

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC Bannack Historic District

AND/OR COMMON

Bannack Historic District

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER Parts of Sections 5, 6, 7, 8, 16 T8s R11W; Sections 1, 12 T8s, R12W

CITY, TOWN

Bannack

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

\_\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

1st

STATE

Montana

CODE

30

COUNTY

Beaverhead

CODE

001

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME State of Montana, Department of Fish and Game/Bureau of Land Management/Dillon District Office

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Helena

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

Montana

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, BEAVERHEAD COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Dillon

STATE

Montana

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE

1953

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Bannack retains much of its physical character from its days as a frontier mining camp, although today it is in reality a preserved ghost town. The nearly deserted town is surrounded by high mountains and undeveloped land covered with sagebrush and occasional pine groves. Very remotely located, Bannack is accessible only by a long dirt road which dead-ends at the east end of the town's main--and only street.

About 40 structures remain along this street, including buildings that were residences, commercial buildings and outbuildings. Most are state-owned, unoccupied and open, and they form a collection of weathered, sometimes ramshackle appearance, amid weeds and wildflowers, set against the mountain backdrop. On the hills there is much evidence of mining, but these efforts, except for a couple of claims, have been long abandoned. Just north of town, up Hangman's Gulch is a reconstructed gallows beside the town cemetery.

Of the 40 structures in the town proper, the territorial (pre-1890) period covers the initial construction of the town and its additions during the decline of placer mining. This was a period of log cabin architecture, however, most of the more substantial buildings such as the Masonic Temple, the Methodist Church, the Graves House and the Court House (Hotel Meade) were erected late in this period. Just about one-half the extant structures date from this era.

The dredger period, which followed the resurgence of prosperity with the introduction of mechanical dredging, lasted until 1910. About forty percent of the remaining structures were built in that period, including several modest stores, though there was nothing on the scale of the large buildings of the late territorial days. There are two of three much more modern buildings which the state plans to acquire. A few of the residences are still used as vacation cabins during the summer months, but only about two families remain through the severe winters, one of these is the superintendent of the park. The state owns the vast majority of the buildings and they are all open to the public.

Except for the sturdy two-story brick Court House and the Masonic Temple and Graves House, Bannack's structures were not designed for long life or with much consideration of architectural character, and many years of abandonment has allowed vandals to destroy and remove parts and even whole buildings. Log sill foundations, earth chinked walls and earth covered pole roofs easily deteriorated and often collapsed as a result of the severe weather and neglect. Many buildings were adapted for various uses and souvenir hunters took anything removable. Many of the buildings were in structurally unsafe condition before the state's restoration of them.

(Continued)

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) Mining	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES 1862-1890

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Bannack is doubly significant. It was the site of the first territorial capital of Montana and also the site of the first discovery of gold in that territory. The discovery of gold in this region resulted in a rush to the gold mining region by way of the Bozeman Trail and up the Missouri River which in turn had a marked effect upon the Indian relations of the Trans-Mississippi West.

In the summer of 1862 a party of prospectors bound for the Idaho gold camps turned back into the Deer Lodge Valley when they heard that the diggings in Idaho were already overcrowded. Working their way south, they stopped on July 28 at Willards (now Grasshopper) Creek to pan for gold. This discovery was purportedly made by John White and William Eads who made the lucky discovery which touched off the first big strike in Montana. As soon as the news of this gold strike reached the outside world, swarms of prospectors eager to get to the region first as well as roughs and gamblers from California and Nevada, all came to Bannack which the camp was named from an Indian tribe by that name. By the end of 1862, 500 men were placering Grasshopper Creek and 500 more came early in 1863.

The gold rush at Bannack proved to be of short duration. The discovery of richer sources of gold at Alder Gulch near the town of Virginia City quickly emptied the camp at Bannack as the miners rushed to the new gold fields. For 2 or 3 years Grasshopper Creek and Bannack were almost deserted. However, in 1866, a miners ditch was dug to Bannack to increase the water supply necessary for placer operations. Later the Bannack Mining and Ditch Company constructed the 30-mile ditch at the cost of \$35,000, and a third ditch was built to handle the benches north of town. With the completion of these ditches, placer mining was resumed and the area was worked and reworked until no more color showed up in the sluices. The town then declined until the spring of 1895, when the first electric gold dredge in North America was brought to the declining town. From the richest ground the dredge brought out \$22,000 and \$38,000 in 2 successive weekly cleanups. Another dredge was put into operation the same fall and the third was launched in 1896. The fourth was installed to dig at the Bon Accord placers a short time later; a fifth several miles below.

Bannack claims the first quartz mine in the territory which was located in 1862 and for whose ores a six stamp mill entirely handmade and driven by waterfall was built. The first steam operated stamp mill was operated in 1864 and before 1870 three more mills stood in the gulch. As late as 1914

(Continued)

**9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Muriel S. Wolle, The Bonanza Trail: Ghost Towns and Mining Camps of the West (Bloomington, 1953) 173-181.

"Bannack State Monument: A Report to the Bureau of Land Management," prepared by Montana Department of Fish and Game, Division of Recreation and Parks, 1975.

DeHaas, John N., Jr., Montana's Historic Structures, Vol I, includes work of HABS, 1964.

**10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY (See Continuation Sheet)

UTM REFERENCES

A	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING	B	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING	D	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

(See Continuation Sheet)

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

**11 FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME / TITLE

Blanche Higgins Schroer, Landmark Review Project; Ray H. Mattison, 1958

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey

DATE

September 1975

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street NW.

TELEPHONE

202-523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C. 20240

**12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ LOCAL \_\_\_\_\_

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE	Landmark Designated: 7/4/61... date	(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)
TITLE	Boundary Certified: [Signature] 11-4-75 date	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	Chief, Hist. & Arch. Surveys	
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER	DATE	
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION	Boundary Certified: [Signature] 11/12/75 date	
ATTEST:	DATE	
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER	DATE	
(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)	Acting: [Signature] 11/12/75 date	

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The State of Montana became involved in Bannack in 1954 when the Beaverhead Museum Association donated about 17 parcels of land as a state park. During 1962, Bannack's centennial, the town was declared a national historic landmark and a celebration spurred some basic stabilization and interpretation efforts. Between 1965 and 1967, the Montana Fish and Game Department began developing Bannack as a state historic park and counteracting the serious problems of deterioration and vandalism which were threatening the integrity of the historic town.

Utilizing matching federal grants-in-aid from the National Park Service, the state park began a program which to date has acquired, stabilized, repaired or restored at least 21 properties and work is planned on an additional eight structures for the near future. The work has concentrated on external elements such as foundations, walls, roofs, windows, and chimneys. One building, the Methodist Church, also had the interior replastered.

Since 1965, the state has removed most incompatible intrusions--which usually consisted of garbage dumps, abandoned cars and appliances and building debris. The only major intrusion presently is a powerline which stretches across the town and hills, and plans are underway to bury this. The few small modern structures existing within the town will be removed as they are acquired by the state.

Long range plans call for continued acquisition and exterior and interior restoration, indepth historical research and an expanded interpretation program. The historic district's structures have been restored under the direction of Dr. John DeHaas, historic architect, who also supervised the Historic American Buildings Survey work in Bannack in 1963. A full-time state employee lives at the site which is visited by about 25,000 persons annually.

The first gold discovery site, White's Bar Mine, is located about two miles east on the Grasshopper Creek from town. The area is virtually undisturbed today except for remnants of old mining activity, many old mine shafts along the hills, a few little weathered structures in the midst of the natural vegetation. Much of the land surrounding this whole area is still in federal ownership and administered by the Bureau of Land Management.

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a cyanide mill which ran a short time was built by the Bannack Gold Mining and Milling Company.

As the result of the urging of Sydney Edgerton, Chief Justice of the newly created Idaho Territory, the Territory of Montana was voted and approved by Congress in May of 1864 and Edgerton was made the first Governor. Bannack became the temporary capital. On December 12 of that year the first legislative assembly of Montana met in the capital. However, the legislators no sooner convened than they voted to hold their next session in nearby Virginia City.

The 90-mile stretch of road between Bannack and Virginia City was the scene of the operations of the infamous Henry Plummer and his gang. During the period of the operation of this sheriff, fugitives from justice flocked to Bannack. On this road the victims of Plummer and his gang were systematically robbed and in some cases were killed. The gang was well organized. Reputedly, one of the rendezvous was Robbers' Roost near the town of Sheridan, originally run by Pete Daly. It was purportedly the favorite meeting place of Plummer and his henchmen. After Plummer and his men had killed over 100 persons the citizens from Bannack and Virginia City organized the Vigilante Committee. Within a year this committee rounded up the desperadoes, tried them before the Miners' Court and hanged or exiled the worst offenders. Plummer and 2 of his deputies were hanged in Hangman's Gulch near Bannack in January of 1864.

During the intervening period from the time when the placers were exhausted until the dredges began to operate in the 1890's, Bannack's population was small. Only a few quartz mines were worked from time to time. In 1938 the post office at Bannack was closed and Montana's oldest town went back to sleep.

History from original report by Ray H. Mattison, 1958.

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Geographical Data

Acreage of Nominated Property--- 1720 (part I 1200, part II 520)

UTM References

Part I: A 12.344300.5003300  
B 12.344250.5001350  
C 12.341850.5001350  
D 12.341900.5003850

Part II: A 12.347040.5000670  
B 12.347000.4999020  
C 12.345360.4999060  
D 12.345380.5000730

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The national historic landmark boundary has been drawn to include all the major remaining structures which comprised the town of Bannack when it was the territorial capital and boom mining town, and the mountains which immediately surround it and provide a natural barrier and setting essential to the character of the town. The land outside of the town proper also includes important historic remains which represent aspects of Bannack's period of prominence.

On a rise to the north is the town's famous gallows-site and cemetery, on the hills to the south and west are many examples of mining from several periods and also remnants of the old freight roads to Virginia City and Utah, as well as a 40 mile water ditch used to power the first electric dredge. A large number of patented mining claims remain in the area, and although no valuable deposits have been located for decades, at least two mountainsides overlooking the town, in what was virtually undisturbed terrain, have been bulldozed in sections for roads and testing on claim sites during the past year.

White's Bar Mine, the site of the first gold discovery in the Montana Territory is included within a non-contiguous section of the landmark, located upstream from the town about two miles and inaccessible except over steep dirt roads over the mountains, within the state-owned section 16. The boundary has been drawn to include the White's Bar Mine site (indicated with a black X), the remains of the early mining town of Bon Accord, and a stretch of Grasshopper Creek bottom.

Beginning at the northeast corner of the boundary of the town, at a point on the east line of section 6 T8s, R11W, 660 feet south of the northeast corner of section 6, the boundary runs in a generally southeasterly direction to a peak of elevation 6200 feet, located in the southwest quarter of section 5, about 1250 feet east of the west section line and 1600 feet north of the south section line; then a generally southwesterly direction to a peak, elevation 6875 feet, located in the southeast quarter of section 7 about 2100 feet north of the south section line and 900 feet west of the east section line; then due west to the west section line of section 7; then north along the west section line to a point about 1200 feet south of the northwest corner of section 7; then due west about 1320 feet into section 12 of T8s, R12W; then due north to a point 2640 feet south of the north section line of section 1, T8s, R12W; then east to the east section line of section 1; then north to a point 660 feet south of the northwest corner of section 6, T8s R11W; then due east to the beginning point.

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Part II of the boundary, a non-contiguous unit encompasses the site of the first gold discovery, and includes the northwest, northeast and southeast quarters, and the northeast quarter of the southwest quarter of section 16 T8s, R11W.