

WHITE SULPHUR SPRINGS, MONTANA

HISTORIC DOWNTOWN BUILDINGS SURVEY

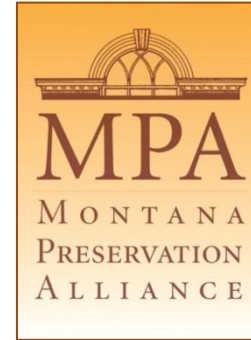
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Special Thanks for outstanding contributions to local history by Helen Hanson, Lee Rostad, George Kirkwood and to the many owners of WSS downtown properties for their contributions to our project.

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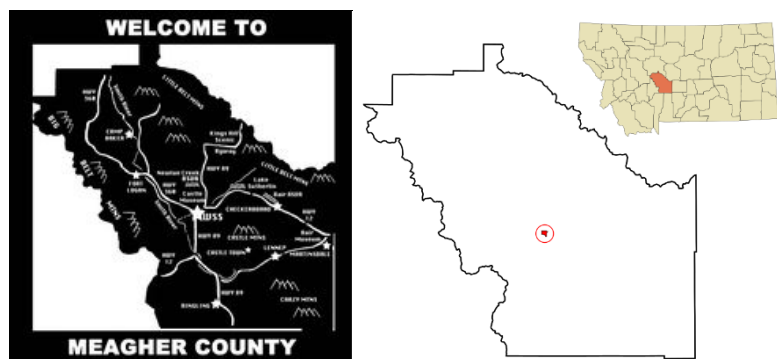
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Introduction

The community of White Sulphur Springs in Meagher County sits at what has been called the crossroads between Eastern and Western Montana. The town has a population of just over 900 people, and an economy that revolves around agriculture and tourism. Like many rural towns in Montana, the community had its heyday a century ago and has seen its population drop and locals gravitating toward hub cities such as Helena, Bozeman and Great Falls. Today, the railroad is defunct, the depot empty and many downtown buildings stand vacant.

Still, there is hope in White Sulphur these days, and signs that things are beginning to turn around. People have been drawn to town by the hot springs spa on Main Street, the writings of Ivan Doig, and since 2006, the Red Ants Pants company that opened in the historic Wellman Block and soon thereafter launched the Red Ants Music Festival that now draws 16,000 people to town every July. New streetlights downtown, a new brewery launched in 2016, and local merchants have all joined together to encourage redevelopment of empty buildings downtown.

Methodology

To create a baseline for assessing the redevelopment potential of historic properties within the WSS commercial corridor, the Montana Business Assistance Connection (local development corporation for the region) secured a grant from the Montana History Foundation. MBAC partnered with the Montana Preservation Alliance (MPA) to initiate a survey of historic buildings in downtown White Sulphur Springs in August of 2018.

The survey boundaries encompassed a roughly 10-block long corridor, along East and West Main Street. The survey team consulted with WSS City Council members, the Meagher County Historical Society, Meagher Co Chamber of Commerce, and business and property owners to focus the survey on significant historical buildings, particularly those with high potential for investment. Properties along Main Street were photographed, and their historic and architectural values were documented and recorded on State of Montana Historic Properties Site Forms.

The active commercial district in White Sulphur Springs is roughly four blocks long, extending east from the County Courthouse to a new Town Pump gas station that was under construction at the time of this project. Outstanding properties within the corridor include the WSS & Yellowstone Park railroad depot and train cars, Parberry Buildings East and West (Masonic Building), Strand Theater, Wellman Block, Spencer Co Mercantile Building, and Anderson Bros Mercantile. Beyond the business district there are additional properties of strong historical significance to the community including the Teslow Grain Elevator, the Spring Creamery and the Parberry and Spencer Residences located opposite one another on the west end of Main Street.

Discontiguous properties of strong interest to the community include the Union League Hall of America, and the Vollstedt-Kerr Lumber Company TeePee burner. Forms for these buildings were also completed.

The project began in April 2018 with a community meeting with local business leaders. Secondary resources were consulted in preparation for field work, and inventory templates created to take into the field. Members of the team reproduced historic panoramas of the town, met with historical society staff and consulted library resources and the Montana State Historic Preservation Office files to develop a survey database and general narrative context of the community. In August 2018, the team visited WSS and conducted on-site work – visiting with local officials and owners, and surveying Main Street in that process.

Field survey included photography, library and archival research, secondary historical sources, owner interviews, and a review of available title records, and city building permits. Once data was finalized, site forms for all properties surveyed were completed and a survey report and maps prepared to summarize findings. Local and peer review was provided by members of the Meagher County Historical Society, property owners and interpretive history staff at the Montana Historical Society.

In October 2018, MPA hosted a Community Meeting to draw further information on historic properties, and tour buildings of concern with community members. Since that meeting, staff have conferred with the Meagher Co Historical Society members for peer review and to verify findings of the survey.

Output

The White Sulphur Springs survey resulted in a complete set of Montana State Historic Property Forms on 22 subject buildings as a means to record their current condition, document their history and determine their eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The forms will benefit owners wishing to pursue preservation projects and funding, and potentially, local tourism by creating the basis for tours and other interpretive materials.

From this survey, our project team determined that while it would be difficult to establish a cohesive historic district in the community, a National Register Multiple Properties Form could be compiled that would make National Register listings and tax credits more readily available to stimulate development in the downtown corridor. In addition, White Sulphur Springs/Meagher County is one of 25 Opportunity Zones designated by Governor Steve Bullock in 2018, to stimulate investment in disadvantaged communities.

This project folds into a larger effort by MBAC and the MPA, supported by a grant from the Steele Reese Foundation to work with WSS and three other rural communities to design heritage development projects and incentivize investments in the local business district. Results of our survey will form the basis for better understanding the buildings and informing discussions with community members and investors exploring opportunities in WSS. Bonds have been forged with local residents and committees have been formed to build upon these results. MPA staff are now planning a heritage conference in White Sulphur Springs in 2020, and advising owners of four historic properties within the study area to help design rehab projects and put signature historic properties into renewed commercial use.



Main Street WSS 1905. Of the buildings depicted, extant buildings include 2) Wellman Block, 3) Parberry Block, 4) Spencer Mayn Building, 5) Rocky Mountain Husbandman, 8) Masonic Hall. Those no longer standing include 1) Higgins House Hotel, 6) Kenck Garage, 7) Red Barn.

Historical Overview

History of the Meagher County Region¹

From the time of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, the region now known as Meagher County was encompassed in a series of U.S. held territories: Missouri Territory (1812), Dakota Territory (1861), Idaho Territory (1863) and finally, within the Montana Territory (1864). Meagher County was an early Montana county, created in 1867 from parts of Chouteau and Gallatin counties. Meagher County was later reduced in size to create Fergus County in 1885, and Broadwater County in 1897, with other portions annexed to Sweet Grass County in 1885, and Cascade and Lewis and Clark counties from 1890 to 1900. In 1911, part of Fergus County was annexed back to Meagher County. The county was named for Thomas Francis Meagher, an Irish patriot who became a general and served the Union in the Civil War. After the war he became the acting governor of the Montana Territory.² The state formally entered the Union in 1889.

The Smith River is the main waterway in the area. The Lewis and Clark expedition passed the mouth of the river on July 15, 1805 and named it in honor of Robert I. Smith, the Secretary of the Navy. Jim Bridger is mentioned on two occasions for activities along the Smith River. It is likely the Smith River was used as a travel corridor between the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers by native people and trappers.³ In 1860, the Reynolds-Maynadier expedition followed the Smith River from its headwaters to its juncture with the Missouri River, helping establish the Smith River as a primary transportation route in the area.⁴

The first gold in Montana was discovered in 1858 on Gold Creek, in the Deer Lodge Valley. In 1862, the Grasshopper Creek gold rush led to the creation of the town of Bannack, and the pursuit of gold throughout much of the mountains of Montana. The chase for gold prompted the investigation of all of the smaller mountain ranges bounding the Smith River and present day town of White Sulphur Springs. Strikes in Last Chace Gulch in 1864 led to the founding of Helena, and across the valley, one of the territory's richest gold strikes was made in Confederate Gulch in 1866. Located 25 miles west of White Sulphur Springs, along a wagon road from Helena to the Smith River Valley, the gulch gave forth an estimated \$19-30 Million (in 1860s dollar values) in gold ore from 1866 to 1869. The Confederate Gulch strike, drew as many as 10,000 miners and led to the creation of Diamond City, "the most spectacular of Montana's boom and bust gold towns," known as one of the toughest places in Montana having a population of 5000 people by 1867.⁵

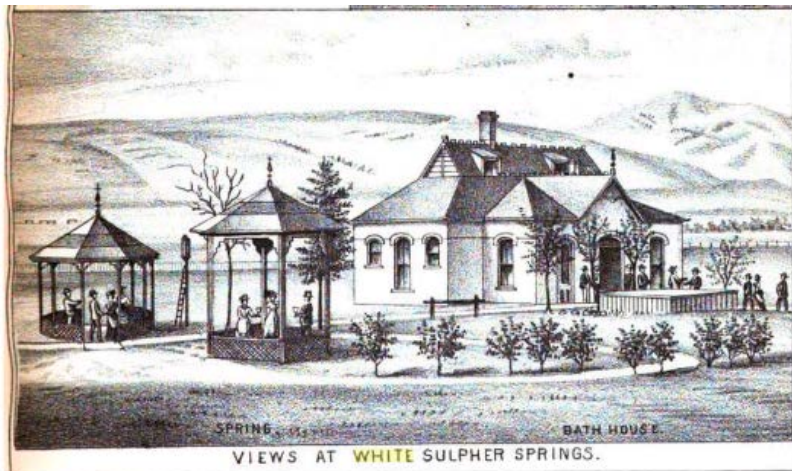
History of White Sulphur Springs

If God ever did spend any time here on earth, that must have been His hang-out, for every little thing that's natural and beautiful to live with is around "White Sulphur." ~Taylor Gordon, Born To Be

The strikes at Confederate Gulch brought prospectors and settlers to the Big Belt Mountains and surrounding region. In 1866, a pioneer named James Scott Brewer encountered the hot springs which were widely known to native peoples of the region and regarded for their medicinal qualities. Brewer built a cabin at the site and four years later, filed a pre-emption claim on a quarter section of land encompassing the springs. For several years, his cabin was the only one located in this valley on the east side of the Big Belt Mountains.

The springs, first known as Trinity Springs and later Brewer's Springs, became a business enterprise in 1871, when Major R.C. Walker purchased a half interest. A 12-foot square hot pool and the first buildings soon followed – a bathhouse, cabins and a stables. As local histories have noted, “baths cost 75 cents-whiskey was extra. The hotel a short distance to the north was made up of a cluster of individual cabins, all constructed of logs with sod roofs.”⁶

In 1874, the Helena-Carroll Road opened and Brewer's Springs became a regular stopping place, with three daily stages traveling the route and a post office that opened in 1875. The springs became an attraction for adventurous travelers and for the men stationed at nearby Camp Baker, a U.S. Army outpost established 18 miles to the north in 1869 to safeguard the emerging mining district in the Big Belt Mountains.



Early WSS bath house and plunge pools ~Leeson's History of Montana 1885

As the Smith and Musselshell valleys opened to settlement, cattle and livestock operations expanded rapidly. By the end of 1876, it was estimated that “10,000 head of cattle and more were coming in for

winter grazing, mainly from the Jefferson, Boulder and Pipestone valleys.”⁷ Just four years later, those numbers had risen to 60,000 head of sheep and 15,000 cattle in Smith River valley.

The springs were rechristened White Sulphur Springs in 1876 when the post office relocated to the new Springs Hotel, a Victorian wood frame hotel with a large dining hall erected across Main Street from the bathhouse by a new proprietor: “White Sulphur Springs, on the north fork of Smith's river, Meagher county, is now the sole property of Dr. William Parberry, he having recently [in 1876] purchased the one-half interest of H.B. Brainard. Mr. and Mrs. Brainard, the popular host and hostess of the Springs for the last three years will vacate the property next month...Dr. Parberry and wife will locate at the springs and invalids seeking this health giving resort can rely upon the best medical advice and treatment.”⁸

Parberry reflected a trend of physician-managed hot springs in the Victorian era, giving rise to resort spas across the country. In Montana, his peers included Dr. William Hunter at Hunter's Hot Springs, and Dr. F.E. Corwin at Chico Hot Springs and Corwin Springs.⁹

Parberry had a bigger vision than just the hot springs; in 1878 he partnered with Robert Sutherlin to plat a townsite for White Sulphur Springs. Two years later, William H. and Robert N. Sutherlin, founders and operators of *The Rocky Mountain Husbandman* newspaper moved their offices from a waning Diamond City mining camp to the emerging town of White Sulphur Springs.¹⁰ That same year, White Sulphur Springs replaced Diamond City as the county seat.¹¹

White Sulphur emerged as a commercial and financial hub for the surrounding mining districts of the Big Belt and Castle Mountains, the Smith River and Beaver Creek. As farming and ranching took over the

surrounding rural area, White Sulphur Springs also emerged as trade center for the surrounding agricultural region and remains so to the present day.

In late 1882, the springs sold for \$80,000 to the White Sulphur Springs Association, a syndicate of investors that included Helena bankers Aaron and Louis Hershfield and Timothy Collins, Ft. Benton banker Charles Duers and Helena rancher Henry Sieben. The holdings included the springs and nine surrounding acres, seven acres on which the Springs Hotel was located, and 1,000 town lots.¹²

As was common in the day, Parberry's plat shifted White Sulphur's street grid to his advantage, with a new road alignment that connected his hotel and the springs. The 140-block townsite plat was approved by the county commission but soon challenged by Jonas Higgins, whose general store stood on the old main road, about 150' from the new Main Street. In retaliation Higgins submitted his own plat which was also duly approved by the county commissioners.

As the *Rocky Mountain Husbandman* reported at the time: "Had they had a vestige of business judgment or vision, they would have rejected Higgins' plat, but they were not business men. They were three old ranchers, friends of both Parberry and Higgins, reluctant to take sides ... in what seemed to them only a personal quarrel."¹³

In 1883 Higgins built an impressive three story brick hotel on his plat, and advertised the Higgins House Hotel to markets as far away as Portland, OR. Because Higgins' plat was offset from the Parberry plat, the hotel protruded 12' into the northern end of White Sulphur's Main Street corridor, forcing the roadway leading into town to curve around it for decades.

HIGGINS HOUSE,

Three-story Fireproof Brick Hotel.



Only First Class House at White Sulphur Springs, M. T.

JONAS HIGGINS, Proprietor.

*Ad from The West Shore, January 1887*¹⁴

People in the community still regret the loss of this substantial hotel in the 1960s, after MT's Department of Transportation mandated its removal as they improved Highway 12 through town.

The local population increased as the mining economy expanded and nearby cattle and sheep ranches grew. During this era, prominent individuals included miner and rancher Almon Spencer, who partnered with T.C. Power of Fort Benton to open the first general mercantile business in White Sulphur Springs. Spencer served as the first postmaster here in 1878-1888, and ran the White Sulphur Springs Hotel.

Others were drawn to White Sulphur Springs from Diamond City, including partners Louis Heitman and Charles Mayn. These two joined Spencer in the mercantile on Main Street, from 1883-1901.

With the sale of the springs, Parberry turned his investments to other properties in the budding commercial district. As the *Rocky Mountain Husbandman* reported in October 1883, “Dr. Parberry is mixing plaster for his new building, the bank and drug store will soon move in.”¹⁵ The following June, the newspaper could hardly contain its anticipation:

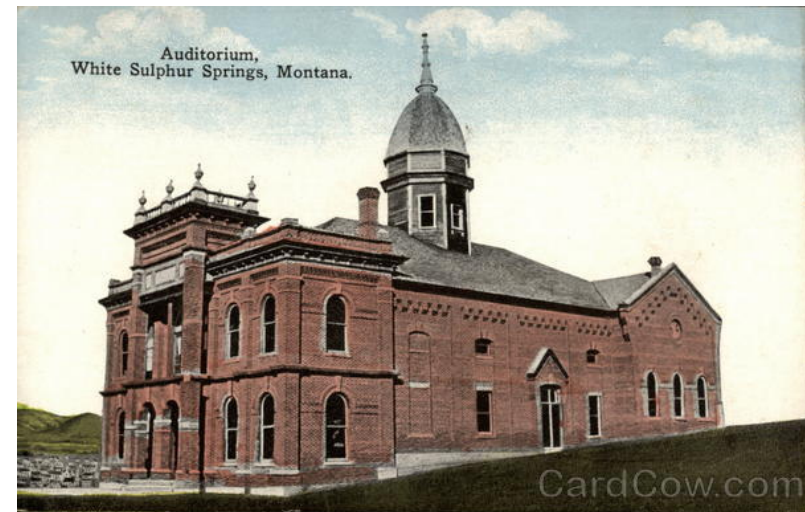
Never in the history of the Springs did things present a more lively aspect than at present. Buildings are going up in every direction and the sound of saw and hammer echoes from morning until night, and mingled with the ring of the anvil and roar of the forge, gives the place the appearance of life and industry. Teams continually rolling in with lumber and freighters unloading merchandise, makes our streets busy while our merchants are crowded with business, unpacking, marking and selling goods. Everything is bustle and everybody has confidence in the future of the town.”¹⁶

Through the 1880s, many significant buildings on Main Street and uphill overlooking the town were constructed.

Early views show a number of primary buildings; those remaining today include Parberry’s Masonic Building (1883) and Parberry Block (1891), the Spencer Mayn & Heitman Building ((1882), and the Wellman Block (1883/1910). (See 1905 view of Main Street on p. 3).

As town founders had hoped, the mining economy expanded after the silver - lead camp of Castle opened in 1887, following a strike that started one of three major mines – The Cumberland. The camp drew

miners by the thousands, along with investment from Helena and ranchers in the nearby Smith and Mussellshell valleys. Within a short time, the Castle Mining District boasted 1,500 claims, fifteen steam hoists, two smelters, 2,000 men, a variety of stores and four newspapers. Primitive transportation hindered growth of the mining industry for two decades, as miners were forced to ship ore and bullion out by horse-drawn wagon. For the next two decades, investors and the newspaper campaigned vigorously for a rail spur to the mines though it was slow in coming.



The Auditorium

Meanwhile in town, other recreational amenities cropped up befitting a hot springs resort community. A picturesque Lake Ida (see image on cover) was created in the 1880s by damming up the flow from the springs for boating and recreation,¹⁷ and a towering brick Auditorium was built overlooking downtown to accommodate groups and events. By 1890, White Sulphur’s population stood at 640.

In 1891, Byron R. Sherman built a residence that symbolized the fortunes of the community at the height of its prosperity. Sherman's career, first in mining and milling in the Bitterroot Valley, then as a rancher in the Smith River Valley, also included a Helena-WSS stage line and real estate interests. In 1891, he built a Romanesque "Stone Castle" designed by leading Montana architect C.S. Haire, which remains a crowning presence on the WSS skyline to this day.¹⁸



Historic Postcard View of The Castle

Like so many late 19th century mining towns, the booming economy of White Sulphur Springs came to an abrupt halt with the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act. Mines shut down all across the West, and in Helena, the Panic of 1893 was acutely painful coming just a few short years after finally achieving statehood. Isolated mining communities and rural communities were hard hit, as the combined setbacks of the hard winter of 1886-87 and the Panic of 1893 were felt. Meagher County lost half its population and Castle's

population crashed while White Sulphur Springs fell to 446 residents by 1900. Businesses throughout the region keenly felt the impact.¹⁹

For those who remained, historical forces brought a bit of prosperity back to the area. On a broad scale, growing immigration attracted by railroad promotion and expansion of homesteading drew new hopeful settlers to the rural countryside. And the town retained its draw as a hub to the rural community, with 8 saloons and numerous businesses. Taylor Gordon noted in his memoir *Born to Be*:

"About 1903 found the little burg at the height of its success. All the mines were running double shift, Copper Ropelius being the nearest, and working about a thousand men. The valley was full of live-stock and plenty of help on every ranch. Eight good saloons and back of each saloon they had a gambling room. Every store and most every business place but the Postoffice had slot machines in them, but not the kind they have around here now-a-days. These were big machines, standing five and a half feet high, beautifully decorated like an Italian accordion, always a little cupid at the top center of the dial, to mark the amount won – if any. You put any coin in them from a nickel to a silver dollar."²⁰

At the same time, the long-awaited rail spur was finally financed and constructed, extending to Toston where a silver-lead smelter was built to process silver-lead ore from Castle and other mining districts. The "Jawbone Railroad" was the goal of Richard Harlow, who worked tirelessly to see it to completion. Later the spur line was shortened to just run between Harlowton east of WSS to Castle.

After 1910, John Ringling, of the famed Ringling Brothers Circus, selected the Smith River Valley as a home base when not on their

national circuit. John Ringling invested in ranching, mining and eventually railroading, with a vision for the White Sulphur Springs – Yellowstone Park Railway, extending the Jawbone to YNP.

Ringling purchased Parberry's Residence on West Main for his family and built a Central MT legacy – with ranches that spread across 110,000 acres, a railroad and mining interests that extended from the Smith River to Ringling to the Castle Mountains.

In 1917, Ringling's nephew Richard came to Montana to manage the Ringling holdings. At a time when Montana was suffering from an extended drought, Ringling envisioned a dairying empire in the greater White Sulphur Springs region, as dairying was one of the industries faring better than general farming and ranching. In 1916 he introduced Holsteins to the valley to form the Ringling Dairy Herd. An enormous Ringling Dairy Barn soon followed in 1921. At 360'x 40' and 100 milking stanchions plus a 100' testing and calving shed, it was one of the largest ever built in Montana. The barn was also fully automated, and featured a 400 ton mow. To process dairy products, in 1922 Ringling built the Spring Creamery that received 300 gallons of milk daily along with sweet cream from a hundred area ranches.²¹

In 1924, Richard Ringling became sole owner of the more than 110,000 acres comprising the Ringling's Smith River Valley ranches. To ensure capacity, Ringling grew 1000 acres of alfalfa, along with 400 tons of grain, sunflowers and corn for silage, financed construction of a network of dairy barns in the valley, and with his partner White recruited farmers "To Develop [A] Great Farming Colony in Smith River Valley, Montana."²²

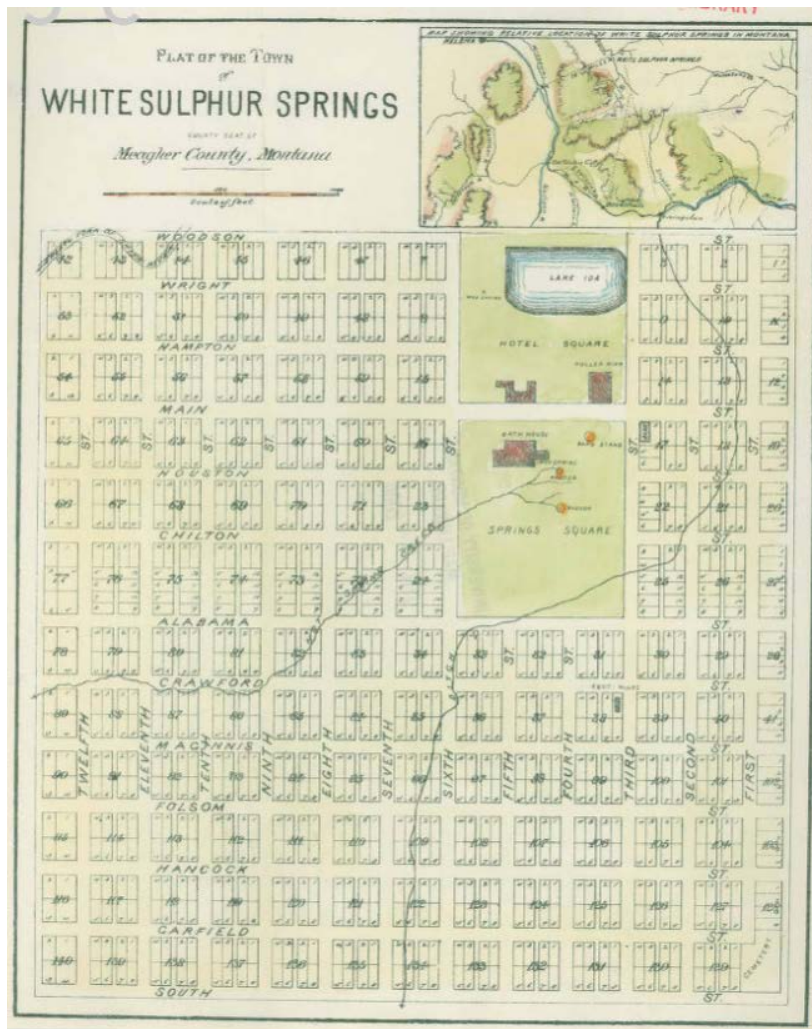
As the Great Falls Tribune noted in 1921, the motivation to develop expansive dairying was in part a response to the agricultural

recession that deeply affected Montana beginning in 1919 with drought and the end of WWI commodities markets.²³ Today, little of that dairy enterprise remains; the creamery in WSS and one last barn on Hussey Creek represents Ringling's farming colony.

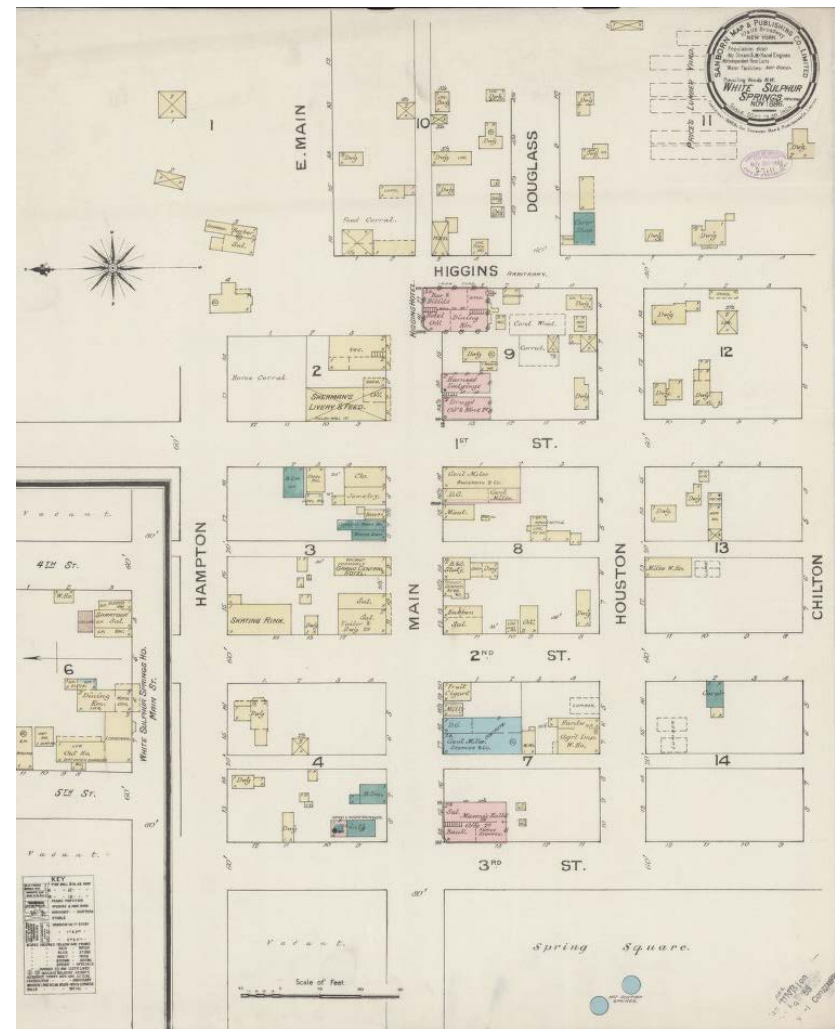
During the 20th century, White Sulphur functioned like many a small Montana county seat – a center for ag shipping and trading, downtown for needs of a large agrarian population, and a point of landing for political services, education and social institutions. Though small, White Sulphur also gave rise to a rich literary tradition in the work of authors prominent in the constellation of Montana writers: Taylor Gordon, Ivan Doig, and Walt Coburn. Their work today provides a window on the past of a town that has never quit.



The Masonic, Parberry, Spencer and Board of Trade buildings, ca. 1905



Plat of the Town of White Sulphur Springs, UM Mansfield Map Library, accessed at <https://mtmemory.org/digital/collection/p15018coll5/id/97/>



1884 Sanborn Map of the White Sulphur Springs Townsite

Architectural Patterns



The architecture of White Sulphur Springs breaks into three periods of building: settlement era building, early business district, and 20th century construction.

The earliest buildings at White Sulphur Springs date to the frontier period. The original log buildings at Brewers Hot Springs were of course the first, followed by other buildings which were later replaced as the town grew. However, two buildings moved in from early mining camps – the Union League Hall of America and the Odd Fellows Hall – remain as relics of this time period. These two buildings today are truly significant, rare examples of a time for which most other resources no longer exist. Simple construction, and Greek Revival detailing, indicates their early construction dates.

The next period of development saw buildings of the early business district take on a solidity and permanence, with 1-2 story buildings of Western Commercial style, sometimes with cast iron storefront elements, and often with sturdy stone and brick walls intended to last far into the future.

And finally, the 20th century brought continued building with a promise of long-term prosperity thanks to a new railroad spur and homestead-era agricultural production. Here we see the WSS & Yellowstone Park RR depot, the Spring Creamery, and the Teslow Elevator. These buildings tell of a community moving toward a diversified economy, the resort potential of the springs bolstered by a settled agricultural community in the surrounding countryside.

One of the most defining features of buildings in White Sulphur Springs throughout its history was the false front. False front architecture was pervasive in frontier-era settlements; in White Sulphur Springs, it continued as a device to give the Main Street of

town a more commanding presence well into the 20th century. Most notable among these were the long-gone Mammoth Red Barn and Carriage works, the Anderson Bros. Mercantile, the Spencer Bros. Mercantile and the Board of Trade Saloon, and in the 20th century the Stockman's, Lane and Mint Bars. Today, the false front continues to be alive and well in downtown White Sulphur Springs and offers the chance to reclaim the feeling of an original western town if owners restore the buildings to their original design.

Sadly, when you dig back into the architecture of White Sulphur across the past century, you see many stately buildings of high quality craftsmanship have been lost or remodeled with little respect for the quality of the original design. The list is long and the causes many – from fire and earthquake to avoidable demolition. It begs the question of what downtown White Sulphur would be like today had those impressive buildings survived: the Springs Hotel, The Red Barn, The Auditorium, Grand Central Hotel, Higgins Hotel, Original Courthouse, WSS Elementary and High Schools, and the Ringling Dairy Barn.

It is our hope that if one thing could come out of this project, it would be a local effort to recapture some of that original aesthetic, and to restore the integrity to the buildings that remain but have been poorly treated in the years since the heyday of WSS. Restoring the integrity of these historic buildings to the community would give far more presence to the town and boost the efforts of so many business leaders working hard to reestablish a sustainable future for the town of White Sulphur Springs.



Union League of America Hall

The Union League of America Hall is the oldest building in WSS. Built in 1864 in Diamond City, it is an important example of mining camp architecture preserved because the building was moved to WSS after Diamond City was mostly abandoned. The hall was cut in half in 1879 to move it by oxen team and then reconnected on its current site.²⁴ Though it is in need of renovation, the building reflects Greek Revival style design influences, with its gently-pitched gable roof and pedimented window openings and doorway.

The building served the local First Presbyterian Church congregation from 1886-1973, when they built a new church and gifted the hall to the Meagher County Historical Society. Currently, the historical society is formulating plans to reuse the building.

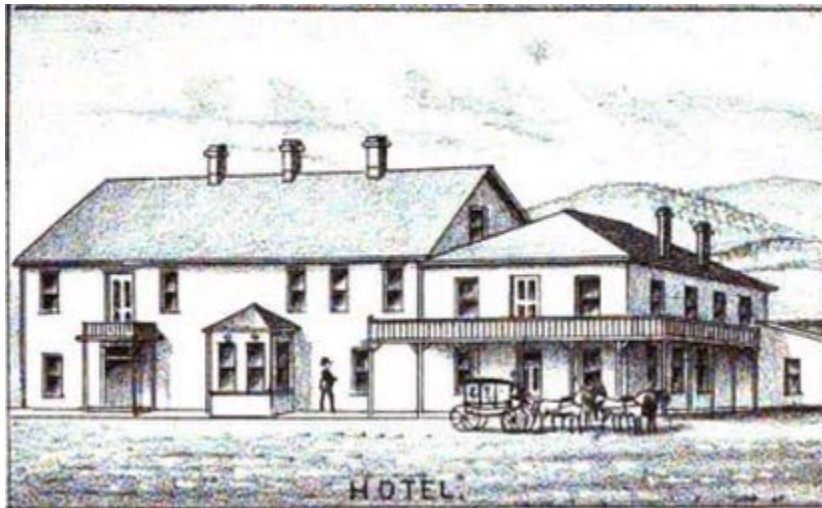


Oddfellows Hall

The Oddfellows Hall is an overlooked building in White Sulphur Springs that dates to the mining camp era in this part of the Rocky Mountains. It carries the indelible imprint of that era, in its Greek Revival elements – the pedimented gable and classical cornice line echoed by the pedimented entrance, and the ornamental oculus window in the gable end.

The building is now a multi-unit apartment building but it holds great potential for restoration.

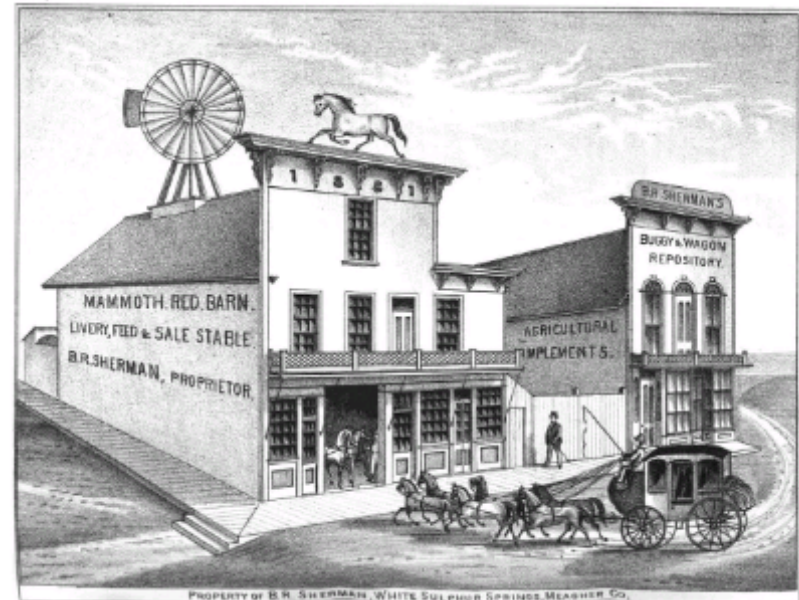
Brewer's Hot Springs was the first generation building at the springs, dating to 1866. It was a log affair, soon expanded by addition of a pool, brick bathhouse, cabins and stables.



White Sulphur Springs Hotel & Dining Hall, built 1876

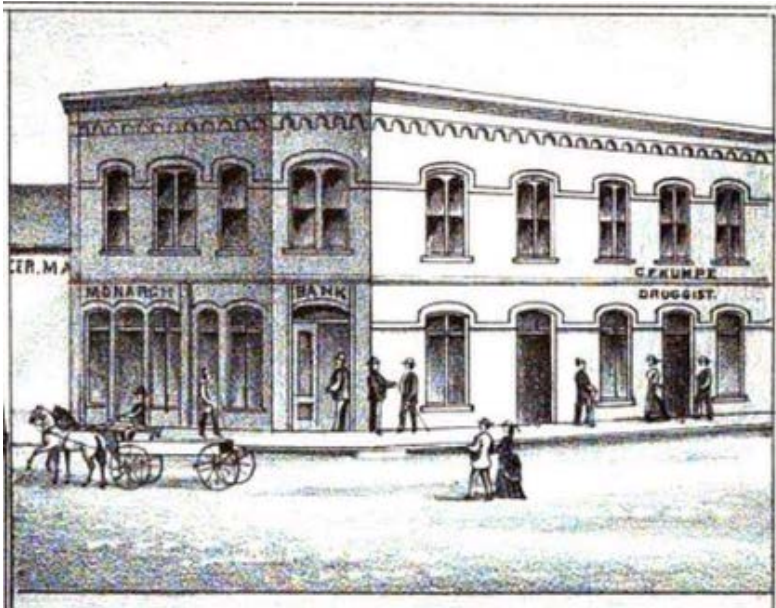
Purchase of the property by Dr. William Parberry led to construction of the Hotel and Dining Hall pictured here. Built of log wall construction, the building was clad with wood lap siding and featured roomy verandas facing the street and the springs. The facilities were expanded with another addition on the opposite side of the dining hall in 1890.

By the mid-20th century, lean times and the failure for the springs to ever become a major resort led to the abandonment of the historic buildings. As Ivan Doig remembered, the buildings at the springs had become a danger with rotten floors and failing structure; it was closed to the public, and eventually torn down in the late 1940s.



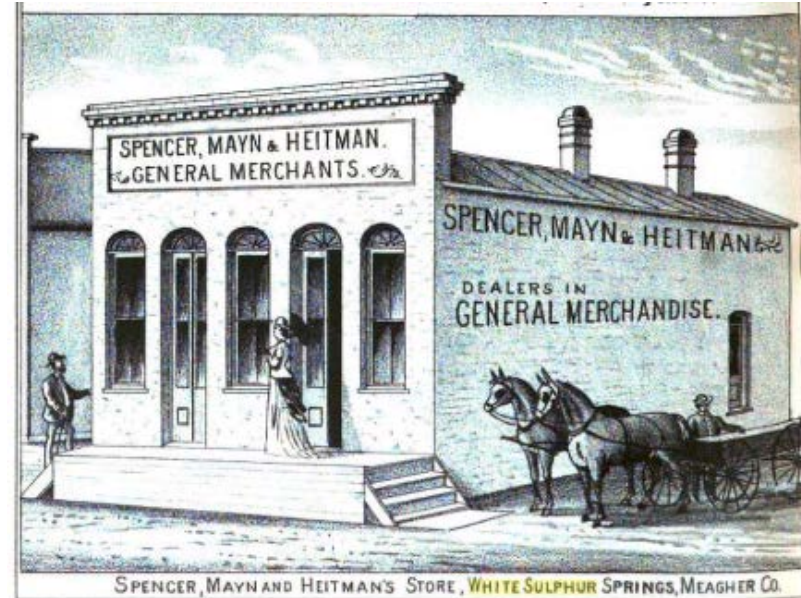
In 1881, B.R. Sherman built a livery on Main Street named the "Mammoth Red Barn," with front doors ample enough to drive a team into the building. The stable reportedly held about 25 stalls, with 2 box stalls out back in the corral for foaling. Upstairs there were three sleeping rooms in front and a hay mow behind.²⁵

In June of 1905, fire broke out in one of the most Windows were reported to have broken out across the street from the blaze and may possibly have been damaged the Wellman building. It was reported that the Chinese owners of a laundry next door saved their building by throwing water on it.



The Masonic Building, 1883

The Masonic Building was constructed by Dr. William Parberry in 1883, to be one of the first substantial buildings in White Sulphur Springs. He sited it directly across from his hot springs spa, and in April of that year, commissioned C.P. Abbott "to burn 200,000 brick" for this building and hold the leftovers for others in town.²⁶ The building held the First National Bank, a saloon and druggist on the ground floor, with offices and the Masons meeting hall upstairs.



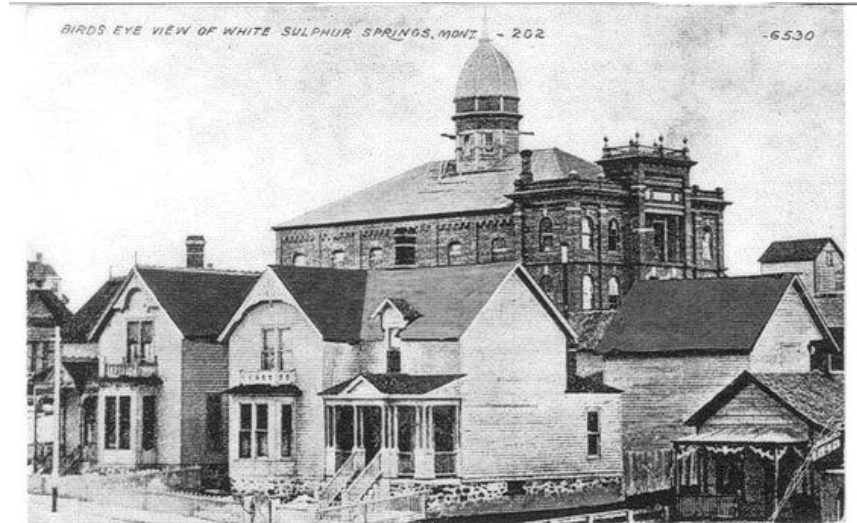
Spencer, Mayn & Heitman, 1882

Almon Spencer launched White Sulphur Spring's first general mercantile business with 19th Century capitalist T.C. Power. In 1882, Spencer was joined by Diamond City business partners Charles Mayn & Louis Heitman and constructed this building, operating here as Spencer, Mayn and Heitman until 1901. After that time, the building continued as a mercantile under the name Spencer, Manger & Co.



Meagher Co Courthouse, 1882

When the county seat moved to White Sulphur Springs in 1880, some of the early buildings moved along with them. A new courthouse was completed in 1882, and carried many of the traits of early settlement institutions. Much like the Odd Fellows Hall, it was a two story building with a central entrance and tall wood sash windows, stone lintels and bracketed eaves. The courthouse, however, was a more substantial masonry building with a cut stone façade. A porch with a balcony formed the main entry, and two doors opened on to the upper story balcony. All featured upper transoms and paneled wood doors.



The Auditorium



Built in 1892, the Auditorium was built to house events and community entertainment. Reportedly the building was never completely finished; when John Ringling bought the property in the 1910s, he used old tent canvas inside the building as a ceiling. The Auditorium was damaged in a 1925 earthquake, and stood vacant for another quarter century. As Ivan Doig remembered, “the remains stood over us, roofless, ghostlike, magical as a wizard’s abandoned castle.” It was torn down in the mid-20th century.²⁷



Anderson Brothers, 1884

In 1884, brothers Elmer and James Anderson opened one of White Sulphur's most prosperous early businesses, a mercantile that dealt in produce, dry goods, clothing and furnishings. The Anderson Brothers' building was an ornate false-fronted commercial block, with cast iron storefront across the first floor. It was described in the early 20th century: "a large and well-appointed store building houses the display and showrooms, while commodious warehouses adjoining are demanded for the accommodation of surplus stock and for the handling and storing of various lines of produce."²⁸

Today, this building is in a sad state of deterioration, but elements of the historic front remain behind later alterations.



Parberry Block East 1891

In 1891, Dr. Parberry built what is known today as the Parberry Block next to the Masonic Building, at the tail end of White Sulphur Springs' heyday. Parberry's investment signaled his belief in the vitality of the locality, and added substantially to the built environment. Through the 20th century, the Parberry Block remained an anchor in the commercial district, housing a number of businesses including the long-running Wiltse Brothers clothing store. It stands out as a Western Commercial design with Late Victorian Romanesque Revival style details.²⁹



The Wellman Block, 1884/1911

The Wellman Block was built ca. 1884 as a saddle and harness-making shop with upstairs lodgings. William Wellman, who ran a saddlery here 1907-1917. In June of 1905, fire across the street may have damaged this building for in 1911, Wellman remodeled adding the storefront and ornate metal cornice seen today.

The building is known for its associations with the Gordons, a family of African descent. John Gordon, an Afro-Scottish immigrant, came to Montana in 1881 and joined by his wife Mary, a former slave, settled in White Sulphur Springs. Following John's death in 1891, Mary raised their five children including Emmanuel Taylor Gordon, an accomplished musician who wrote of his life upbringing in White Sulphur and his career in New York during the Harlem Renaissance in

the acclaimed autobiography *Born to Be*. His sister Rose ran Rose's Café, was a physio-therapist and regular contributor to the local newspaper. After Jessie Wellman bequeathed the building to the Gordons in 1936, the post office was located here 1938 - 1950; the building stayed in the Gordon family until 1974.³⁰



Business Card for Rose's Café
MT Historical Society Museum, 1982.22.01



WSS & Yellowstone Park Railway Depot, 1910

The WSS & Yellowstone Park Railway Depot was completed in 1910, to serve John Ringling's new rail spur. Consisting of two railroad depot buildings joined together, it has two primary rooms, a waiting area and freight room, as well as an office. Typical of small rural depots, it is a simple, one story frame building with Craftsman Style details, a wood floor and wood lap, and board-and-batten siding. The building is now owned by the Meagher County Historical Society.



Creamery

In 1922, the Spring Creamery, Inc. placed an order with a St. Paul firm for a complete creamery measuring 40'x80', including a pasteurizer, churns, workers, packing equipment, engine, boiler, tester and scales, and an ice cream unit. It was to be built on railroad right of way near Main street, with half of the building devoted to processing, and half for feeds to retail to the 100 dairymen on contract to supply 300 gallons of milk daily and sweet cream weekly to the creamery.³¹

More than a thousand dairy cows had been shipped into the county by 1923, and the community of White Sulphur Springs furnished a home market for the new industry."³²



Parberry/Ringling Mansion

The Parberry House is a 2 ½ story Queen Anne residence that appears to be a brick building that was later stuccoed, perhaps when the Ringlings renovated and added a wing to the home in 1917. With its multiple gables, porches, bays and exuberant high style wood trim, the building is one of the most prominent residences in the town. The interior retains a high degree of design integrity, with rich woodwork, numerous tiled fireplaces and some original finishes.

Behind the mansion is a metal sided barn, moved from a nearby Hutterite colony. Used for events, it is protected by bright red metal siding. Beneath that exterior lies a Hutterite-built barn of historic construction.



The Almon Spencer House

Almon Spencer's 1890 brick residence was enriched through the Romanesque Revival style detailing – round arches, rusticated granite lintels and the general visual weight of the structure. It stands across the street from the Parberry/Ringling Mansion; together these

two fine homes bookend the south end of Main Street.

The Castle

No work on architecture in WSS would be complete without a mention of Byron Sherman's 1891 Romanesque "Stone Castle" designed by leading Montana architect C.S. Haire. Built of Castle Mountains granite hauled in by oxen, the lavish home included oak and cherry woodwork, Italian marble in the bath, elaborate gas lighting fixtures and hot running water.³³ It lies outside our survey area, but is an imposing presence on the hilltop above town.







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End Notes

¹ This section excerpted from Rich Noonan, National Register Nomination for the Parberry Block East, Section 8, p. 1. Statement of Significance.

² Roberta Carkeek Cheney, *Names on the Face of Montana*, p 181.

³ Stephen A. Aaberg et al. *6666 Ranch-Dry Range Proposed Land Exchange, Class HI Cultural Resource Survey Results, Meagher County, Montana, Volume I: Management Report*, p. 38.

⁴ Kenneth W. Karsmizki, *South Fork of the Smith River: Historic Cultural Resources Adjacent to U.S. Highway 89*, p. 4.

⁵ Carkeek Cheney, p. 73.

⁶ Michael Leeson, A History of Montana, 1885; Lee Rostad, "White Sulphur Springs," *Montana Magazine*, November/ December 2003.

⁷ Hal Stearns, "History of the Upper Musselshell Valley to 1920," p. 43

⁸ A.J. Fiske, Helena Herald, 1877, as quoted in the Great Falls Tribune, February 17, 1935.

⁹ Marilyn Johnson McMillan, Taking the Waters: Montana's Early Hot Spring Resorts, Montana State University thesis, 1982, p. 60.

¹⁰ Grant, Frank R. "Embattled Voice of the Montana Farmer"

¹¹ Meagher County News, November 25, 1976.

¹² Michael Leeson, History of Montana, 1739-1885. p. 807.

¹³ Rocky Mountain Husbandman, March 26 1891.

¹⁴ The West Shore, An Illustrated Western Magazine, January 1887.

¹⁵ Rocky Mountain Husbandman, Oct 13, 1883; Johnson McMillan, Taking the Waters, p. 60.

¹⁶ Rocky Mountain Husbandman, June 19, 1884, p. 3.

¹⁷ Lake Ida occupied the area that is now White Sulphur Springs City Park.

¹⁸ Susan Curtis, John DeHaas, Fred Quie, "National Register Nomination for The Castle (of White Sulphur Springs)", 1976.

¹⁹ U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1900.

²⁰ Taylor Gordon, Born to Be, p. 11.

²¹ Lee Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass: A History of Meagher County*, p. 136-137.

²² Ibid.

²³ GF Tribune, Jan 22, 1921 as quoted by Raymond Salle Laier, The Development of a specialized dairy industry in Montana 1919-1939, p. 40

²⁴ Rostad, *Mountains of Gold*, p. 172-173

²⁵ Rostad, *Mountains of Gold*, p. 54

²⁶ Rocky Mountain Husbandman, April 19, 1883

²⁷ Meagher Co Historical Society, *Meagher County: An Early-day Pictorial History 1867-1967*, p. 19.

²⁸ Lee Rostad. *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass: A History of Meagher County*, p. 196-97; photo: Meagher Co Historical Society, *Meagher County: An Early-day Pictorial History 1867-1967*, p. 19

²⁹ From Rich Noonan, National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Parberry Block East, 2007, Statement of Significance, Section 8, p. 1.

³⁰ Chere Jiusto, National Register nomination for the Wellman Block. In 1974, the Wellman Block passed from the estate of R. Gordon to H. Lowry.

³¹ *The Creamery and Milk Plant Monthly*, June 1922, p. 48

³² Montana Dept of Agriculture, Labor and Industry. "Montana: Industrial Resources," Helena: 1923, p. 94.

³³ Susan Curtis, John DeHaas, Fred Quie, "National Register Nomination for The Castle (of White Sulphur Springs)", 1976.