

14 Towns Have Lives, Too

1870-1920

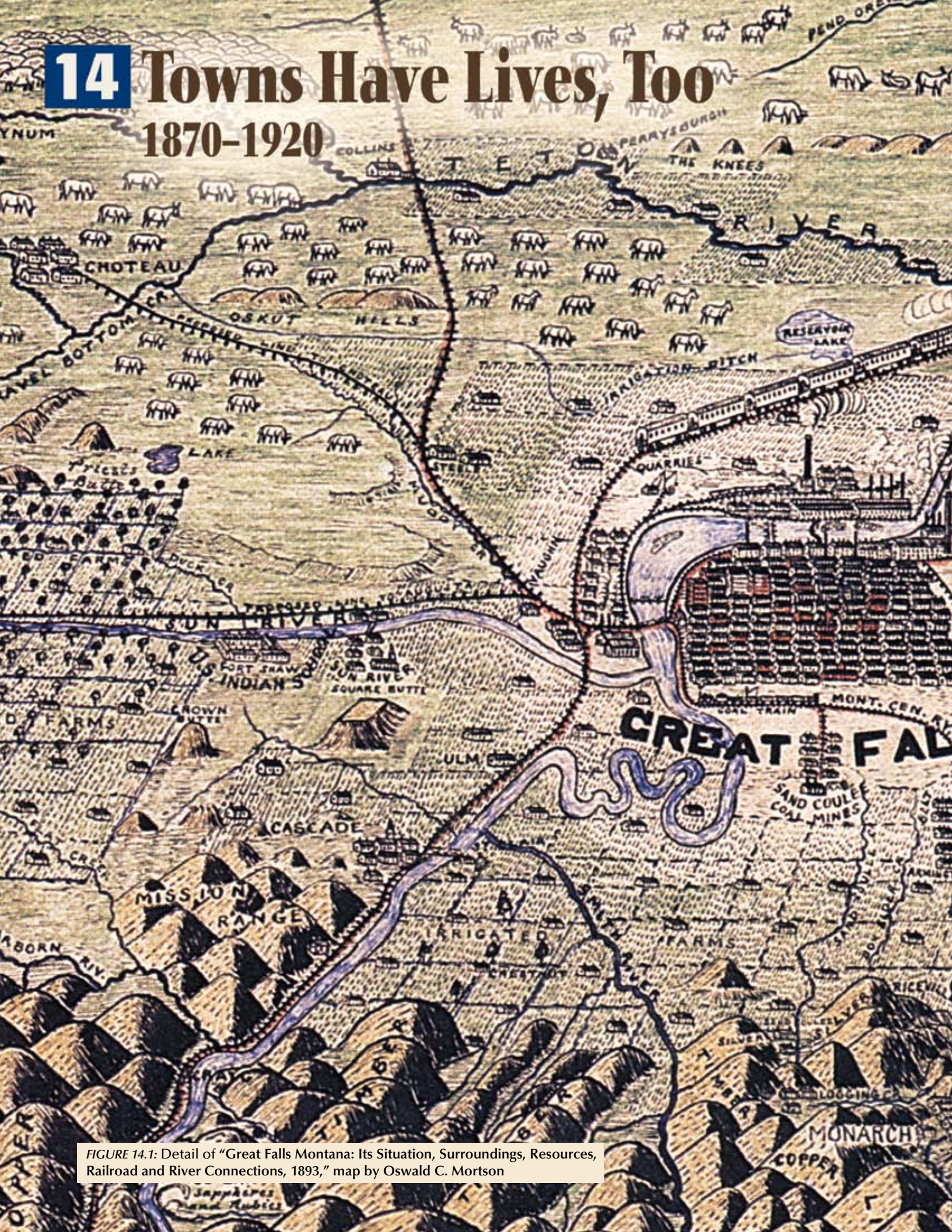


FIGURE 14.1: Detail of "Great Falls Montana: Its Situation, Surroundings, Resources, Railroad and River Connections, 1893," map by Oswald C. Mortonson



READ TO FIND OUT:

- What causes a town to grow in a certain place
- The secrets behind the shape of your town
- What a town provides besides businesses
- How you shape the community you live in

The Big Picture

Towns grow up wherever human activity is concentrated. What your town looks like reveals clues about its economic, political, and social past. Forces active today will shape how your town looks in the future, too.

Why are towns born? Why do some towns grow and flourish, while others become ghost towns? Why do we even need towns? What is a town?

Many people came to Montana in the late 1800s and early 1900s hoping to earn some money and go back home again. But many others came to stay. They built cities and towns, made friends, and created communities. They worked to make their towns more beautiful by planting gardens, building parks, and adding architectural details to buildings.

People built towns and neighborhoods according to their desires and expectations. But large social and economic trends—like the coming of the railroad or the homesteading boom—shaped towns, too. Many Montana towns have very similar characteristics because they were born out of similar circumstances.

Yet each town also has its own personality and its own story to tell. You can find clues about the story of your town (or the town closest to you) from its layout, its buildings, its name, and other features. Once you know what to look for, you can learn some fascinating things about when, how, and why your town began, and how it reflects the Montana story.



FIGURE 14.2: Many of Montana's earliest towns were gold camps like Garnet, shown here in 1899. People quickly built stores and houses out of whatever materials were available—usually wood. These buildings were not designed to last very long.

1870–1920: Population Boom

No matter where you live in Montana, your hometown was probably born between 1870 and 1920. In these 50 years, Montana's population boomed. Mining, railroads, forestry, and homesteading drew thousands of people here. Most of the towns that exist today—and many that have disappeared—got their start during this period.

1870: Outposts on the Frontier

In 1870 the United States government conducted its first official **census** (a count of every person living in each area of the country). The first census counted only the areas that had more than two U.S. citizens per square mile. It did not count Indians living on **reservations** (land that tribes reserved for their own use through treaties). Since this was just eight years after gold had been discovered in Montana, only a few places qualified. The rest of the territory was labeled "frontier."

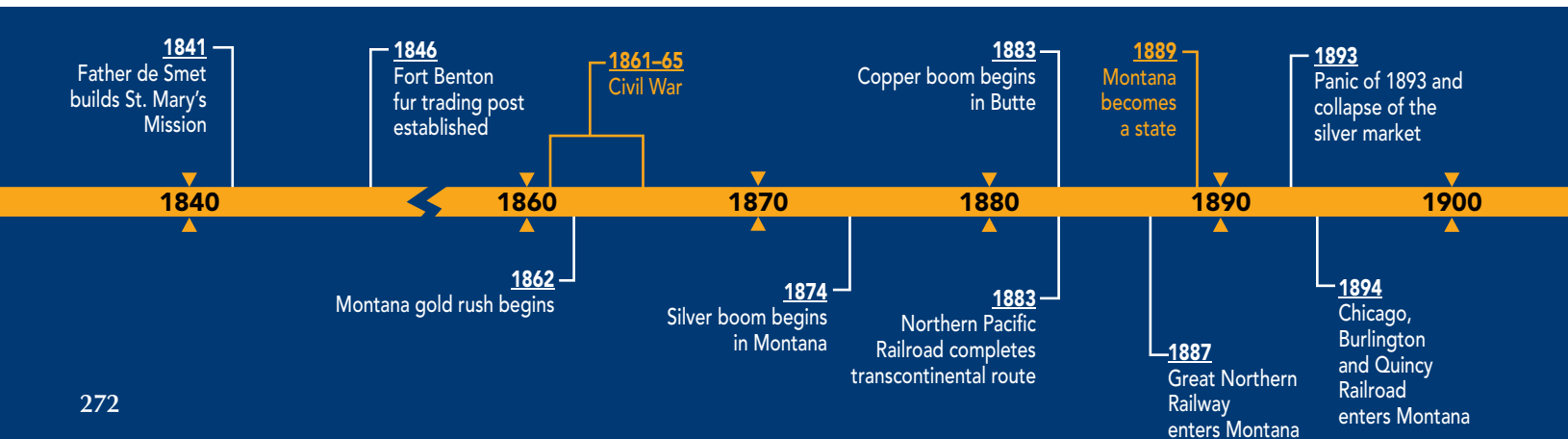
Most people that the 1870 census counted lived around Bannack, Virginia City, Helena, Fort Benton, the Deer Lodge Valley, Missoula, and the Bitterroot Valley. Most of these communities hugged the main transportation routes—the Corinne Road, the Mullan Road, and the Missouri River.

Almost 90 percent of the people counted in these settlements were white Euro-Americans. Nearly 10 percent were Asians—Chinese miners, business owners, doctors, and laborers working in the gold fields. One-third of Virginia City was Chinese. A small percentage was African American. Men outnumbered women by four to one—a sure sign that these communities were made of miners on the move, not settlers here to stay.

You Can Never Judge These Western Places by Their Names

"The country in this neighborhood is very thinly settled and you will be surprised when I tell you that the place which bears the pretentious name of Superior City, and which is the post office for the country within a radius of fifty miles, consists of a log house and a barn. You can never judge anything in these western places by their names, for the people seem to have a peculiar habit of giving high sounding names to the most insignificant places."

—PRIVATE FRANK BURKE, STATIONED WITH THE SIGNAL CORPS AT CROW'S NEST, MONTANA TERRITORY, IN A LETTER HOME TO HIS FATHER, FEBRUARY 15, 1881



Montana Population

1890: Settlements Expand

By 1890 Montana had achieved statehood. Railroads made travel in and out of Montana much faster and easier. People poured into the region to set up farms, ranches, and businesses and to work in the forests and mines. **Placer mining** (separating loose gold and nuggets from dirt, sand, and gravel in a creek bed) was mostly over. Big silver and copper mines supported more permanent communities like Butte and Philipsburg. Most of Montana's Indians lived on reservations that were only a fraction of their original territory (see Chapter 11).

The population soared. Between 1880 and 1890 Montana's population increased 140 percent faster than the rest of the country's did.

1920: Settlements Are in Place

The homesteading boom attracted new waves of immigrants after 1900. By 1920 settlements had spread across nearly every region of the state. Now the nation's railroad network was at its peak. Five major rail lines served Montana—more than would operate here ever again. The year 1920 marked the end of a half century of **immigration** (people moving to a new country) and population growth across the nation—and a period of total transformation in Montana.

Communities of Many Nations

People of many nations, languages, and ethnic groups came to Montana to homestead or to work in the mines, smelters, lumber camps, sawmills, and towns. Immigrants named towns like Inverness and Amsterdam in honor of their former homes. Northwest of Missoula is Frenchtown, settled by people from New Brunswick and Quebec, in French-speaking Canada.

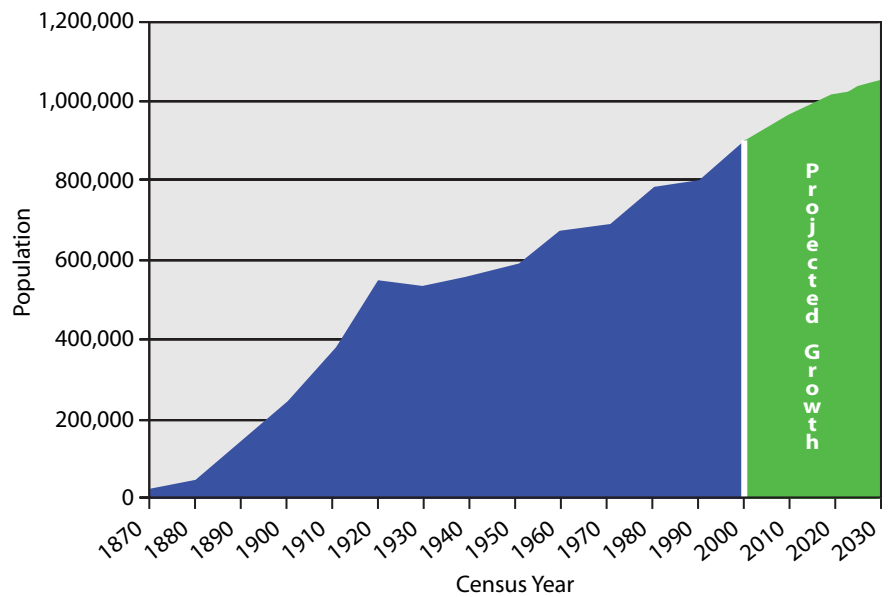
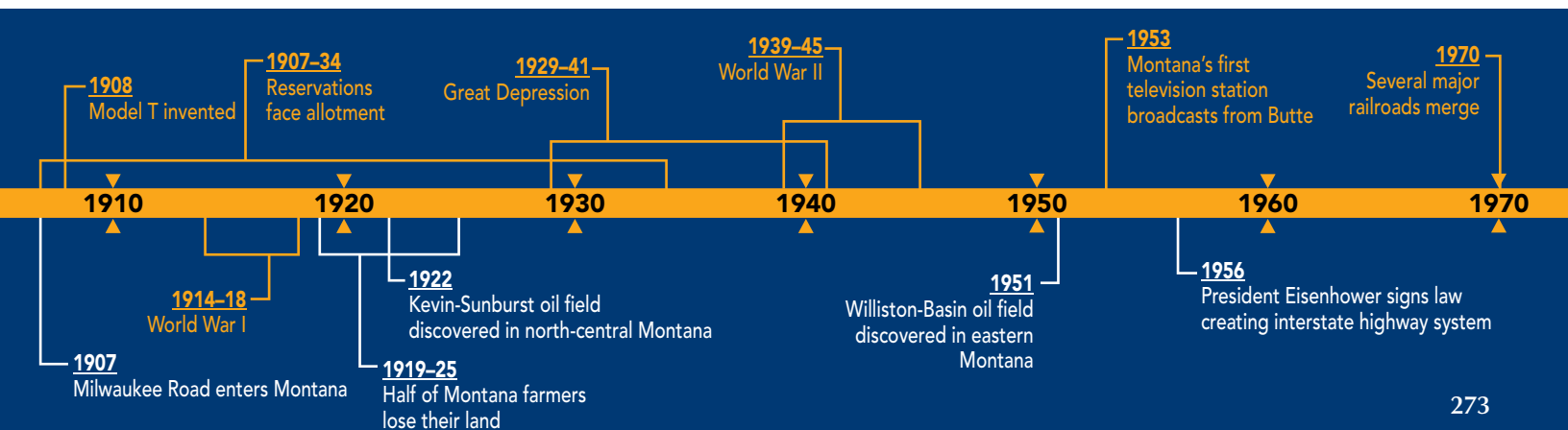


FIGURE 14.3: Between 1880 and 1900 Montana's population surged as people flooded into Montana by road and riverboat but mostly by rail. Homesteading attracted a new wave of immigrants after 1900.



People from Ireland, Finland, Italy, Greece, Austria, Russia, Lebanon, and China crowded into mining towns like Butte and Red Lodge. Immigrants gave names to neighborhoods like Red Lodge's Finntown and Butte's Dublin Gulch (named after a city in Ireland). The town of Kremlin got its name from the Russian word *kremlin*, which means "fortress." Some local Russian farmers called it that because they claimed to see the fortress of Moscow in the prairie **mirages** (optical illusions caused by light and moisture).

Sometimes names can fool you. Zurich, for example, was not named by Swiss immigrants, even though it was named after Zurich, Switzerland. It was named by Great Northern Railway employees who just wanted a name that sounded good.

Street names also provide clues about early residents. Many Métis people settled in Lewistown after Métis trader Francis Janeaux built a trading post there in 1879. That is why several Lewistown streets—Janeaux, Morasse, and Ouellette—bear Métis names. A local doctor **platted** (mapped) the town of Lewistown in 1882. He started at Janeaux's fence line, which is why Lewistown streets do not run north and south.

Towns Appeared for a Reason

Why is your town (or the town where you shop or go to school) located where it is? Most Montana towns were built for one reason: **commerce** (business activity). Towns grew up where people gathered for economic activities. In early Montana three types of economic activities typically created towns: transportation, agriculture, and **natural resource extraction** (industries based on removing natural resources like mining, smelting, and logging).

FIGURE 14.4: Do the downtown streets of your town run parallel to the railroad tracks? Is there a train depot in or near downtown? If so, this is a clue that you live in a town founded by a railroad company. This **aerial** (from the sky) view of Glendive shows how important the railroad was to the city.



Some towns grew for reasons other than commerce. Many reservation towns grew around federal agencies or missions. Other communities grew around military bases. And some towns grew for more than one of these reasons. The more purposes a town served, the more likely it was to survive if one of its industries died or became less profitable.

Transportation Towns

Some of Montana's earliest permanent settlements were transportation towns. They formed wherever roads intersected or met railroads or riverboat docks. Hotels, stores, stagecoach and freight companies, and other businesses planted themselves as closely as possible to the intersection, or along the main roads that fanned out from the center of activity.

Fort Benton began as a trading post at the northernmost port of the Missouri River in 1846. The town grew as gold seekers and settlers came to Montana by riverboat.

Missoula (first called Hellgate) emerged at the crossroads of five important roads, including the Mullan Road. Timber and gold from western Montana and produce from the fertile Bitterroot Valley moved up these roads on their way to larger gold camps, business centers, and riverboat ports like Fort Benton. They all funneled through Missoula. It was a natural spot for a town.

Transportation towns flourished as long as people and commerce continued to flow along nearby routes. If the main route fell out of use or moved, business activity moved with it and the town died. For example, Fort Benton lost its prominence when railroads replaced steamboats as the most efficient way to travel.

Some towns died in the 1960s when the federal government built the interstate highway system (see Chapter 20). Like the railroads, the interstate funneled traffic away from previously well-used transportation routes. Towns on the interstate grew. The towns off the interstate system had to struggle along as best they could.

The Railroads Built Towns, Too

Railroad companies designed and built towns all across Montana and the West. As they laid tracks across the continent, they planned, platted, and promoted towns to be built along their routes. Railroad companies



FIGURE 14.5: Railroads changed towns. The Northern Pacific Railroad liked to point to ways it made towns more connected to the outside world, more established, and—therefore—safer. But locals sometimes complained that crime actually increased after the railroads arrived because so many people passed through town on the trains.

needed to create economic centers that would feed freight and passenger business to the railroads.

Railroads often mapped out towns even before the tracks arrived. Railroad agents, working ahead of the lines, determined where the city blocks would be. They decided which way the streets would go, and sometimes even named the downtown streets.

Usually these developers designed towns to look like towns back east. They designed square blocks of a certain size, parallel streets, and other elements that would feel familiar to the new settlers.

Railroads also built towns to house their operations and workers. Every 200 miles the railroad built a division point with repair shops. Every 100 miles was a “sub-division” point with smaller repair shops and housing for crew changes. These towns usually grew into bigger communities.

Many railroad towns were named after railroad officials or their family members, most of whom had never been to Montana. Billings was created by a group of railroad employees and businessmen. They named their new town after former Northern Pacific Railroad president Frederick Billings. The town started in May 1882 with one store, one house, and a bunkhouse for railroad workers. By fall of that year, Billings had 155 businesses, 99 homes, six railroad buildings, 25 tents, and a church.

The Northern Pacific Railroad platted the town of Townsend, near Helena, in 1883 and named it after the family of the railroad president’s wife. The railroad sold lots around the train station for \$5 apiece to encourage settlement.

Towns Moved to Be near the Railroad

If the railroad bypassed an existing town, the town usually died—unless it had a very good reason (like a rich mine) to keep people there. Sometimes towns lifted up their buildings and moved the entire town near the railroad tracks, as Bainville, Martinsdale, and Circle did. Demersville moved its buildings, too. Residents put the buildings on log rollers, hitched them to horses, and pulled them to a spot where the Great Northern Railway had platted the town of Kalispell.

Towns actively campaigned to attract the railroad so they would not be left out. Everywhere the railroads went in Montana, they built or contributed to the growth of communities.

FIGURE 14.6: Water power is one of the natural resources that built towns. Great Falls, built along the Great Falls of the Missouri River, grew because of industrial activity that fed on water power. The city’s first dam was built at Black Eagle Falls in 1890.



Natural Resource Towns

Natural resource towns began with the gold rush. Gold camps and logging towns sprang up wherever people harvested resources. Later, towns grew around silver and copper discoveries. Coal, timber, oil, and **hydro-electric** (generating electricity from water flow) dams also made towns boom.

Certain types of resources required a lot of equipment and **capital** (money) to extract. So individual corporations sometimes founded towns. The Cottonwood Coal

Company built Stockett, nestled in the Little Belt Mountains south-east of Great Falls, in the 1890s. The company owned all the stores and houses in town. Families of the coal miners—mostly Italian, Polish, and Slavic—rented their houses from the company. They were required to do their shopping at the company-owned store. Almost everything the miners earned went back to the company for rent and groceries.

Natural resource towns often followed a **boom-and-bust cycle** (sudden economic activity followed by decline, then a period of quiet, and then another burst of activity). The town would boom as long as the resource was plentiful and valuable. When the resource ran out or lost value, the town would go into a bust cycle. Then, unless another economic activity took over, jobs would dry up and people would move away.

No one lives in Castle now, but in the 1880s the silver town was home to 2,000 people. Helena, on the other hand, did not become a ghost town when placer mining ended, because it had also become a center for banking, commercial transportation, and government.

Some resource development projects ate up towns altogether. Canyon Ferry Reservoir, created by Canyon Ferry Dam in 1954, swallowed up the remains of the village of Canton as well as neighboring ranches. The remains of former towns also lie at the bottom of reservoirs created by the Clark Canyon and Fort Peck Dams. And in Butte, the Berkeley Pit devoured Meaderville, McQueen, and Parrot Flat. These towns are not even ghost towns, but simply memories.

Butte: A City Sprawled over the “Richest Hill on Earth”

The copper-mining town of Butte was Montana’s only industrial urban center for many years. In the 1890s Butte’s hills and gulches hummed with more than 47,000 people of many nationalities. They were rich silver and copper barons, humble miners’ families, preachers and prostitutes, chimney sweeps and society ladies. The city had ten newspapers, four railroads, three telegraph lines, four fire departments, six undertakers, 26 doctors, 11 houses of worship, the Columbia Gardens amusement park with a roller coaster, and 156 saloons. One historian called Butte “the richest, rowdiest, toughest, and ugliest town in the Rocky Mountains.”

Life beneath Butte was just as vigorous and far more dangerous. Miners plummeted as deep as 2,000 feet below the surface in fast-moving cage elevators. They worked with hammers, air drills, shovels, and dynamite in 100°F heat. Many suffered lung disease from the **silica** (rock) dust and died young.

Beginning in the 1950s, **open-pit mining** (removing low-grade ore using huge earth-moving equipment) began to replace underground mining. Open-pit mining required fewer workers, so Butte lost population. At the same time, the pit grew so large it swallowed parts of the town itself.

Agricultural Center Towns

Across the eastern plains of Montana lie small, regularly spaced agricultural towns with grain elevators, water towers, church steeples, and neat arrangements of white, **clapboard** (a kind of wood siding) houses. These towns often line up by the railroad tracks, but their main function is to serve as a business center for the people who farm nearby.

Farmers and ranchers deliver their goods to town for shipping to market. They also come to town to bank, shop, and go to school. **Grain elevators** (where grain is stored for shipping by rail) and **stockyards** (pens for holding animals before shipping to market) commonly appear in agricultural centers.

Economic changes in farming activity deeply affect the life of a farm town. When drought and economic depression hit in the 1920s and 1930s, thousands of homesteaders left their farms and moved to the city or out of state (see Chapter 13). When the farmers left, banks and businesses lost customers. This explains some of the agricultural ghost towns that dot eastern Montana.

Improved roads also changed farm towns. Good roads meant that people could easily drive to bigger towns to shop. Children could ride buses to go to schools farther away. With people shopping and attending school elsewhere, smaller farming communities have suffered.

Sometimes the thing that saved towns was government. County seats are bigger and more prosperous than neighboring towns that depend exclusively on business from local farmers or ranchers to sustain them.

FIGURE 14.7: Businesses in Sheridan depended on surrounding ranchers for their customers. So no one complained too much when sheep blocked traffic.



Reservation Towns

While most towns grew around commercial activity, reservation towns were created for a different purpose. Reservation towns grew up around the government **agency** (reservation headquarters), where the federal government distributed payments to tribal members in the form of food and supplies. The reservation agent and other employees lived and worked at the agency. Churches, schools, and a few commercial and service businesses followed.

While many Indian families clustered near the agency, others spread out along riverbanks and other places where their people had traditionally camped. Some of these places also grew into towns.

Reservation towns also grew around the boarding schools. On the Fort Belknap Reservation, many families moved to Hays so they could see their children, who attended boarding school at St. Paul's Mission School there.

When an agency moved, the town followed. The Crow Reservation agency (originally near Livingston) moved twice as the tribe **ceded** (gave up) land. In 1875 the agency moved near Absarokee and in 1884 to its current site on the Little Bighorn River. Within two years many Crow families settled at the current Crow Agency.



FIGURE 14.8: At first most Indian families on reservations lived in tipis, just as they always had done. Tipis were warmer in winter and cooler in summer than wooden buildings. Later some families built log cabins beside their tipis. This photo of a camp near Crow Agency was taken in 1895.

Special Communities: Towns of a Different Purpose

Some Montana towns grew up to serve a special purpose. The U.S. military built East Base (now known as Malmstrom Air Force Base) in the 1940s, during World War II. At that time it was two miles east of Great Falls. Aircraft operations, maintenance, and industrial buildings dominated most of the base. Housing barracks and homes for families of Air Force personnel were clustered in one corner.

Glasgow had an air base, too, built in 1955. When the government shut down the Glasgow Air Force Base in the 1960s, 8,000 people left in just three months. Valley County lost one-third of its population after the air base closed.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, a different kind of special community appeared. To help provide jobs to unemployed men, the federal government created the Civilian Conservation Corps—called the CCC. It employed thousands of young men to plant trees, build mountain roads, erect fire lookout towers, fight forest fires, and construct dams in national and state forests and parks. The government set up CCC camps deep in the woods to house these laborers. When World War II started in the 1940s, the Depression ended and the camps closed.

Big Sky, a resort town south of Bozeman, was ranch land until 1970. Then NBC newscaster and Montana native Chet Huntley and a group of investors built a ski resort, golf course, and several villages with shopping, housing, and other services. The community started as a tourist destination and quickly developed as a resort community. Unlike other commercial centers, which serve both tourists and locals, resort towns are designed almost completely around the needs of tourists.

Saint Marie: Montana's Newest Ghost Town

A few miles north of U.S. Highway 2, on Montana Highway 24, lies Montana's most modern ghost town. The little community of Saint Marie was built in the 1950s to house the airmen at Glasgow Air Force Base and their families. About 7,200 people lived here, but when the air base shut down, Saint Marie became a ghost town. Today, hundreds of 1960s-vintage homes—complete with hard-wood floors and swing sets—line the empty streets. Fewer than 200 people live here.

Montana also has some communities that do not have a downtown at all. About 4,000 people live in Hutterite colonies in Montana. Hutterites are people of German ancestry who share a religious commitment to **communal** (shared by all members of a community) living—that is, they do not own private property. The community owns the land, equipment, buildings, and livestock and pays the expenses of the colony.

Montana's 39 Hutterite colonies produce about 60 percent of the state's pork, half of its eggs, and about 17 percent of its milk. The layout of the colonies—clusters of houses, a main dining hall, a church, and an orderly array of farm buildings, shops, and grain elevators—shows communities thoughtfully organized around a common purpose.

Why Does Your Town Look the Way It Does?

What does your town look like? (If you live in the country, think about the closest town.) How is it laid out? Do streets radiate out from a central square? Is it a **strip town** (a town with one main business street) hugging both sides of a highway? Can you travel all the way down the main street without turning? The layout of a town—especially its original layout revealed in early maps—tells a lot about how and why it got started, and what the people who built it expected and hoped for in their town.

FIGURE 14.9: Hutterite colonies like the Fairhaven Colony, in Cascade County, are designed to reflect the shared goals of community members. The architecture, activities, and traditions are centered around church and family.



Main Street: Straight or Curvy?

Does your main street run straight through town? If your downtown winds and curves through a gully, like downtown Helena does, it was probably a gold-rush mining camp that was already full of shops, businesses, and houses before any city planners could create an orderly layout.

When surveyors had a chance to design a community before people arrived, they usually made straight streets following a grid pattern. Business buildings lined Main Street (or First Street) and nearby streets. Single-family homes were set along tree-lined streets in walking distance of downtown. Before cars, people

liked to live close to work. Little corner grocery shops appeared in every neighborhood.

X-towns, T-towns, and Towns with Squares

Some towns have specific shapes that give us clues to their past. For example, if a town formed at the intersection of two important roads, the business district shaped itself around the crossroads in the form of an X. Culbertson, one of the oldest towns in northeast Montana, started as a fur trading post and grew up as a cattle town at the intersection of two roads (now U.S. Highway 2 and Montana Highway 16). Originally, the main streets were aligned with the intersection of these two roads. Later, when the railroad came, the town grew. The new streets ran parallel to the railroad.

Railroads were so important to communities that towns often changed their layout to run parallel to the tracks. This is one way to tell if a town along the tracks was built before or after the railroad came through. For example, Townsend was built by the Northern Pacific Railroad. It is laid out parallel to the railroad tracks.

Miles City was built before the railroad. At that time people and goods traveled on steamboats, so the main streets faced the river. When the railroad came through in 1881, new streets were laid out parallel to the railroad.

In many railroad towns, the main streets form a "T." The railroad tracks and the main business street paralleling the tracks make the crossbar of the T. A second business street dead-ends into the tracks, making the stem of the T. Livingston is a good example of a T-town. It was a big day for a railroad town when it could claim it was no longer a "string town" with just one main street strung along the tracks.

Does your town have a central square? Then it is probably a county seat. Many (but not all) county seats featured a one-block city square that was presided over by a mighty looking—usually stone—county courthouse. The city-square



FIGURE 14.10: Most Montana towns are T-towns, X-towns, or strip towns. Simms is an exception. It is designed around the central square, with streets radiating out from the four corners of the central block. This radiant design was patterned after the city of Washington, D.C.

Paris Gibson, Town Designer

Paris Gibson, a businessman from Fort Benton, designed the City of Great Falls in 1884. He envisioned a beautiful, prosperous city along the spectacular falls of the Missouri River. He worked with James J. Hill, president of the Great Northern Railway, to make sure the railroad would serve and support his dream town. Gibson laid out the town in a grid pattern with wide boulevards lined with elm trees planted at specific intervals. Great Falls was incorporated in 1888, and Paris Gibson was its first mayor.

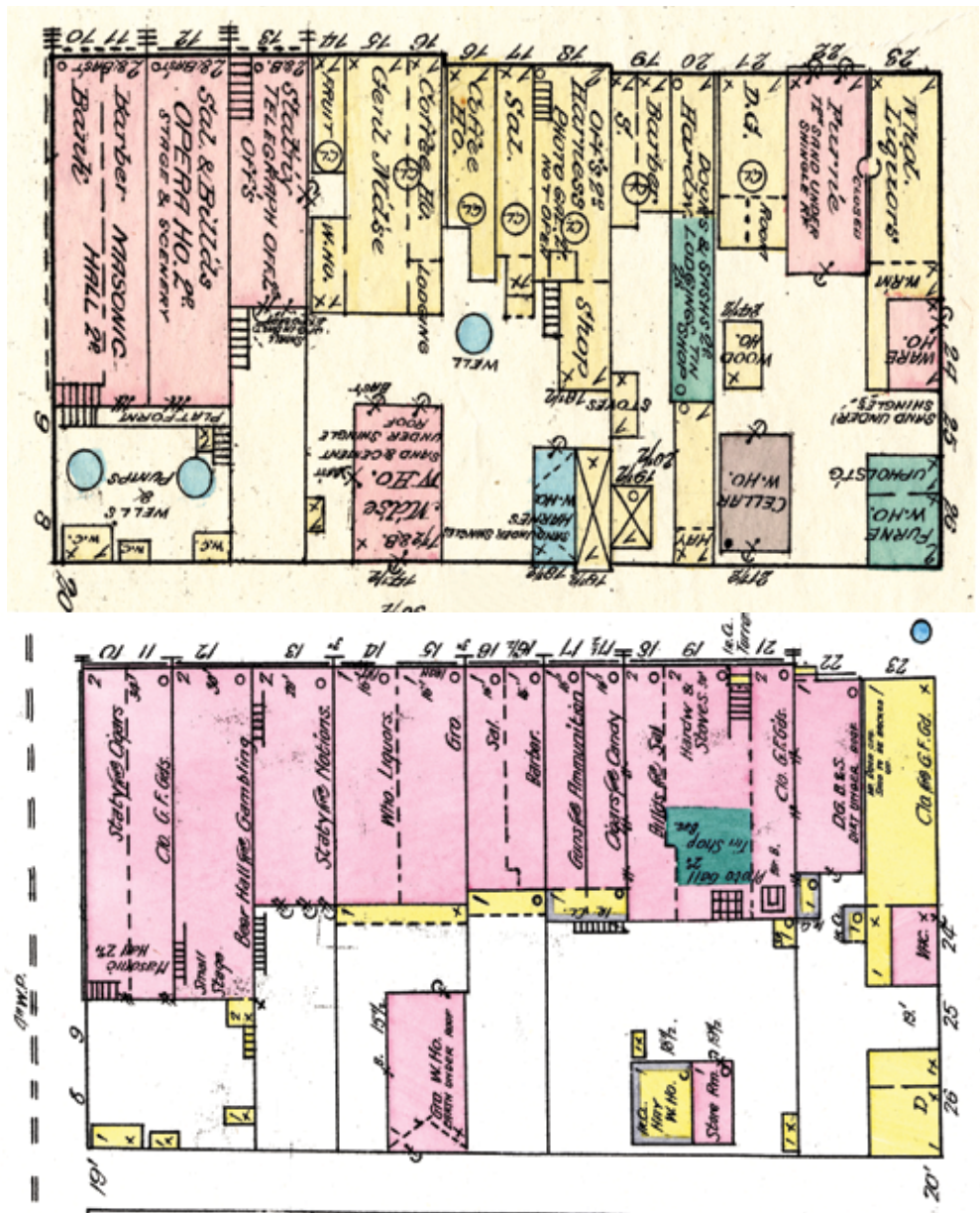
tradition, used in many towns in the East, emphasized the importance of law and order and of government within the setting of the town. Chateau is a good example of a town dominated by its courthouse square.

Tallest Buildings: Where Are They?

What (and where) were the first multistory buildings in your town? What were they made of? What do the tallest buildings in your town look like now? In most towns, tall buildings indicate the power center of a town. They tell a lot about what the town's founders did, what they hoped for their town, and what materials they had to work with.

In some towns, a bank or hotel was the first tall building. In county-seat towns, the courthouse may be the tallest building, indicating the importance of county government. In farm towns, the grain elevator might tower over everything. In smelter towns, the smelter stack dominates the skyline.

FIGURES 14.11 and 14.12: These two maps, from 1884 (top) and 1891 (bottom), show the same block of Bozeman's Main Street. The buildings colored yellow are wood, the ones colored pink are brick, and the ones colored green are metal. By 1891 brick buildings had replaced almost all of the earlier wooden buildings.



What Do the Buildings Look Like?

The way buildings look tells about a town, too. The very first commercial buildings in Montana, built in the 1860s, were log or wood-frame structures fitted with high false fronts. False fronts were important architectural elements of early boom towns because they made the main street look far more impressive and stable than it actually was.

As soon as people thought a town was here to stay, they started building in stone or brick. These materials were more expensive than wood, but less likely to burn if a neighboring building caught fire.

Architecture changed when the railroads came. Railroads allowed people to import building materials like plate-glass windows (developed in the 1880s). Large plate-glass windows allowed shopkeepers to display their goods to people passing by on the sidewalk, and they let more light into their stores.

Builders also ordered tin ceilings, iron fronts, and other iron decorations from catalogs and had them shipped in by train. Imported materials changed the way buildings looked. They made Montana look more like other parts of the country. And they let Montanans express pride in their communities by building in the most up-to-date styles.

Where Do People Gather?

Where do people gather in your town for outdoor events? On the courthouse lawn? At a park set slightly off Main Street?

In other parts of the United States, people gathered in town squares set right in the center of town. But in many Montana towns, there was no town square. People gathered right on Main Street for parades, speeches, and outdoor events.

Open spaces like courthouse squares or city parks are usually set slightly apart from the main-street area in Montana towns. That is because they usually appeared after the downtown area was already built. Cities did not always think about creating parks right away—but in the Progressive Era, and again in the 1930s, more communities began to build parks, playgrounds, and libraries (see Chapters 15 and 18).

Whether your town includes open spaces or not, where they are, and what they focus on—the town hall, school, railroad station, fairgrounds, or river—can help you figure out what the designers of your town felt about the role of outdoor gatherings and green space in the town's life.



FIGURE 14.13: To learn more about your town, look up. Architectural details around doorways and windows and at the top of buildings tell you something about the craftsmen in your community. When people were proud of their buildings, they added special touches to make them look more interesting or impressive.

“Helena, which prided itself in the 1880s as one of Montana’s model cities, had bad drinking water. Purification was primitive. When worms began coming out of faucets in Helena homes, the city council reacted by declaring the water system a public nuisance. Eventually, the water company cleaned up the system and fresh water returned.”

—WILLIAM L. LANG, *MONTANA: OUR LAND AND PEOPLE* (1979)

FIGURE 14.14: Cities provided public services like firefighting. In towns where most buildings were built of wood, fire was an almost constant threat. Here a firefighter trains his hose on a fire in downtown Billings in 1916.



What Makes a Town a Community?

What is a town? Why do we need towns? Even though towns formed around commercial activities, a town is more than its businesses. A town is an organized community of people that lies within specific boundaries (the city limits). Most towns are governed by a local government that might include a mayor, a city council, or other decision makers.

One purpose of an organized city is to provide public services like fire departments, streets and sidewalks, trolleys and buses, and garbage collection. Many towns also provide libraries, police, courts, schools, and jails. They collect taxes to finance the operation of the town for the benefit of the people living in it.

Towns also protect public health. Before the 1890s most cities dumped their sewage into nearby rivers and streams, believing that the bacteria would filter out as the water flowed downriver. The contaminated water spread diseases, and many people died of illnesses like typhoid and cholera. So cities built services like sewers and water treatment plants to keep their citizens healthy.

Building a Community

Although a city or town provides public services and structures, it takes people to make a community. To the people scratching out new lives in Montana, joining together as a community was extremely important.

Newspapers helped knit communities together by sharing information and ideas. Sometimes a newspaper started up almost as soon as a town was born.

Schools became community centers where people came to vote, to hold town meetings, and to gather for programs and dances. Tribal colleges on the reservations, built in the 1960s, also served as community centers.

Churches provided a place where people could share their beliefs, traditions, songs, and language. Churches appeared almost as soon as a town formed. Even the smallest towns often had several houses of worship. In addition to their religious functions, churches organized their members to help one another and serve the community. They raised money to build hospitals, orphanages, women’s shelters, schools, and colleges across Montana.

Fraternal Organizations: Instant Bonds

If you were moving to a new town where few people knew one another, how would you choose your friends and allies? **Fraternal** (meaning “like brothers”; sharing interests or beliefs) organizations like the Masons, the Good Templars, and the Elks, Eagles, and Moose lodges served an important purpose in young communities. If a stranger came to town who belonged to the same brotherhood you did, he was probably all right.

Ethnic brotherhoods like the Hibernians (Irish) and the Sons of Norway joined countrymen together. They also acted like insurance agencies. They paid members’ hospital bills and made sure their members got decent funerals when they died. These services were immensely important before health insurance and worker’s compensation existed.

Unions acted as the center of community life for many workers. Unions often paid widows’ benefits, funeral expenses, and hospital costs. They also held picnics, dances, sporting events, and other social activities that brought cheer and recreation to even the roughest circumstances.

You and Your Town Shape Each Other

Wherever you live, political, economic, and social forces have physically shaped your town. As you stroll through your town, you can piece together its life story from its layout, buildings, and architectural styles.

National trends and developments also shape towns. You may be able to see how **industrialization** (rapid development of industry) and immigration after 1900 shaped many of the buildings and neighborhoods of Montana. Your town may have been shaped by a railroad, even if trains do not stop there anymore. And the towns around you may still have buildings that were abandoned in the economic depression of the 1920s and 1930s.

What happened to your closest downtown when improved roads, highways, and big shopping centers appeared in the 1960s and 1970s? More recently, how have large retail chains transformed your town’s layout and shopping patterns?

National and statewide trends are not the only thing to shape towns. People shape their towns, too. Here is an example. In Butte, the Berkeley Pit swallowed up whole sections of the town—and some of the small towns on its outskirts. But in the 1970s the people of Butte decided that their uptown area was worth saving. Despite pressure from the Anaconda Company,

FIGURE 14.16: City health departments sometimes put people in **quarantine** (isolation) to protect the public from dangerous diseases. But not everybody liked it. In 1921 Howard Hockersmith grew very tired of being confined to his home in Square Butte, Cascade County, while quarantined with smallpox.



FIGURE 14.15: People in towns lived close enough together that they got electricity much sooner than people who lived in the country. These workers are stringing power poles in Libby in July 1911.



the Butte City Council voted not to let the copper mine destroy the business district. Today, historic uptown Butte is part of a National Historic Landmark—a place officially recognized for its historical significance to the nation.

The historic preservation movement has helped many towns across Montana shift from a natural resource economy to a tourist economy. For example, Philipsburg was once a silver-mining town. Now it relies on tourists who come to enjoy its mining history. Residents have restored the historic downtown, and Philipsburg is now one of the most photographed towns in Montana.

But it does not take a movement to change your town. People change their towns by their everyday habits and activities. Whether you usually drive, walk, or ride a bike shapes your town's traffic patterns. Where your family shops for groceries and supplies influences which stores will survive. Where people buy and build houses, where they get their water and power, and how they spend their money all affect how your town will change. And how you and your neighbors create beauty—in landscaping, architecture, public art, and other ways—will also affect the future of your town.

Just as your town has been shaped by people and events in its past, you are shaping Montana history now by what you, your family, and your neighbors do every day.

FIGURE 14.17: What better way to celebrate the 1920 Elks convention than a large statue of an elk straddling the streets of downtown Butte? Clubs and fraternal organizations made their presence known in many ways. The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks started in 1868 and became an active service club, raising money for charities nationwide.



Expressions of the People

Sports

Howard Cosell, a famous sports journalist, once said, "Sports is the toy department of human life." From traditional tribal games to modern basketball tournaments, sports have always been a central part of community life.

On Sundays (the only day miners did not work), mining camps held baseball games or bare-knuckle boxing matches. One of the longest bare-knuckle fights in history took place at Virginia City in January 1865 when two competitors went 185 rounds.

Montana formed its first statewide baseball league in 1893. Soon nearly every town had a baseball team. Rivalries between neighboring towns boosted community spirit. Some—like the rivalry between Scobey and Plentywood—gained legendary proportions. In 1925 businessmen in both towns hired former professional ballplayers to play for their town teams. Sell-out crowds watched two former members of the Chicago White Sox lead Scobey to victory that season.

During the Great Depression, people needed something to cheer about. The game—any good game—created a world in which anything was possible. More than 1,300 people turned out to watch the Plentywood Wildcats defend their district basketball title in 1938.

Before World War II most boys and girls went to work after eighth grade. But in the 1950s high school attendance skyrocketed. High school sports became even more important.



FIGURE 14.18: More girls played sports in the 1920s than in the 1950s. Here, members of the Havre girls' football team of 1924 pose with their coach.



FIGURE 14.19: Members of the Libby High School freshman football team give the varsity Loggers a chain saw salute in this 2007 photo.

High school sports teams helped Montana towns build and solidify their identities. The teams gave themselves mascot names that showcased their towns' industry and their skills. Libby (which started as a timber town) fields the Loggers and celebrates at halftime with a chain saw salute. The former railroading community of Harlowton boasts the Engineers. People in the oil town of Sunburst root for the Refiners. In Big Timber they cheer on the Sheep Herders. And even though the sugar beet factory is long gone, the Chinook Sugar Beetlers still take the field every fall.

Sports—especially basketball—play a big role in the life of Montana's Indian reservations. Schools on five of Montana's seven Indian reservations have won state basketball cham-

pionships. Many reservation towns have fewer resources and fewer forms of entertainment than other towns. Sometimes basketball becomes the main focus of the whole tribe—especially at tournament time.

Over the years Montana's tribes have fielded some outstanding players like Assiniboine player Garrett Big Leggins of the Frazer Bearcubs, who scored 28 points in 14 field goals in the first five minutes of a district tournament game in Glasgow in 1952. In one 1959 game, George Yellow Eyes of Miles City scored 8 points in one minute of the fourth quarter. (His team won division championship that year.)

Cheering for the home team, watching athletes excel in competition, joining together in the thrill of a good game—these experiences have united people in communities for generations. They are a big part of the life of your town.

“Sports gives people in a community a common identity. The more difficult circumstances are for the community, the more important the role of sports becomes.”

—ROBERT SWARTOUT, HISTORY PROFESSOR, CARROLL COLLEGE

CHAPTER 14 REVIEW

► CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. Identify: (a) interstate highway system; (b) strip town; (c) historic preservation movement
2. Define: (a) census; (b) commerce; (c) plat; (d) capital; (e) communal; (f) grain elevators; (g) stockyards
3. Why did Montana's population grow so quickly between 1890 and 1920?
4. Why are many Montana towns named after European cities?
5. What were the three main factors that led to the creation of Montana towns?
6. What caused towns like Fort Benton to lose their importance?
7. Why did railroad companies need to build towns?
8. What kinds of towns were affected by the boom-and-bust cycle?
9. Why did some agricultural towns die?
10. How did roads change farming communities?
11. What was the main difference between the purpose of most reservation towns and non-reservation towns?
12. Describe three main designs for towns.
13. How did the coming of the railroad change the architecture of towns?
14. What are some of the public services a town might provide?
15. What factors often contribute to a sense of community within a town?

► CRITICAL THINKING

1. Discuss **demographics** (statistics characterizing human populations). How might they reflect the origin of a town?
2. Analyze why some towns survive and others do not. Do you think "special purpose" communities have a greater or a lesser chance of survival than cities created for one of the other main reasons discussed in the chapter? Why or why not?
3. How do you and your friends and family define your community? Is the community your school? Your neighborhood? Your town? What brings you together as a group?

► PAST TO PRESENT

1. Towns in the early 1900s were important social and business centers. Do towns serve those same functions today? Do you think that it is easier or more difficult to build a sense of community today than it was 100 years ago?
2. Schools have traditionally been one of the most important factors in building a sense of community within a town. Today, many school districts are looking at **consolidation** (combining several schools into one). How do you think this affects communities?
3. Why was your town founded (for example, mining, agriculture, the railroad)? Compare that to its main reason for existing today.
4. What is the National Register of Historic Places? Why do some people think historic buildings are worth preserving?

► MAKE IT LOCAL

1. Research the history of your town. How has it changed over the years, and what caused these changes?
2. Find out what businesses lined your main street in past decades by using Sanborn maps and Polk City directories. How are these buildings used now?
3. Find out if any properties in your community are listed in the National Register of Historic Places.
4. Research the story of a large disaster (earthquake, flood, or fire) that affected your community.

► EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Plan a city. Decide what things are most important to the people of your imaginary community, and then make sure to design your city to meet your community's needs.
2. Develop a tour of some of your community's historic places.
3. Create an exhibit featuring your high school's sports history.
4. Create a poster or PowerPoint presentation—using your own photographs—showing how people have added beauty to your town through landscaping, architecture, and/or public art.

Credits

The following abbreviations are used in the credits:

BBHC Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming
GNPA Glacier National Park Archives
LOC Library of Congress
MAC Montana Arts Council, Helena
MDEQ Montana Department of Environmental Quality, Helena
MDT Montana Department of Transportation, Helena
MFWP Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Helena
MHS Montana Historical Society, Helena
MHSA Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena
MHSL Montana Historical Society Library, Helena
MHS Mus. Montana Historical Society Museum, Helena
MHS PA Montana Historical Society Photograph Archives, Helena
MSU COT Montana State University College of Technology, Billings
NMAI National Museum American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
MSU Billings Special Collections, Montana State University Billings Library
NARA National Archives and Records Administration
NPS National Park Service
NRIS Natural Resource Information System, Montana State Library, Helena
SHPO State Historic Preservation Office, Montana Historical Society, Helena
TM Travel Montana, Helena
UM Missoula Archives & Special Collections, The University of Montana-Missoula
USDA United States Department of Agriculture
USFS United States Forest Service
WMM World Museum of Mining, Butte

Chapter 14

- FIG. 14.1 Detail, "Great Falls, Montana: Its situation, surrounding resources, railroad and river connections, 1893" (O. C. Mortson, ca. 1893), MHSL Map A-335
- FIG. 14.2 Main Street, Garnet, MT, 1899, MHS PA 947-521
- FIG. 14.3 Population growth chart, created from U.S. Census data
- FIG. 14.4 Aerial view, Glendive, MT, photo by Roy Swan, MHS PA 947-708
- FIG. 14.5 Poster, MHS Mus. 1980.61.109
- FIG. 14.6 Black Eagle Dam, courtesy of Pacific Power and Light Co., Great Falls
- FIG. 14.7 Sheep in Sheridan, MT, 1942, photo by Russell Lee, courtesy LOC, USW3-009659-D
- FIG. 14.8 Crow Camp near Crow Agency, 1895, MHS PA 955-814
- FIG. 14.9 Fairhaven Colony, Cascade County, MT, photo by Steve Shirley, Helena
- FIG. 14.10 Simms, MT, courtesy NRIS
- FIG. 14.11 Detail, *Bozeman, Mont., Nov. 1884* (Sanborn Map and Publishing Co., New York, 1885), p. 2, Map Coll., MHSL
- FIG. 14.12 Detail, *Bozeman, Mont., Nov. 1891* (Sanborn-Perris Map Co. Limited: New York, 1892), p. 3, Map Coll., MHSL
- FIG. 14.13 Gargoyles on Atlas Building, Helena, photo by Geoffrey Wyatt, Helena
- FIG. 14.14 Cardell Lumber Company fire, 1916, Billings, courtesy Western Heritage Center, Billings
- FIG. 14.15 Stringing the first electrical wires in Libby, MT, 1911, MHS PA PAc 97-14.8
- FIG. 14.16 Howard Hockersmith in quarantine near Square Butte, ca. 1921, courtesy The History Museum, Great Falls
- FIG. 14.17 Large elk in downtown Butte, courtesy Dr. William E. Farr, Missoula
- FIG. 14.18 Havre girls' football team, 1924, photo by Brainerd, MHS PA Al Lucke Coll. 948-415
- FIG. 14.19 Libby Loggers' chain saw salute, photo by Paul Sievers, *Western News* (Libby) 2007