle of town across the street from Skinners Saloon. You will also find benches placed along the boardwalk allowing you to sit a spell and imagine the sights and sounds of Bannack in her heyday.

## THE VISITOR CENTER

The visitor center is open 7 days a week from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. during the summer. It is closed in the winter months, usually from the middle of October through the middle of May.

Inside the Visitor Center you will find a variety of books and other interpretive materials. There is also a video room with an assortment of videos to help you better understand Bannack and the surrounding area. Rest Rooms are located inside for your convenience. Cold drinks are also available.

The building the Visitor Center is located in was once owned and occupied by early Bannack resident George French. Mr. French was also a carpenter and it is believed he was the one responsible for building Henry Plummer's coffin.

# I. 1862 - THE BEGINNING

Bannack's history began over 130 years ago when in July of 1862, John White and fellow members of a Colorado based group of "Pikes Peakers" camped several miles downstream on the creek which runs through Bannack. Unaware that the creek had already been named "Willard Creek" by Lewis and Clark, White christened the creek the "Grasshopper" because of the dense grasshopper population in the area at the time. As was customary, the party panned the gravel on the banks of their camp and found gold in sizable quantities. White filed one of the first recorded mining claims in what would become Montana Territory. Good news traveled fast and miners rushed to the new "Grasshopper Diggins". The first camp was located about 8 miles upstream from the original discovery and that was Bannack's beginning. By early fall the mining camp boosted a population of about 400 and swelled to 3000 by spring.

## *BANNACK*

The little mining camp was named for the Bannock Indians, affiliated with the Shoshone, sometimes known as the Snakes. The Bannock were particularly fond of camas root cakes. Bannock is a Scotch word and means "a cake cooked over an open fire". It is believed that the town received its change in spelling when the Post Office was established on November 21, 1863, and when the name was submitted to Washington D.C. the "O" was inadvertently taken for an "A".

## 1. YANKEE FLATS

Located on the south side of Grasshopper Creek, Yankee Flats acquired its name after a group of Minnesotans settled there. The Civil War was raging in the east, and early Bannack residents brought their political loyalties with them; the northerners settling in Yankee Flats and the southerners settling in Bannack. Some of the buildings were moved to the Bannack side of the creek but, all other traces of this community disappeared as the dredges worked their way along the Grasshopper Creek.



A Brewery originally sat in the main parking lot as you come into Bannack. It was a large building with two floors, a porch and balcony. It was constructed by John Manheim during the winter of 1862-63. Mr. Sidney Edgerton gave a speech from the balcony shortly after he named Bannack as the first capital of the new Territory of Montana. After the business and equipment was sold it became the meeting hall for the community. (Beaverhead County Museum photo.)

## II. LAW AND ORDER IN A NEW LAND

### THE MINERS COURT

As soon as a rich location was found in any one of the many valleys or gulches, there was a great rush to that locality. New camps sprang up so rapidly that Territorial officials could do little toward providing effective government. So, the miners of Bannack met and established a miners court. B. B. Burchett was elected judge and Henry Crawford, was elected sheriff. A mining claim was one hundred feet up or down the creek and as far out on each side as the pay dirt extended. Title to a claim was established by staking it and posting a notice and then taking it to the recorder and having it recorded. The claimant was then obliged to work his claim every day when water was available. An absence of three days constituted a forfeiture and the claim could then be jumped. In case of sickness the claim was protected until such time as the owner was able to resume work. The laws laid down by the miners' court were very simple and absolutely just. Shortly after arriving in Bannack, Chief Justice Sidney Edgerton strolled down main street. He came upon a Miner's Court in session. Judge Burchett, seeing that Mr. Edgerton was a stranger, invited him to sit with him. The trial proceeded, but not for long.

*"It was interrupted by the suggestion that liquid refreshments be served. A dandy was sent to a neighboring saloon for whiskey. The court then took a recess for a drink. After several drinks, the court proceeded."*

*Martha Edgerton Plassman*

### LINCOLN APPOINTS EDGERTON

In the 1860's Bannack matured politically as well as economically. In March of 1863, as a reward for his loyal service to the Republican party, President Lincoln appointed Sidney Edgerton as Chief Justice to Idaho Territory. He was the only representative of organized government in the Montana mining region. As Chief Justice, Edgerton assumed he would be assigned to the district centering in the Idaho capital, Lewiston. Instead, he was sent to the most remote part of the Territory, into the gold camps east of the Bitter Root Mountains, Bannack. Federal law provided that he could not assume his duties until he first took an oath of office from someone qualified to administer the oath. No such person could be found in Bannack and, as a result, Edgerton never did take the oath qualifying him as Chief Justice of Idaho. Even if he had taken the oath, he would have been relatively powerless for he had no United States marshal or any other assistance that he would have needed in dealing with the outlaws that were terrorizing the country. During the winter he witnessed the activities of the Vigilantes, and was sympathetic with their action. Since he had no marshal, and few other facilities for holding court or making its work effective, he did not open court, but gave freely of his time in counsel with leading men in Bannack in an attempt to build up some semblance of order.

Mr Edgerton was later chosen by the citizens of Bannack to travel to Washington D.C. to secure a division of the Territory. He succeeded and was appointed Governor of Montana Territory in May of 1864.



Home of Montana's first Territorial Governor. (Montana Historical Society photo.)

*"After the improvements were made, (the house) seemed very homelike and comfortable, but when one has been moving for a few months, he is not inclined to be as fastidious as to the style of house he occupies."*

*Lucia Darling, 1863*

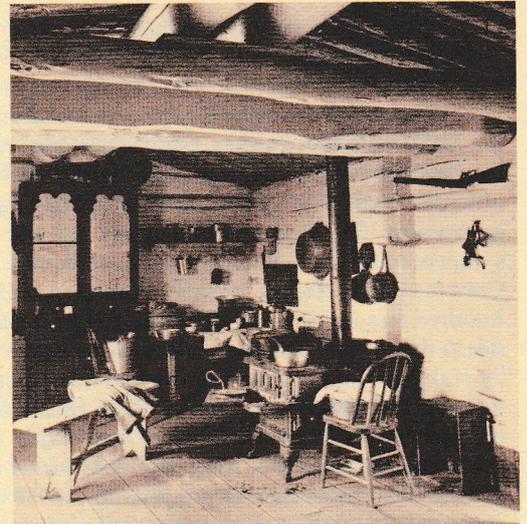
*"The house was built of logs thrown together in the rudest manner and had a dirt roof that turned to mud in the rain, hail or snow, and tricked through on the occupants. It was a poor excuse for a house but, there was no better house in town."*

*Martha Edgerton Plassman*

## 2. SITE OF MONTANAS' FIRST GOVERNORS' MANSION

Sidney Edgerton arrived in Bannack in September of 1863. Mary, his wife, and their four children: Martha - 13, Wright - 10, Sidney - 7, and Pauline age 5 made the 2500 mile journey to the goldfields of Idaho, with him. From the letters written by Mary Edgerton to her family after her arrival in Bannack, it was apparent that she desperately missed her family in Ohio. Lucia Darling, Edgerton's niece, traveled to Bannack with the family and became the first public teacher in Bannack in the late fall of 1863.

Edgerton realized he would not be moving on to Lewiston, as planned, so set out to find a home for his family. With miners already moving on to the discoveries in the Alder Gulch region, cabins were to be had in Bannack. Mr. Edgerton was able to buy a building that had been used as a store. He purchased it at a sheriffs sale for a cost of \$400.00. The original structure was one room with a kitchen added on and was located here. Fire destroyed the "mansion" in the early 1900's but the small sod roofed structure in the back is said to have been built from the logs that were salvaged from the original building. The Edgerton's lived in this home for the entire time they were in Bannack. Mrs Edgerton did the best she could under the circumstances to beautify the house. She covered the walls with sheets, but did not have enough for the other rooms. The front room served as a combination living room and bedroom and one corner was curtained off for Mr. Edgerton to use as his office.



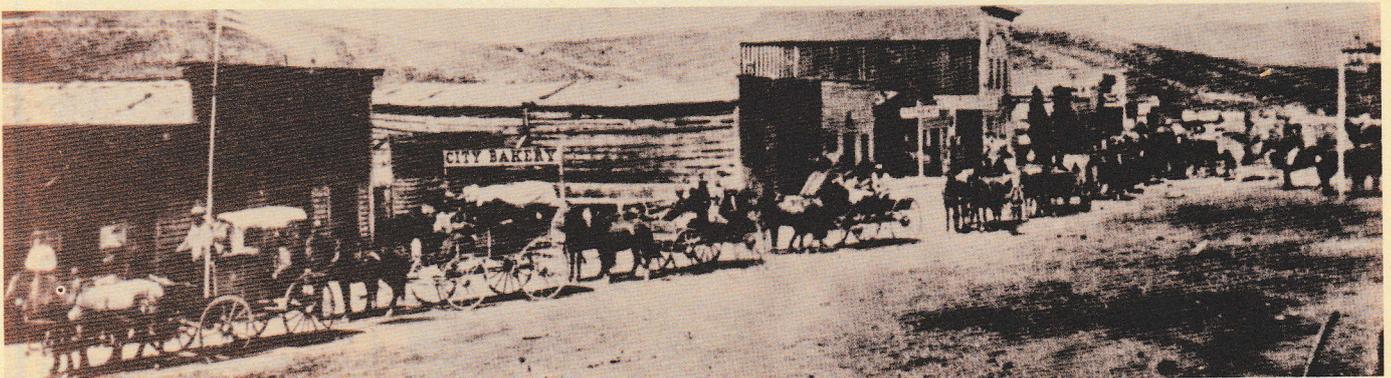
Typical interior of early pioneer cabin in Bannack, 1863.  
(Montana Historical Society photo.)

### III. FAMILY LIFE IN BANNACK

The first families to come to Bannack knew a great deal of hardship. They had crossed the great plains. Surviving dust storms, drought, rain storms, drowning's, starvation, Indian attacks, only to arrive in Bannack without even a decent place to live. Many arrived quite late in the year with only their wagons to live in. If a family were fortunate enough to find a cabin, it was usually small and uncomfortable.

Bannack was a crude mining camp on the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains and for the most part was made up of men who had come alone to the gold fields, intent on making their fortunes and escaping back to civilization in "the states". Between four and five hundred people spent the winter of 1862-63 in Bannack and of that number, probably no more than fifty were women.

As primitive as many of the homes were in Bannack, a woman's life revolved around that home. Bannack remained a mans world and the few women who intruded actively into it weren't of the "respectable" society. Respectable women led secluded lives and had little contact with the outside world. There was little visiting between the women of the community; they stayed at home and found plenty to keep them occupied there. Men did most of the shopping and all of the gossiping.



Wilbur Fisk Sanders brought his family to Bannack along with the Edgerton party. When they reached the top of the hill over looking Yankee Flats and Bannack, five year old Jimmy Sanders summed up the feelings of the entire entourage when he said, "I fink Bang Up is humbug." (Montana Historical Society photo.)



### 3. DOC RYBURNS' HOUSE

Doctor Ryburn came to Bannack in 1897. He cared for the residents of Bannack and often traveled many miles by buggy in response to the medical needs of the community. He was one of the last doctors to practice medicine in Bannack. He was a member of the Bannack Masonic Lodge and served as Worshipful Master for three years.

### 4. MASONIC LODGE /SCHOOL HOUSE

Masonry, or Freemasonry as it is more properly called is an international fraternity, whose origins go back to the builders of those remarkable structures created in Gothic style of architecture during the Middle Ages in Europe and England.

They were organized into lodges, and used signs, symbols and passwords, and were separated in to different grades, or degrees of skills, with the Master Mason being the highest, similar to a contractor or architect today.

As Gothic architecture waned, the lodges began to take members who were not actually builders, but who would be a credit to the organization. They were called "Accepted Masons."

Masonry, although it stresses morality and has religious overtones, is not a religion. It accepts men of all faiths, and creeds. Masonry calls itself "that religion in which all men agree"-- and requires it members to have but three beliefs:

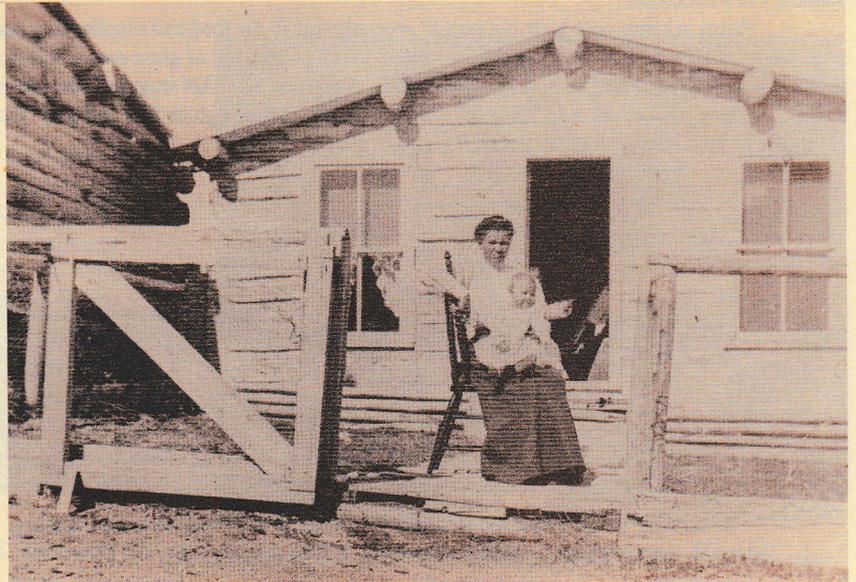
- A. Belief in a supreme being.
- B. Recognition of the Brotherhood of man.
- C. Belief in the Immortality of the soul

Please, take time to go upstairs and look inside the lodge.

*"I have been waiting for an opportunity to send a letter to Salt Lake or I should have written before. We have to pay a dollar for sending or receiving each letter. I tasted butter for the first time since we came here and it was a treat I can assure you, but as long as it is ten and twelve shillings a pound....I think we shall do without it most of the time. Everything is very high here. Sugar is 75¢ a pound, pork sixty, flour from twenty five to thirty, nutmegs 50¢ an ounce.*

*We had extremely cold weather here the week before last. The mercury in the thermometers after going forty degrees below zero froze in the bulb. I never knew such cold weather..... I was so afraid that the children would freeze their noses or ears that I got up a number of times in the night to see that their heads were covered. Their beds would be covered with frost".....*

*Mary Edgerton, Winter 1863-64*



Bannack Masonic Lodge And School House ~ Late 1870's  
(Beaverhead County Museum photo.)

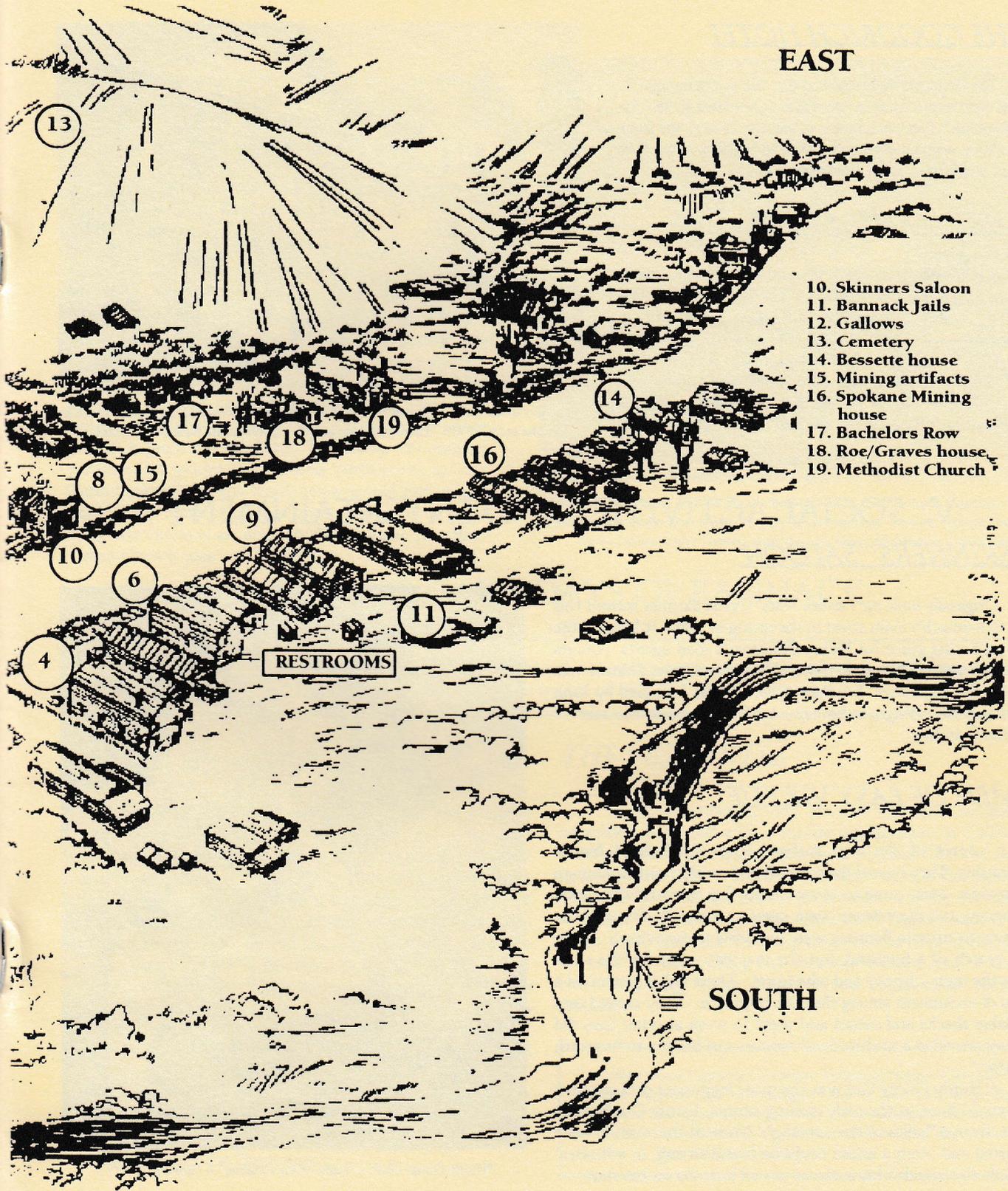
The Masonic emblem, "The Square and Compass" located above the windows on the second floor, was carved from hard wood for the front of the building when it was built in 1874. Mrs. A.F. Graeter donated her hickory breadboard to be used to mount the emblem. The building was built for a cost of \$1500.00. In comparison, the brick court house, across the street, was built for a cost of \$14,000.00 just one year later.

# NORTH

- A. Parking Lot
- B. Visitors Center
- 1. Yankee Flats
- 2. Governors mansion
- 3. Ryburn House
- 4. Masonic Lodge  
School house
- 5. Assay Office
- 6. Gibson houses
- 7. Hotel Meade
- 8. Goodrich Hotel
- 9. Chrismans Store



EAST



- 10. Skinners Saloon
- 11. Bannack Jails
- 12. Gallows
- 13. Cemetery
- 14. Bessette house
- 15. Mining artifacts
- 16. Spokane Mining house
- 17. Bachelors Row
- 18. Roe/Graves house
- 19. Methodist Church

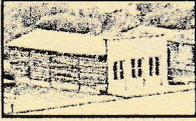
RESTROOMS

SOUTH

## 8. THE GOODRICH HOTEL

The Goodrich Hotel stood on this site and is thought to be the first commercial hotel in Montana. It provided shelter for many of Bannack's first inhabitants. In the late 1940's, the front of the building was removed and moved to Virginia City. It is there today and known as the Fairweather Inn.

## 9. CHRISMANS' STORE



George Chrismans' store was described as: "The news bureau, the university, the social settlement of the hamlet to which intelligent, genial companionship and a wide fireplace gave cheerful welcome....Of course, these audiences were composed wholly of males. It is believed that Henry Plummer had his offices in the back of this building.



The Goodrich Hotel is shown here next to Skinners Saloon and the Hotel Meade in the early 1900's. There was a large livery stable in the back of the Hotel.

# V. SOCIAL ACTIVITIES AND ENTERTAINMENT

## 10. SKINNERS' SALOON

Originally built on Yankee Flats, Cyrus Skinner moved this building to Bannack's main street in the spring of 1863. It became the popular gathering place for Henry Plummer's road agents. Graves and Murphy operated a store in this building after Cyrus Skinner was hanged by the Vigilantes. For many years it was occupied by John McMeen and A.F. Wright who did a brisk business in the sale of general merchandise.

### *WOMEN OF EASY VIRTUE*

Most of the men suffered from the lack of female companionship. They missed the warmth and comfort only a woman could provide. Men came to town on payday to spend their hard earned money, and the women were eager to accept it. Some of the first women to arrive in Bannack were the ladies of easy virtue. Some were in search of a husband, but the majority came for the same reason as the men - money and adventure. These ladies generated a great deal of excitement among the male populace. They moved into the available shacks and cabins and went to work at what they did best. They provided a multitude of services not limited to "warmth and comfort".

A Hurdy Gurdy Girl was the most legitimate occupation a woman could have in the early mining camps. Hurdy Gurdy Girls were not always "ladies of the evening". Most of the women were kind hearted and often a miner could be found sitting in a "Ladies" cabin while she mended his socks or sewed buttons on his shirt.



"Hurdy Gurdy Girl" ~ "Lady of the Evening" ~ "Soiled Dove"?

As Bannack began to develop economically, it also developed socially. While the Masonic Lodge served as a social outlet for the men, there also were other diversions which men as well as respectable women could attend. Balls and dancing parties were held two and three times a week. These parties offered pleasant entertainment to all the ladies, married or single, as well as the children. Best suits packed in the bottom of trunks were dragged out, aired and pressed for these festive occasions. The waltz, the schottische, the polka, the Virginia reel and the quadrille were the popular dances. The men and women of Bannack also had the opportunity to partake in other socially acceptable entertainment. Traveling theaters and circuses occasionally stopped in town and provided further diversion. Bannack also had a baseball team. They were quite professional and played other rural communities such as Argenta and Mill Point. Ice skating was another pastime that young and old alike participated in. On Saturday evenings, the whole town would turn out to skate. Scrap lumber and sage brush was gathered and a huge bon fire was set afire on the banks of the creek. Often times it was well below zero.



Early 1900 Bannack sported quite a baseball team. Left to right standing: Smoke Paddock, Jim Ashworth, Harry Wrenz, Toots Paddock. Seated: George Gauthier, Newe Evans, Harry Graves, Roy Jagers, Harry McMannis, Carl Knoll.

## VI. THE DARK DAYS OF BANNACK

*"It is probable that there never was a mining town of the same size that contained more desperadoes and lawless characters than did Bannack during the winter of 1862-63." Thomas Dimsdale*

### THE ROAD AGENTS

Henry Plummer came to Bannack in the spring of 1862. He had spent time in San Quentin Prison the year before. He soon gained the trust of the people in Bannack and was elected by the miners court to serve as sheriff of the bustling gold town. He immediately organized his group of followers, approximately 25 of them, into a fraternity they called the "Innocents". So called because they agreed to always plead their innocence in the unlikely event of their arrest. Unconcerned with the public opinion they boldly identified themselves with a black handkerchief tied in a sailors knot at the throat. In the eight months the road agents terrorized the gold camps, it is estimated they robbed and murdered 102 people.

As the robberies and killing increased people became afraid to travel from home. It became apparent to some that perhaps their own Sheriff could be involved in some way with the "Innocents".

### THE VIGILANTES

On December 23, 1863, the first Vigilante Committee was organized, patterned after a similar organization in California, its members included citizens from both Virginia City and Bannack. Its leaders were Paris S. Pfouts, president; James Williams, executive officer; Wilbur Sander, official prosecutor. During the next forty-two days, Vigilantes under the direction of James Williams went as far as the Canadian border in pursuit of members of the gang. By the end of January, they had executed twenty-four of the robber band, including Henry Plummer and banished or silenced the remainder.

*".....there was a Vigilance Committee formed at Virginia City and a number of these highway men were hanged. Before they were hung, they made confessions and implicated many others. Their confession was that there was a regularly formed band of them and that the sheriff of this district was the captain." Mary Edgerton, January 17, 1864.*

## 11. BANNACK JAILS

When the gold rush was in it's peak, jails were seldom used, offenders were either warned, told to get out of town, or hung. No one wanted the job of guarding prisoners when they could be working their claim. After Henry Plummer was elected to the office of Sheriff on May 24, 1863, he had the jails constructed at their present sight. They were in plain view from his offices in the back of Chrisman's Store.

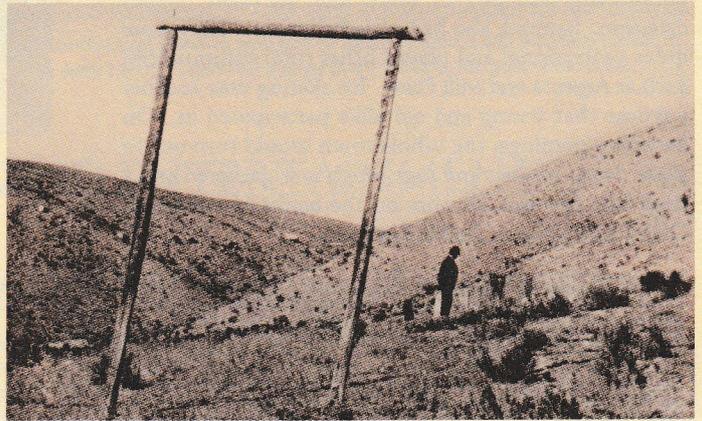
Inside the smaller jail, the prisoners chains were attached to the metal rings. Today, looking through the barred windows, the gallows are in plain sight.



These were the first jails built in Montana and provided very little comfort for those unfortunate enough to find themselves incarcerated.  
(Montana Historical Society photo.)

## 12. THE GALLOWES

were ordered constructed by Henry Plummer, lawman and outlaw of Bannack. John Peter Horan, R. C. Rawley, Ned Ray, Buck Stinson and Henry Plummer were the only men hanged on the gallows. Justice was often swift in the early mining towns. On January 10, 1864, several of the Vigilantes from Virginia City arrived in Bannack. They had recently captured and hung Red Yeager and others. Before Yeager was hung he confessed and implicated Plummer as the leader of the "Innocents". The Vigilantes from Virginia City along with the Vigilantes from Bannack decided they must capture Mr. Plummer and his associates, Ned Ray and Buck Stinson. They planned to apprehend and hang them the next day but received word that three fresh horses had been brought into town. Afraid that the leader of the Road Agents was about to escape they decided to act immediately. They proceeded in their regimented military fashion and captured all three of the men. Not a shot was fired. On that cold January evening, just about dark the three men were marched up to the gallows. All three were lifted up and dropped to their death. Henry Plummer, after pleading his innocence, begged the Vigilantes to "Please give me a good drop."



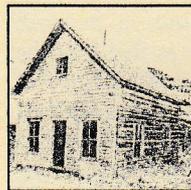
These original gallows were chopped down by a local misfit. The existing gallows is a replica built in the exact location of the originals.

## 13. THE CEMETERY

located on the hill, just east of the gallows, hasn't been used for many years. The crumbling stones and other crude markers silently tell the tales of love and woe. Whether accidental, natural or intentional, death claimed the lives of young and old alike. Residents from every walk of life were brought together in one final resting place. Even though most of the grave markers are gone, the Old Bannack cemetery is a testament to the harsh reality of life in a frontier town. This cemetery was used from 1862 when Bannack was founded up until about 1880.

In approximately 1876 the residents of Bannack started using another cemetery. It is located just outside the park entrance, off of the county road coming into the park. Over 60 marked graves offer an insight into Bannack's past. It is a very worthwhile stop.

## 14. THE BESSETTE HOUSE



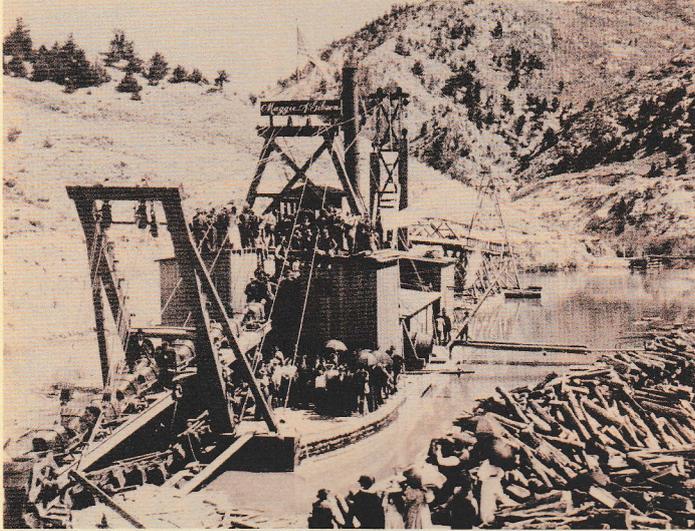
was home to one of the earliest residents of Bannack. While the cemetery tells the story of many early and untimely deaths in the mining town, a few healthy souls lived to "a ripe old age". Amede "Mitty" Bessette was one of the original Vigilantes, a stockman, raising sheep, one time owner of the famous Bank Exchange Saloon and the Hotel

Meade. He was one of Bannack's last surviving founders and lived here until his death in 1919. Amede's house was also used as a house of quarantine in the early 1900's, during the epidemics that took so many lives here in Bannack. People stricken by the disease were kept here until they got over the illness or died. It is also known as the "Crying Baby House" and it is believed that the house is haunted by all the children that died during the epidemics.

## VII. ALL THAT GLITTERS

Placer Gold was the first gold discovered here in Bannack by John White. The PLACER DEPOSITS found in the creek were easy to work and required very simple tools such as gold pans, sluice boxes and rocker boxes. There were also several stamp mills operating east of the main town of Bannack in little "suburbs" located in the canyon. Early residents in the winter of 1862 tell of the constant hammering of the stamp mills. These STAMP MILLS would crush the rock and the miners would wash the gold free with a series of sluice boxes.

As time went on the shallow placer diggings were exhausted and other means of obtaining the valuable mineral had to be found. Much effort was put into developing a series of ditches to bring water into the area to mine the higher bench deposits. Remains of the ditches that brought water into Bannack are still evident on the south and east hills that surround the town. These first ditches were hand dug and constructed of crude lumber and carried water from as far away as 30 miles. High pressure streams of water were used to wash away the top soil to get at the bench deposits of gold. It was usually washed into a series of sluice boxes. The HYDRAULIC MINING period lasted for about 40 years and the washes created from the high pressures nozzles are still evident.



The Maggie Gibson Dredge, one of five dredges to work the gravels of the Grasshopper Creek, was located east of Bannack, about a mile or so below town. (Beaverhead County Museum photo.)

As the Hydraulic mining phase exhausted, the lust for gold once again looked to the Grasshopper Creek. The DREDGING PERIOD began. The F. L. Graves dredge developed in 1895 here in Bannack was the first successful electric dredge in the continental United States. The dredge proved to be so successful that four more were developed in the area of Bannack. The dredge boats created a pond within the waters of the creek and floated along as they tore at the gravels below with a series of buckets linked together. The large buckets revolved around a boom, bringing the ore on board. It was then sorted and sluiced, and all but the gold dumped back into the creek. While the Graves dredge operated by electricity, all the other dredges were powered with wood fired steam.

As the dredging period ended, two of the dredges were dismantled and moved to other parts of the country. The Graves and the Graeter were abandoned here in Grasshopper Creek and what wasn't salvaged, was left to rot in the creek. The dredging period only lasted about 10 years.

15. THE MINING ARTIFACTS found here represent all of the major mining phases that went on in Bannack. Bannack had several different boom periods beginning with the first major discovery of placer gold and stamp mills in 1862 to the 1970's hard rock mining operation of the Apex Mill located across the creek to the south.

16. SPOKANE MINING HOUSE served as headquarters for one of the last companies to try their luck at hard rock mining in the area. The Apex mill across the creek was built during World War I and operated off and on for about 60 years. Most of the mill-mining had ceased by the 1940's. In the 1960's the Apex Mill was converted from a cyanide mill to a flotation mill but it only operated for a short time as such.



High pressure hoses washed the gravel down into a series of sluice boxes. The water used for this operation was carried by flumes. The flumes stretched across the hillsides for 30 miles.

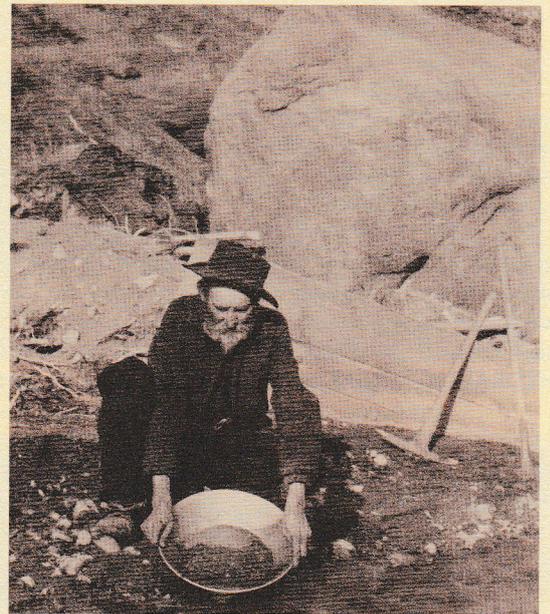
## 17. BACHELORS ROW



In the first few months after the great discovery of gold in what would become Bannack, miners rushed to the area and staked their claims. They

slept in bedrolls, tents, brush wickiups, or wagons, not wanting to take time away from their mining efforts to find adequate housing. As the colder weather approached, it was obvious to most of them that they would have to find more comfortable conditions to spend the winter months. Bachelors Row consisted of a dense row of shacks that paralleled the main ditch which came into town. The miners, not wanting to be far from their claim and main source of water needed for sluicing, built as close as they could to the ditch. As freezing cold claimed the ditch the miners could only wait, huddled in their shacks on the ditch, for the thaw to free the precious water.

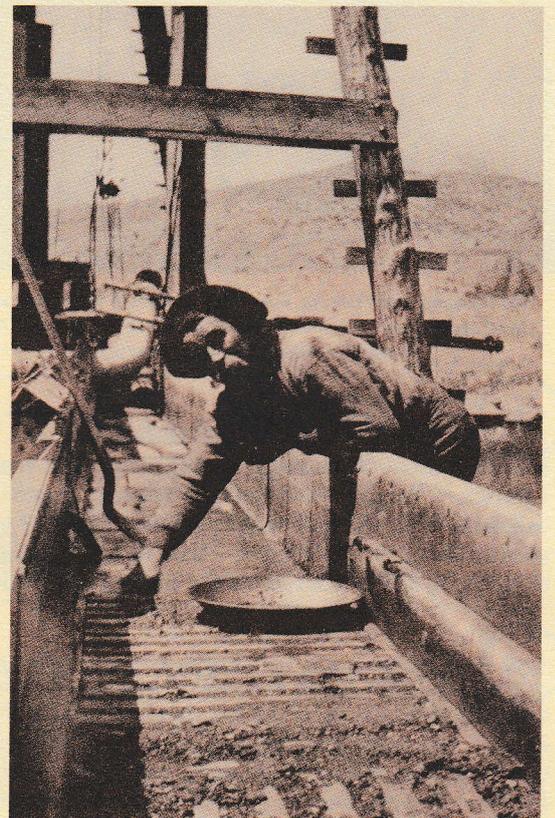
*"The miners here are all waiting anxiously for warm weather to come, so that they can wash the dirt they have got out during the winter. Some have already washed the dirt. From the claim that Mr. Edgerton "shook" that pan of dirt last fall, the men washed fifteen hundred dollars in one day, a thousand dollars another day, and six hundred dollars another day, but that is all the good the money will do them, for as soon as they get any, they gamble and drink it up".*  
Mary Edgerton - April, 1864



Panning for Gold. (Montana Historical Society photo.)

## 18. THE ROE/GRAVES HOUSE

Located directly west of the church, this house was built by William Roe in 1866 or 1867. It was the first frame house built in Bannack. William Roe was one of the first of many to become rich in Bannack. He arrived in Bannack in 1862 and even though he filed one of the first claims in the new mining town, his interests turned to freighting, merchandising and banking. He and his brother Isaac, opened a general store and meat market and soon after that licensed a banking business to buy gold. He was one of the Vigilantes to capture Plummer, Stinson and Ray the night they were hung. He later moved to Dillon and was one of the incorporators of the State Bank in 1899. The home is also known as THE GRAVES HOUSE. It was acquired by F.L. Graves shortly after he developed the first dredge. Upon the launch of the electric dredge by Mr. Graves, he was honored with some very elaborate gifts. He was awarded an ebony headed cane and a solid gold watch. Instead of the usual numbers around the dial, F. Louis Graves, was engraved around the dial with the F. representing the numeral 12 and the G representing the numeral 6. The house was owned and occupied by the Graves family up until its acquisition by the park.



Joe Gauthier, "cleaning up" the electric dredge. 1895

## VIII. OLD TIME RELIGION

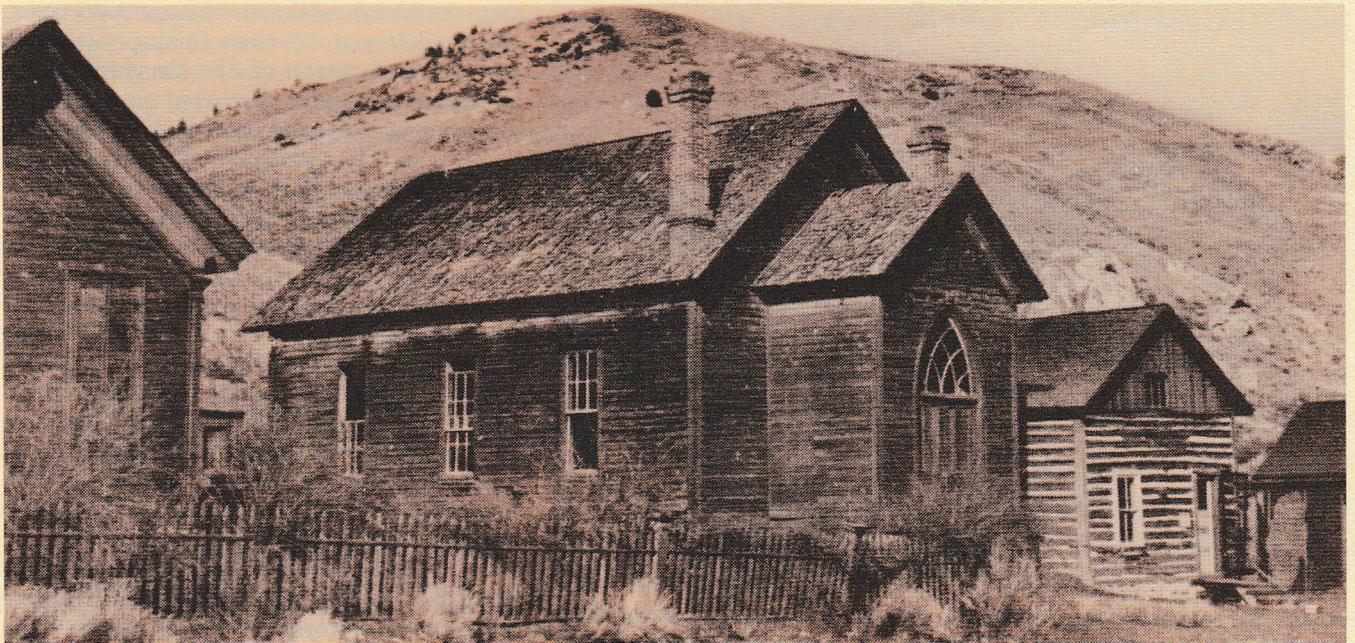
### 19. THE METHODIST CHURCH

Built in 1877, this was the first building in Bannack built exclusively for the purpose of worship. Throughout Bannack's history, the women folk often remarked in their letters and diaries "of the lack of a proper place to worship". Religion played an important part in the lives of the first "respectable" women to come to this little mining town and no doubt had a lot to do with their tolerance of life here. However, not having a place to hold regular meetings was always a problem. Mary Edgerton is said to have carried with her across the plains a letter from her minister stating that she was "a member in full and regular standing" in her church in Tallmadge and recommended her "to any church of Christ, wherever her lot may be cast." Circuit riders became the norm for the isolated towns like Bannack. One of the more famous ones to come to Bannack and have a significant impact was William Van Ordsdell, fondly remembered as "Brother Van".

Brother Van arrived in Bannack at the peak of the mining activity. He found all the gambling houses and bars open on Sunday. Stepping up to the bar, he announced himself as a minister. The bartender whistled the crowd to quietness and informed them the bar would be closed for "one hour". Brother Van had his chance and in his marvelous singing voice, sang a popular song of that day, "A Diamond in the Rough." The crowd, hungry for entertainment, asked for more. Brother Van, continued and the crowd got a good hours worth of religion.

In August of 1877, Bannack had a major Indian scare. Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce Indians had just defeated General Gibbon at the bloody, Battle of the Big Hole. Word reached the isolated little community that the Indians were on the rampage and headed straight for Bannack. People from around the area gathered in Bannack to seek protection. Two lookouts were built on the highest points of the hills on either side of Hangman's Gulch for early warning. In case of a siege, the local water supply was barricaded. The women and children were gathered in the brick fortress, the Hotel Meade. Some stories tell of hiding the children in the safes located inside the hotel. Although the Indians killed four settlers in Horse Prairie they never came close to Bannack. The bodies of the settlers were brought to town and buried by Brother Van Ordsdel.

After it was apparent that the town was safe from an attack, Brother Van, being the promoter that he was, took advantage of the large number of settlers in town and talked them into building the first real church in Bannack.



Brother Vans' Church, stands in silent homage to Bannack, "The Diamond in the Rough". (Montana Historical Society photo.)

## IX. FROM GOLD TOWN TO GHOST TOWN

As the price of gold declined so did Bannack's population. It was no longer affordable for the townspeople to operate the mines which were the main source of income for the families in Bannack. With the absence of jobs, people were forced to go elsewhere to find a suitable means to support their families. In the late forties the majority of the population had moved on to other areas and Bannack was becoming a "ghost town". The post office ceased to exist, the school house was closed, there was no doctor, there was no grocery store. Bannack, once the proud capital of Montana, was abandoned. Its golden sands washed clean, its people gone.



As everyone left Bannack, the buildings were left empty to rot in ghostly silence.



Once again there was a renewed interest in Bannack. This would prove to be the salvation of this fragile piece of Montana's history. A new resource, recreation and tourism, brought a different kind of rush to Montana's "First Best Place."

In 1940 a group of concerned citizens from Dillon and Bannack organized to preserve the old town site. The group included representatives from the Beaverhead County Museum Association, the Southwestern Montana Mining Association and the local chapter of The Daughters of the American Revolution. However, early efforts of the group were put aside due to World War II.

In 1947, a group from Western Montana College began an effort to preserve some of the Bannack buildings that had historical importance. After the preservation efforts by the college, the townspeople began working toward purchasing the town site. In 1954 the court ordered the Bannack property owned by I. B. Haviland Mining Company put up for auction. Chan Stallings a longtime resident of Bannack was the successful bidder. The Beaverhead County Museum Association was then able to purchase portions of the town from Mr. Stallings. On January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1954, the Beaverhead County Museum Association formally donated this to the state of Montana.

One stipulation was made as part of the donation: Bannack was not to be made into a tourist town in competition with Virginia City, the ghost town atmosphere was to be preserved.