

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

Virginia City, Montana

AND/OR COMMON

Virginia City, Montana

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Virginia City

VICINITY OF

\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

First

STATE

Montana

CODE

30

COUNTY

Madison

CODE

057

**3 CLASSIFICATION****CATEGORY** DISTRICT BUILDING(S) STRUCTURE SITE OBJECT**OWNERSHIP** PUBLIC PRIVATE BOTH**PUBLIC ACQUISITION** IN PROCESS BEING CONSIDERED**STATUS** OCCUPIED UNOCCUPIED WORK IN PROGRESS**ACCESSIBLE** YES: RESTRICTED YES UNRESTRICTED NO**PRESENT USE** AGRICULTURE COMMERCIAL EDUCATIONAL ENTERTAINMENT GOVERNMENT INDUSTRIAL MILITARY MUSEUM PARK PRIVATE RESIDENCE RELIGIOUS SCIENTIFIC TRANSPORTATION OTHER**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Office of the Mayor; Bovey Restorations (major owner); Bureau  
of Land Management (part of Section 26, T6S, R2W)

STREET &amp; NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Virginia City

VICINITY OF

STATE

Montana

59755

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC

Madison County Courthouse

STREET &amp; NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Virginia City

STATE

Montana

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE

1964

 FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress

CITY, TOWN

Washington,

STATE

District of Columbia

## 7 DESCRIPTION

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

---

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

Tucked into the foothills of the Tobacco Root Mountains of southwestern Montana, where Daylight Gulch joins Alder Gulch, Virginia City is the sole survivor of a string of mining camps that once lined Alder Gulch for nearly twelve miles. Before the end of the first year after the initial gold strike all of the available claims in the gulch were located and it was lined with cabins and sluices and camps. Nearly all of them but Virginia City were demolished by later, large mining operations.

Virginia City, once the most famous and promising settlements in the Montana Territory, remains as a collection of old frontier mining structures, fortunately spared the fate of her sister mining camps and preserved because it was never completely abandoned: neither did it ever revive or grow after the third quarter of the 19th century. A good number of original buildings are extant, although undoubtedly a great number have just fallen apart or been scavenged for parts or firewood. Some old buildings still in use have been remodeled, but in the past three decades a good number have been repaired and restored as the tourist potential of the historic town has been developed by several groups, most prominently Bovey Restorations.

Basically a main street town, built along a gulch, on a road which runs east-west through the mountains, Virginia City c. 1864-66 had an estimated population of 10,000 all drawn there within a short time of the original strike in 1863, by the promise of gold. Like all the frontier boom towns, especially in such remote territory, it was quickly built of whatever makeshift materials were available, mostly temporary shelters for the constantly drifting prospectors. More substantial buildings, especially commercial buildings on the main street, were soon constructed as the town quickly became the major town and then the capital, of the territory.

In 1864 a town plan with many named streets, including several parks and even a capitol square, was designed but the town never developed beyond the main street and several square blocks. Virginia City today retains many of the characteristics considered typical of the western frontier towns.

Many of the old buildings are framed in hewn logs covered with sawed pine siding, with additions extending haphazardly around them. Under the weathered sheathing--horizontal or vertical, and often both, in irregular patterns and patched with shingles and tin--original log construction can sometimes be seen. A few buildings are of brick or cut igneous rock. Some of the more substantial commercial buildings and houses have simple 19th century details, especially in the woodwork trim and window treatment, and by far the most pretentious structure is the Madison County Courthouse which, from the east end, dominates the main street

(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 type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

1863-1875

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Virginia City, the Territorial Capital of Montana from 1865-1875, was the center of a string of mining camps which lined Alder Gulch, the site of one of the biggest gold strikes in the northern Rockies. During its boom years Virginia City itself may have had a population as large as 10,000, while the placer mines in the gulch produced an estimated \$40,000,000 in gold in that first decade.

In its heyday Alder Gulch was lined for nearly twelve miles by prospecting camps--Centerville, Adobe, Nevada City, Adobetown, Junction, Ruby, and back from the creek, Central City. In later years these were all burned, torn down or covered up when larger-scale mining operations reworked the areas with dredges. Although still county seat, Virginia City, the sole survivor of the Alder Gulch camps, has only a few hundred permanent residents and has for most of the year the appearance of the classic western ghost town. However, the historic mining town survives due to considerable preservation work and tourist activity which now reawakens Virginia City each summer.

Virginia City, even in the early days, was the official center of activity in Alder Gulch and contained at least half the inhabitants. Soon after the first temporary settlement there, and with the quick prosperity of the Gulch, more substantial buildings were built along Virginia City's Wallace Street and fortunately a number of these remain today. Some of these are of brick and stone with typical 19th century details, but most were built of makeshift materials of logs or wooden clapboards now weathered silver, and many were false-fronted commercial buildings that became the trademark of frontier town main streets.

During its boom period Virginia City was closely associated with one of the famous vigilante groups of the mining era, organized to rid the town of the notorious road agent gang led by Henry Plummer. After the capital was removed to the rival mining town of Helena, in Last Chance Gulch, the population and prospecting activity of Virginia City rapidly dwindled. However, although the population dropped from about 2500 in the 1870s to 600 in 1890 to 380 in 1940, the town remained the county seat and some mining activity has continued periodically in the area ever since. This minimal activity has managed to keep the town barely alive, and consequently preserved the center of Virginia City from the fate of the other camps in the gulch.

(Continued)

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(See continuation sheet)

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approximately 20,000 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,2	4,2,7,6,6,0	5,0,1,6,8,8,0	B	1,2	4,2,7,9,3,0	5,0,1,5,7,8,0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	1,2	4,2,6,6,8,0	5,0,1,3,8,7,0	D	1,2	4,2,5,1,5,0	5,0,1,3,5,6,0

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

E-12.424230.5015550

F-12.425130,5017080

(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, National Park Service

DATE

9/15/76

STREET & NUMBER

1100 "L" St., N. W.

TELEPHONE

(202) 523 5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington, D. C.

STATE

# 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:  
July 4, 1976  
Boundary Certified:  
[Signature]  
DATE: [Signature] date

TITLE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

May 9, 1979

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
ATTEST: William Labovch

DATE

May 8, 1970

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS

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vista of little one and two story structures. Nearly all the wooden buildings on Wallace Street display the false fronts which were so characteristic of frontier town architecture, cottonwood boardwalks still serve along parts of the main street, and just overlooking the west end of the town is Boot Hill.

Alder Gulch rises on the north slope of Old Baldy Mountain and flows in a north-westerly, westerly and southwesterly direction until it empties into the Ruby River. For the 14 miles of its course it cuts deeply into the gneiss and schist formations of the southwest foothills of the Tobacco Root Range. Virginia City is located at the point where Daylight Creek flows westerly into Alder Creek, about midway upstream, and the town and main street (route 34) roughly parallel Daylight Creek. At altitude 5,760, Virginia City is surrounded by the Tobacco Root, Ruby and Gravelly ranges.

Alder Gulch was named by the original prospecting party for the clump of alder trees along the creek, but those trees are long gone and timber for the town was always scarce, as the hills are mostly covered with grass, sagebrush and scrub pine. The soil is "parched and alkaline." The gulch is narrow, varying from one-eighth to one-half mile in width and when all claims along the gulch were quickly located, many prospectors turned to lode mining. The rich productive portion of the Alder Gulch placers were confined to the canyon area proper or to the upper 14 miles of the stream. The gulch has several tributaries within this distance, but no profitable placers have existed outside of the main gulch since the May 1863 discovery.

South of Virginia City via Jackson Street and then along a trail for .3 miles is a monument marking the site of the original gold strike of May 1863. West .8 mile from the end of Wallace Street, on the north side of Alder Gulch is a large pile of waste gravel from the dredgings, called Bummer Dan's Bar for the prospector who struck a rich claim at that site in the 1860s. On the hill at the northwest end of town is Boot Hill, graveyard for at least five notorious outlaws, while the town cemetery, labeled on maps "new cemetery" is on the same level at the northeast end of town.

There are no known detailed contemporary descriptions of the structures in booming Virginia City, 1863-1875, but there are a few known old photographs of parts of town. These and a number of contemporary accounts provide a sense of the sort of reckless style of the settlement and society of Alder Gulch. Soon after the first great rush from Bannack, makeshift shelters--tents, shanties and brush wickiups initially served the prospectors who were undoubtedly more interested

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in finding gold than in building houses. The first more permanent structures were apparently log cabins. In Virginia City the first building is believed to have been the Mechanical Bakery, then Morier's Saloon, and the first residence was built by John Lyons.

Although a number of historical accounts of Virginia City have been written, to date no carefully documented or detailed survey of the buildings has been completed. Bovey Restorations now own a large number of buildings and much original source material on the area.

Among the major historic buildings of Virginia City are:

Madison County Court House (1875), by far the most pretentious building, the two-story brick structure, with cupola and columned porch entrance, on a raised stone foundation, dominates the town; additions on rear; HABS 1964; interior burned c. 1970, restored (with NPS grant) 1974, and continues in county use.

Col. W. F. Sanders House (1867), probably best preserved house in town still a residence; frame one and one-half story, with typical 19th century detail; original owner was leader in early Montana government; HABS 1964.

Content Corner (1864) one of earliest stone buildings in town, two stories with front section a storefront in brick, some gothic style windows; built by the Content Company, now a restaurant and general store; second floor believed to have been leased as territorial offices in 1865; HABS 1964.

Montana Post Building (1864) stone with gothic arched windows on back section, decorative board and batten storefront section with flat roof and crenelated cornice; office of first newspaper in Montana Territory; then hotel barroom; burned 1937; restored to 1870s appearance by Bovey Restorations; now a museum.

Water Company Building (1864), rope burns discernible on the purlin of the frame structure, evidence of when it served during construction as gallows for Vigilantes' execution of five road agents.

Vigilante Headquarters (c. 1864) believed to have been meetingplace both of outlaws of Plummer gang and later of vigilantes; two stories, front and sides of stone; rear of logs, second story front is clapboarded with wide door; false front and large doors on street facade; original use unknown, but was livery stable for years, now houses part of Bovey carriage collection.

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Arsenal, believed to be first in Montana Territory; built of rock with mud mortar, into hillside on Idaho St., one room with flat grassed-over top, original metal doors missing.

Sisters' Hospital believed to have housed the first court; for many years Catholic sisters' hospital, log frame sheathed in rough sawed white pine, several sections, with false front; now Bonanza Inn, painted white and improved for hotel use.

Masonic Hall (1867), two-story, stone building with white trim and hooded cornice, with central semi-circle, quoins on corners and around fenestration.

Rank's Drugstore (1864) two-story stone building, still used as drugstore, its records list William Fairweather as one of its first customers.

Wells Fargo Office, one-story with arched windows, old photographs show it with a large "Overland Express" sign; once Buford's Mercantile; now a coffeehouse.

Virginia City Madisonian Office, the local newspaper has been published since vigilante days; housed in a one-story stone building, with three arched bays' erected by Allen and Milliard Banking House.

Gilbert Brewery (1863), founded by H. S. Gilbert, probably the first brewery in Montana, now restored as a museum, with beer garden.

Harness Shop and Mechanical Bakery are two of the earliest known of the extant log buildings with false fronts and weathered board siding used as small shops, lining Wallace Street.

The National Park Service completed a study of the history of Virginia City, with a brief description of the condition of the historic buildings and a number of photographs, in 1937, and this is probably the best source on the town's condition before restoration work began around 1940. The description noted that on Wallace Street only four or five buildings apparently postdated the historic (1863-1875) period. A recent fire had destroyed two old frame stores, the well known "Seven-Story Hotel," or Madison House (one-story high, with many additions built down the hill behind) had recently been razed, and the oldest log cabin had been torn down two years before, for firewood.

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The report's photographs include a few historic views which show Daylight Gulch filled with at least twice the number of buildings. The 1937 NPS photographs are particularly interesting in comparison with present day views. The town at this time was characterized by its abandoned buildings, many still intact with their false fronts and cottonwood boardwalks along Wallace Street, but endangered and deteriorating because of non-use. In the 1920s the Thompson-Hickman Memorial Library was financed by old Alder Gulch families but the town was barely alive and the old frontier buildings were often remodeled or torn down, for parts--the luckier ones were just abandoned.

Large scale dredging activities left piles of gravel up and down the lower end of Alder Creek, completely rearranging the landscape and tearing down and covering up the mining camps that once lined it. Central, Nevada City, and Adobetown and Junction were among the victims. Scattered evidence of some of the early mining days remains in the Gulch itself but most of the structures were demolished and probably scavenged for use by the mining companies or others. For example the logs from the big J. B. Millard Mansion built on the side of a hill, and reached by 200 steps, at the head of Alder Gulch, are known to have been used in a house on Idaho Street, Virginia City. The old OK Corral and Livery in Virginia City were torn down by a mining company for their lumber.

Of the lower (west) two blocks of Wallace Street, entirely in Bovey ownership, 26 buildings are original, seven are reconstructed mostly from old parts, and one was moved there in complete form, (according to John Ellingson, historian for Bovey Restorations). These buildings have been repaired and refurnished on the interior and exterior, using period decorations and pieces from the Bovey collections. The establishments along Wallace Street are all completely outfitted with period pieces and merchandise, although not necessarily the same type of establishments as were there in historic Virginia City. Some of the buildings are open to the public as hotels, saloons, a coffee house, a theatre. Some are museums--a newspaper office and brewery which you can visit, while number of others, although completely stocked as shops, are viewed only through the shopfront windows.

For example, the Montana Post Building (1864), burned in 1937, was restored by Bovey Restorations according to photographs and descriptions of the building as remodeled by D. W. Tilton in the 1870s, and is now a museum. The present Fairweather Inn (operating) is the several-times-remodeled Anaconda Hotel of the 1870s, reconstructed by Bovey Restorations Inc. to resemble the Goodrich House in Bannack--which was destroyed by its owner and whose columns Bovey salvaged for his Virginia City establishment.

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Among the major buildings that Bovey Restorations owns and maintains are Content Corner, the Wells Fargo Office, the Montana Post Building, the Gilbert Brewery, the Sisters' Hospital (now Bonanza Inn), the Fairweather Inn (the remodeled Anacconda Inn), the Opera House (in an old livery stable), besides many small shops in between these, some moved or reconstructed to fill in the vacant spaces in the blocks. They also operate a modern motel with a frontier town facade at the east end of town. The totally relocated railroad depot at the west end of town marks the east end of the short narrow gauge railroad line built by Bovey to run west from Virginia City to Nevada City, about one mile away.

At the site of the old mining camp of Nevada City, where 12 original structures remain, Bovey Restorations Inc. have reconstructed a western town of approximately 50 structures with a collection of old buildings saved from other sites and now filled with an enormous number of artifacts from the Bovey collections. Included are an amazing assemblage of 19th century music machines and a group of buildings filled with artifacts from Chinese mining communities, plus all the usual and unusual period furnishings for the old shops, houses and barns, salvaged from throughout the West and across the United States. Nevada City is not part of the national historic landmark.

At the east end of Virginia City, most of the houses and commercial buildings are privately owned, many of the historic buildings are still in use, and there are a few unsympathetic modern buildings and additions to old ones, including several fairly recent tourist and souvenir shops, a gasoline station and some trailer houses. There are three museums besides those operated by Bovey Restorations; the Thompson-Hickman Memorial Library, the J. Spencer Watkins museum, and an old-time drugstore display in the basement of Rank's drugstore. The east end is the active section of contemporary year-round Virginia City, with banks, restaurants, shops, the school and County Courthouse, and residences located on the east end of town, and north or south of the main street--a good number of which are located in historic buildings.

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In the 1940s Charles and Sue Bovey, collectors of frontier artifacts, from Great Falls, Montana, began to buy and repair some of the old buildings in town--most of which were abandoned. Bovey Restorations now owns a large number of the structures in Virginia City, including more than two whole blocks at the west end of Wallace Street. They have repaired, remodeled and refurnished the buildings with parts, and decorative details of the frontier mining period, on both the interiors and exteriors; however, all of the structures have not been restored, in the strict sense, to their original appearance or use. The Bovey-owned buildings and their contents displayed both in Virginia City and the reconstructed mining camp of Nevada City one mile to the west, probably constitute one of the most remarkable collections of western Americana in the country.

History

Gold was first discovered in the vicinity of Virginia City by a party from Bannack, led by Henry Edgar and Bill Fairweather. This party had been turned back by hostile Indians from a prospecting trip to the Yellowstone Valley. While camping beside a creek, Fairweather panned gravel from the stream bed and found gold May, 1865. A few days later Fairweather and company arrived in Bannack for supplies, having panned an exciting amount of gold dust from the creek and staked out their claims in what they named Alder Gulch--for the trees which shaded the creek. By the time they left Bannack, their secret was out and they were followed by hundreds of hopeful prospectors from whom they extracted promises to honor the original claims before leading them to the gulch site.

News of the rich placer deposits in Alder Gulch quickly brought thousands to Montana. Of the several "cities" or camps that suddenly sprang up in Alder Gulch, Virginia City, the sole survivor, was principal. During the most prosperous days of 1864-65, it is estimated that at least half of the ten thousand or more residents of the Gulch lived there. In 1865, because of Virginia City's wealth, population and promising future, the territorial capital was moved there.

Practically all of the most important routes of the Northwest were arteries of traffic through southwestern Montana. The Bozeman Trail, blazed in the winter of 1862-63, became the most popular route to the Montana mining fields and ran through the Black Hills and Big Horn Mountains, across the Yellowstone River and through the Bozeman Pass to Virginia City.

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In spite of the journey over treacherous routes and through hostile Indian country, unnumbered thousands set out for Montana upon learning of the gold strikes there. The early numbers drawn from nearby settlements and mining camps were soon increased by large numbers from the states. Accurate population figures for Virginia City are unavailable, and estimates are often exaggerated. It appears that in the peak years 1864-65, the Virginia City area (Alder Gulch) had about 10,000 inhabitants, but a large percentage of these were always drifters, moving on to other mining camps or back to the states. The Virginia City population never grew after 1866. There are also various estimates of the amount of gold mined, which was probably over \$40,000,000, most of it between the years 1863-1869. During the first three years production appears to have been approximately \$10 million annually. (Olaf Hagen, NPS report, 1937)

The Varina Townsite Company recorded its claim to the 320 acres on which Virginia City now stands June 16, 1863. It first was named in honor of Jefferson Davis' wife, but the recording judge was a northerner and re-named it Virginia instead, an agreeable compromise. The town was incorporated in 1864 and a year later, on February 7, 1865 was made the temporary capital of the territory, succeeding Bannack.

By the end of the first decade Virginia City showed signs of decline and the surplus population which had stampeded to Alder Gulch were soon attracted by other gold discoveries, including Last Chance Gulch where Helena arose as a very powerful rival. Through the 1860s Virginia City clung to its position as Territorial Capital, until 1875 when the booming Helena became the capital city.

However, Virginia City remained quite active and prospered as a major center in southern Montana, though gold production had shrunk from millions to a few thousand dollars worth annually. By 1885 a company of Orientals were gleaning the gold remaining from the gravels of Alder Gulch. Through the 1870s Virginia City, despite poor soil, was the center of the western Montana cattle industry.

The hordes who rushed to Alder Gulch upon news of the gold strike were a motley collection of miners, businessmen, and pilgrims, as well as gamblers, desperadoes, drifters and loafers. In 1863 the legal status of Virginia City, newly transferred from the Washington to Idaho Territory but still 400 miles from any legal authority, was such as to encourage the outlaw class.

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Goods to the new town had to be shipped by steamboat, then pack train from Fort Benton or freighted across the plains by oxen teams. There was no safe way of shipping out the millions in gold that the Alder Gulch prospectors collected. The only stage route was to Bannack, there was no post office in the territory so letters were carried from Salt Lake City across 474 miles of unsettled country, and money had to be sent to the nearest express office in private hands. Provincial governments and territorial assemblies were unable to muster much authority. A sheriff, judge and recorder were elected, and although the miners' courts received no authority by law, they were in fact the law, and their decisions were final.

The lawless element arrived early in Virginia City and though the "Bad Men of Montana" have perhaps been romanticized beyond their true numbers and exploits, the Plummer gang alone produced a record of robbery and murder possible unequaled by other western outlaw gangs. Under the leadership of Henry Plummer who, in spite of a criminal record, was able to secure the position of sheriff, the outlaws operated an amazing organization with officers, spies, passwords, and hide-outs. Along the 90 mile stage road between Bannack and Virginia City, and in the surrounding gold rush camps, the gang plundered ore shipments and murdered scores of men.

The crimes escalated quickly and in the summer of 1863 the robbery and murder of Dutchman Nicholas Thiebalt for \$200 in gold dust brought the situation to a crisis. A secretive group of Virginia City citizens formed a Vigilance Committee which apprehended George Ives for the murder, tried him by a miners' court and hanged him. The vigilantes soon set out to capture, try, and punish the rest of the road agents. Secret committees investigated and discovered individuals or groups of criminals. Those found guilty of serious crimes were promptly hanged. Others were banished. Nearby camps organized similar citizens' law groups, which quickly reduced the rampant criminal activity by sometimes controversial but quite effective law and order techniques.

Post-Historic Period

The 1939 WPA Guide to Montana described the very sleepy former territorial capital (population 242) as "one of the few gold camps that have long maintained existence. Prospectors still outfit in its stores and dredge workers make it their home." Any sizeable mining activity ended just before World War II and since that time tourism has apparently become the only major business aside from that of the county seat. However, very limited mining efforts or explorations continue in the area.

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According to Dick Pace, in his Golden Gulch: The Story of Montana's Fabulous Alder Gulch, until the early twentieth century it was fairly busy in the Gulch. The Kearsage operation in Summit, always considered to be the richest area, was working to capacity, with 150 to 200 men, and Summit was producing high grade ore using a 60 stamp mill, with dozens of teams hauling in cordwood. Up and down the gulch smaller operations were working and below Virginia City dredges were digging gravel. The Kearsage burned out in the early 20th century but operators moved to new locations around Summit and kept producing ore. Other mines--the U.S. Grant, Winnetka, High-Up, Alameda, Easton-Pacific, etc. were worked periodically.

Activity slowed down when Courey Placer stopped dredging in 1922. The little town of Ruby began to fade and other towns in the gulch below Virginia City dwindled to small towns, sometimes to only one or two prospectors. In the 1930s Humphrey's Gold Corporation brought a good payroll into town, with mines above Virginia City working and mild prosperity. Also there were dozens of placer mines scraping out one dollar or less per day from old claims. But Humphrey's moved men and machinery from Alder Gulch in the mid-1930s and Virginia City faced the first really bad slump. Other towns in the gulch had long since disappeared; Summit, Highland, Pine Grove, Central, Nevada, Adobetown, and Junction had either burned out, been torn down or buried by the dredges.

World War II deepened the depression in Virginia City as the men were off to war, many others left for work on the coast, and the county courthouse provided the only work. At the end of the war, the government, interested in obtaining silica, allowed the U.S. Grant mine to reopen, giving jobs to 43 men.

Charles and Sue Bovey of Great Falls, Montana, became involved in buying and repairing old structures in Virginia City and housing their extensive collections of western artifacts there c. 1940. During the last three and half decades their company has saved a large number of Virginia City's frontier buildings and developed most of the west end of town into a considerable tourist attraction which operates during the summer months. The Bovey initiated effort was first named the Historic Landmark Society of Montana, and is now Bovey Restorations Inc.

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City, Montana, 1970) ( copy HSS library).

"Virginia City, Montana" Historic Sites Survey Report prepared by Olaf T. Hagen,  
NPS, Region Two. October 1, 1937.

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The national historic landmark boundary has been drawn to include the town of Virginia City and a sizeable portion of Alder Gulch, which was lined with rich gold placer mines and prospectors' camps for miles during the boom period. Virginia City was the major center of Alder Gulch and is the sole survivor of these camps. The boundary encloses approximately 20,000 acres and is drawn along the eastern boundary of the town and then between prominent mountain peaks to form a six-sided figure around the town and gulch area. The grass-covered hills which rise on all sides above Daylight Gulch, where Virginia City is located, are virtually undisturbed--except for a few dirt roads and evidence of old mining operations and the several still active claims--and they are essential to the natural and historic setting of the old mining town. Features included within this boundary which postdate the area's 19th century period of importance, do not contribute to the national significance of the landmark.

As seen on the USGS 15' Virginia City, Montana map, beginning at the northeastern corner of the town limits of Virginia City (point A), the national historic landmark boundary runs southeasterly along the eastern town boundary to the southeast corner (point B); thence southwesterly for about one and a half miles to a peak (point C) approximately 6320 feet in elevation, near the midpoint of the north line of Section 35, T6S, R3W; thence southwesterly for approximately one mile to a peak (point D) located in the northeast quarter of Section 34, T6S, R3W, approximately one-quarter miles southwest of the El Fleeta Mine; thence northwesterly approximately one and three-eighths miles to a peak (point E) located near the southeast corner of Section 21, T6S, R3W, and labeled as 6236 feet in altitude; thence northwesterly approximately one and one-eighth miles to a peak (point F) just south of the midpoint of the north line of Section 22, T6S, R3W, labeled as 5915 feet in altitude; thence southeasterly approximately one and two-thirds miles to the point of origin.