Cultural Landscape Development and Tourism in Historic Mining Towns of the Western United States

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Geography

By
Alison L. Hotten

Dr. Gary J. Hausladen/Thesis Advisor

May, 2011
We recommend that the thesis
prepared under our supervision by

ALISON L. HOTTEN

entitled

Cultural Landscape Development And Tourism In Historic Mining Towns Of The
Western United States

be accepted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Gary J. Hausladen, Ph.D., Advisor

Paul F. Starrs, Ph.D., Committee Member

Alicia Barber, Ph.D., Graduate School Representative

Marsha H. Read, Ph. D., Associate Dean, Graduate School

May, 2011
Abstract

This thesis examines the development of the cultural landscape of western mining towns following the transition from an economy based on mining to one based on tourism. The primary case studies are Bodie, California, Virginia City, Nevada, and Cripple Creek, Colorado. Each one is an example of highly successful tourism that has developed in a historic mining town, as well as illustrating changes in the cultural landscape related to this tourism. The main themes that these three case studies represent, respectively, are the ghost town, the standard western tourist attraction, and the gambling mecca.

The development of the landscape for tourism is not just commercial, but relates to the preservation of history and authenticity in the landscape; each town was designated as a Historic District in 1961. An important part of this research is the role of popular culture and the mythic West and how these concepts have influenced the physical and cultural landscape of the mining town. All of the case examples are affected, to a certain extent, by general ideas about the nature of a western mining town, as well as popular knowledge specific to the site.
| 1 | Introduction | 1 |
| 2 | Methodology and Literature Review | 17 |
| 3 | Historic Designation and Authenticity | 26 |
| 4 | The Historic Landscape of the Mining Town | 39 |
| 5 | Bodie: Landscape as a Museum Display | 55 |
| 6 | Virginia City: The Commercialized Historic District | 72 |
| 7 | Cripple Creek: Gaming Tourism in the Historic District | 87 |
| 8 | Conclusion | 107 |
|   | Bibliography | 112 |
## List of Figures

1.1 Cripple Creek, Colorado, town entrance ........................................ 1
1.2 Headstone for Wyatt Earp in Virginia City, Nevada ......................... 3
1.3 Regional map of Western United States ........................................ 5
3.1 National Register criteria for evaluation ....................................... 32
4.1 Detail of 1890 Sanborn map for Virginia City, Nevada ..................... 43
4.2 Detail of 1908 Sanborn map for Cripple Creek, Colorado ................. 44
4.3 Cast iron pillars in facades, Virginia City, Nevada ........................ 45
4.4 A false-fronted building, Virginia City, Nevada ......................... 46
4.5 The Standard stamp mill in Bodie, California .............................. 49
5.1 Arranged kitchen in Bodie State Historic Park ............................... 55
5.2 Timeline of Bodie history and population .................................... 56
5.3 Visitors peek inside a building in Bodie State Historic Park ............ 67
5.4 Two former commercial buildings in Bodie ................................ 69
5.5 Items arranged in the window of Bodie’s schoolhouse ...................... 70
6.1 Virginia City Outlaws Wild West Show ...................................... 72
6.2 Timeline of Virginia City history and population .......................... 73
6.3 Virginia City’s cemetery ............................................................ 80
6.4 The Bonanza Casino and Café in Virginia City ............................ 82
6.5 Bank of America in Virginia City ............................................... 85
7.1 Cripple Creek District Museum ................................................... 87
7.2 Timeline of Cripple Creek history and population .......................... 88
7.3 Map of “Nugget” casinos in Nevada ............................................ 90
7.4 Kenny Rogers-themed slot machine ............................................. 91
7.5 Map of Cripple Creek casinos .................................................. 96
7.6 Facades along Bennett Avenue, Cripple Creek ................................ 100
7.7 Parking lots in Cripple Creek .................................................... 104
7.8 The Midnight Rose parking structure, Cripple Creek ...................... 105
1. Introduction

Many mining towns in the American West share a common history – the development of mining claims and stamp mills; tent-cities growing into urban centers within months; the coming of the railroad, post office, and stage routes; and the boom and bust of population following initial speculation and the later decline of profits. While relatively few of the old western mining towns remain, especially in unforgiving terrains like that of Nevada, the development of the mining town into a site of tourism has changed the cultural landscape more than many visitors realize.

In the mind of many Americans, the days of mining in the West long since came to an end, now a part of history and the frontier experience. Modern mining operations in the western states no longer resemble common perceptions of old western mining, but instead are in many ways indistinguishable from eastern operations because of

![Fig. 1.1. The silhouette of a prospector and his pack mule mark the entrance to the Cripple Creek Historic District, Colorado. Photo by David Shankbone, Wikimedia Commons.](image-url)
standardized technology, procedures, and safety measures. No longer does the lone prospector wander the vast desert with his pack-mule, pick, and coffeepot, panning for gold in an isolated streambed. This romantic, albeit inaccurate and stereotypical, image has been replaced by technology and geophysical survey work that in no way represents the individual fortitude or ingenuity of an American forging his way on the Frontier. 19th and 20th century mines were a source of impressive technological innovations, while modern large-scale operations are accused of using technology to destroy the earth. As Richard Francaviglia points out, there is often animosity toward destructive mining activities, which are “regarded with nostalgia only after they are finished” (1991, 205).

Historic mining in many parts of the West is now romanticized and idealized into a tourist experience that emphasizes a mythic past. Popular history has favored the exploitation of certain dramatic, memorable events and characters in the history of each town, or has even borrowed these features from the popular legends of other western towns; one business in Virginia City has crudely fashioned wooden headstones for Wyatt Earp and Billy the Kid on its doorstep (Fig 1.2), and the “Wild West Show,” a staged shoot-out, gives credit to Tombstone. As James Loewen discusses in *Lies across America* (1999), “history wars” are also common where multiple communities attempt to claim an important event or character as part of their own heritage, such as the disputes over both Buffalo Bill Cody and Wild Bill Hickok’s final resting places.

Part of the intention of this thesis is to show the role of popular culture and history in the development of the mining town into a tourist attraction that capitalizes on the
community’s history of mining. The American West, a mythic concept, has been an important part of pop culture since it gained popularity through dime novels in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The dime novel helped to establish character archetypes that would soon be adopted in Western films: the cowboy hero, gunslinger, vigilante, outlaw, bandit, Indian, prostitute, lawman, gambler, drunkard, and robber baron, to name a few. The 1903 film The Great Train Robbery marked the start of an era of the Western in film, a medium that quickly popularized the Western genre. The cowboy became a nationally

---

1 As opposed to towns where the mining history is incidental to the development of tourism, such as the number of Rocky Mountain mining towns that are ski resorts today; this includes Aspen, Vail, and Telluride in Colorado, as well as Red Lodge, Montana.
recognized hero by the 1930s, and “people around the world readily recognized the
cowboy as the symbol not only of the West but of America” (Christensen 2002).

Although the popularity of the Western has waxed and waned over the years, it
has continued to be an important genre up to the present day, with recent films like No
Country for Old Men (2007), the True Grit remake (2010), 3:10 to Yuma (2007), and
even the family film Rango (2011). The stories told in contemporary film and print are
creative reinterpretations of the classic-era western, expanding into genres like
steampunk, fantasy, and science fiction, as in the case of Wild Wild West (1999), Jonah
Hex (2010), Serenity (2005), and Back to the Future Part III (1990). The wide-spread
recognition of the images conveyed through western film, television, and print over the
last century has had an influence on the landscape.

While popular culture plays a significant role in shaping the western mining town,
it is not the main argument of this thesis. Emphasis is on the changing cultural landscape,
looking at themes in landscape management and historical preservation as they relate to
the history and pseudo-history of the region. Three case studies exemplify major themes
of tourism and landscape management that have arisen from the western mining town:
Virginia City, Nevada; Bodie, California; and Cripple Creek, Colorado. All three of these
case studies are Historic Districts under the National Historic Landmarks Program and
the National Register of Historic Places. Virginia City serves as an example of a standard
historical tourist attraction, a historic site preserved for tourism; Bodie, California, as the
abandoned ghost town turned museum display; and Cripple Creek, Colorado, as the
historic district with an economy renewed by gambling. In the process of addressing
these case studies, examples of secondary importance will be referenced to support
Fig. 1.3. Regional map of the western United States showing the location of sites discussed in this thesis. Map by author. ArcGIS projection: USA Contiguous Albers equal area conic USGS.
discussions, as indicated in figure 1.3.

Clues to the cultural history of each town are apparent in the landscape and in the amenities available to visitors. More than that, however, the visitor sees a representation of the Wild West, a historical landscape that has been peppered with thematic decorations and selective preservation efforts in order to convey the essence and character of the town in its physical appearance. In some cases, visitors’ expectations play a major role in the changing cultural landscape, as in the examples of Red Lodge, Montana, and Virginia City where business owners covered building facades with unpainted vertical clapboard to mimic scenes from popular western films and television.

The tourist should not be understood as a negative force, though, since catering to visitors’ expectations doesn’t always mean a shift away from authenticity in the landscape. Instead, it can reinforce preservation efforts and the accuracy of the history presented. Bodie is a prime example of this, as illustrated in Dydia Delyser’s journal article *Authenticity on the Ground: Engaging the Past in a California Ghost Town* (1999). Delyser spoke with many visitors to Bodie State Historic Park who admired the authenticity of the town, where they felt they could “see things the way they really were” (617). In comparison, the visitors expressed dismay over the commercialisation of other historic sites: “There are so many of these Virginia Cities around… there the buildings are all painted-up, fixed-up, beautiful buildings with everybody trying to sell everything from T-shirts to hot dogs” (617).

Several authors, including Hal Rothman (1998) and Ronald James (1998), refer to tourism as an extraction industry, using a metaphor appropriate to the mining town: the tourist is a resource to be mined until the resource is exhausted, often implying that the
small town must sell itself in any and all ways possible to maximize profits before the mother lode runs dry. This sense of desperation to do whatever it takes to extract money from the tourist is usually an exaggeration, though it is apparent in cases where a community believes its fame is fleeting. In the case of Virginia City, popularization of the town through media – most notably the show *Bonanza* – led to a boom of visitors. Many business owners and investors aimed to make as much money as possible before popularity waned, instead of aiming to create an experience that the tourist would want to revisit (James 1998). As mentioned, this led to many owners covering the facades of their brick buildings with rustic-looking clapboard to imitate the West that Americans had seen in *Bonanza*. T-shirts and trinkets were sold to visitors, as opposed to the nobler goal of preserving the site’s unique, authentic history and presenting it in as accurate a form as possible. Later eras saw the removal of these wood facades and preservation efforts to restore the town to a more authentic aesthetic. Along with a number of stores hawking tourist wares, a variety of museums now exist in the town.

Often the formation of a community heritage museum or a written history is one of the first things to emerge from a town that relies on a dying resource economy, since an established history can encourage tourism to the town and legitimize historic designation and preservation efforts. The goal is not necessarily directly related to tourism, but can instead be the result of residents’ efforts to preserve some record of the town as well as personal memories before they are lost forever. Ella M. Cain and Warren Loose both wrote books about Bodie, for example, which combined stories and memories with accounts of historic events. Neither author critically examined the town’s history,
nor relied on extensive research, which meant that neither work was entirely accurate.\(^2\) However, both books still helped to popularize Bodie’s history. Marshall Sprague, as a reason for writing *Money Mountain* in 1953, laments “Cripple Creek never had a good press agent. Virginia City had Mark Twain… the Klondike had Jack London” (xii). A history, especially a popular history, can play an important role in the town’s future.

The community museum can be a reason to visit a town, a road-trip stop, a visitor’s center, and a central feature of a community. Just the same as written histories, however, not all are created equal in terms of accuracy, quality, and reputation. The history that is presented can be biased, as in the case of a number of company mining towns where the company creates a museum that touts their own accomplishments and ignores unflattering facets of history. The National Mining Hall of Fame and Museum in Leadville, Colorado, is an example included in *Lies Across America*. The author refers to the museum experience as “watching an industry pat itself on the back” (Loewen 1999, 118) as it emphasizes the role of the mining industry in the development of the United States’ economic growth and prosperity while ignoring ethnic groups, organized labor, dangers involved in mining, and the environmental consequences of mining, among other issues. Problems arise when the visitor cannot easily determine whether the history presented at the museum is authentic, complete, and accurate, which occurs when they have no prior knowledge of the site; Scott Magelssen notes the danger of this where a site might convincingly claim “to be real history by virtue of their attention to detail” (2007, xii).

\(^2\) Cain’s work, for example, exaggerated the peak population of Bodie based on her personal experience.
History can save the touristic mining town from Disneyesque commercialization; however, the cultural landscape cannot avoid change during the process of developing a tourism economy. The transition to tourism as the primary economy of the town is not just a different means of income; it’s often a means for survival of the town. In most cases, a community can save itself from economic failure by capitalizing on its history, and by extension can save the historic architecture of the town. Furthermore, when the economy is based on selling the town’s history, it is advantageous to ensure that the history is well-represented in the landscape, whether through the architecture, monuments, or plaques. In a sense, the town sells history and history is the means by which other things are sold.

The optimist would emphasize tourist experiences and interactions with history, authenticity, and community heritage, all of which encourage the town’s survival. Meanwhile a pessimist would cite capitalism, rampant commercialization, and the subsequent loss of the vital character of the town. When it comes to the historic landscape, commercialization is a dirty word. Some would consider it to be a necessary evil, but others would argue that the means do not justify the end, especially when they do not even accomplish that end. The debate over commercial development in the historic district will be addressed in more detail in relation to each of the three case-study sites in chapters five through seven.

What do entrepreneurs in mining towns use to sell their wares? Often stories and exaggerations in one form or another, whether it is through re-enactments of events,

---

3 In-depth discussion of what exactly is being sold in the western mining town will be addressed in detail in each of the case studies.
historical plaques, or word-of-mouth, add to the local lore and lure. The tourist isn’t just buying a souvenir, there’s a story behind the souvenir. Tales in sync with the old West character of the mining town are more memorable, and as such they are more likely to be passed on, just as urban legends are. Fallacious information that is surprising and interesting, especially in the form of a story, is more likely to be remembered. It is easy for it to be taken as a fact if there is some authority or credible nature to the tale, such as references to statistics or quotes – even if these too are fallacious (Heath and Heath 2007).

While the urban legend is generally a story that “didn’t happen to me, but happened to my cousin’s friend’s boyfriend,” the mining town took story-telling to a different level. The West, among other things, is a place where mythology and reality blend together, as shown with the writings of Mark Twain and Dan DeQuille in Virginia City. “One cannot truly create so simple a dichotomy between the ‘real’ or historic West and the mythic West. That would imply that the two can be readily separated, whereas, in fact, they have been in many ways mutually constitutive” (DeLyser 2003, 5).

Exaggerations of population size, a mine’s wealth, or the violent nature of life in the mining town is common, and in some cases is the result of 19th and early 20th century boosterism: larger populations implied a prosperous metropolis, and reports of large mine yields encouraged investment. The press was an important feature of the mining town, which often had more than one local newspaper, because their articles would spread news of the mining district to nearby cities or even across the nation. The diffusion of news across the nation – and even internationally – is illustrated by Mark Twain’s various hoaxes in Virginia City’s *Territorial Enterprise*. It was common for the local papers to
print satire and fictitious stories as entertainment. Twain wrote a gruesome article about a man who massacred his whole family and scalped his red-headed wife (Twain 1863). The next day the paper printed a follow-up article conceding that the story was a hoax; the man was a well-known bachelor and a local bartender, so his patrons soon discovered that he was, in fact, alive. But it was too late, the sensational story had spread across Nevada and California, and was reprinted verbatim in papers in San Francisco and Sacramento, that later expressed outrage over the deceit (Lyman 1934).

It’s easy to call showy attractions like those of Tombstone, Arizona, ‘inauthentic’ because of rampant commercialization and to point out discrepancies between “real” history and the history presented to tourists. Inauthentic representations and showmanship is nothing new, and in many western towns it dates back far enough in the town’s history that it might in fact be considered an authentic tradition. Bodie, for example, tried to live up to the reputation of the popular phrase “the bad man from Bodie” by staging a shoot-out for an important writer visiting the town in the nineteenth century. After a point, Bodie tried to claim the image of lawlessness, a rough and rowdy “man for breakfast every morning” town. In reality, the crime rate in Bodie was actually lower than many East-coast cities, though the nature of the crimes tended more towards dramatic brawls and shoot-outs; while not particularly unusual, the town gained a reputation (Sprague 2003). It is often the case that in mining towns, especially those notorious for violence and rowdiness, the myth far surpasses reality.

Robert Guilford Taylor, in his book Cripple Creek, notes that there was tourism in the town as early as 1900. Tourism is not a modern invention, nor is visiting the mining town a new thing; however, the motivations for doing so have changed. Today we
generally visit the western mining town as a historic landscape, while in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, people visited the mining landscape to observe the famous, prosperous mines and the technological wonders associated with these grand operations. This involved the technology directly involved in mining in some cases, but not always. Virginia City experienced an increase in tourism after 1869 related to the Virginia and Truckee Railroad line and the impressive five hundred foot long trestle, which was a tourist attraction in itself (James 1998).

The three towns chosen for this thesis each represent a different theme in cultural landscape management while also sharing several characteristics important to defining a successful tourist experience in a former mining community. The most important of these characteristics is location. Of obvious importance is the fact that these towns are in the western United States. While there are American-West-themed tourist communities in the eastern United States, or even in other countries – for example, the tourist attractions in the Tabernas Desert based on the filming locations for Spaghetti Westerns – the fact that these three towns are in the American West gives them an element of authenticity and historic authority that is not present in the western-themed historical recreations of other regions. Even historic recreations of the West in the American West are granted more authenticity than those in other regions just by virtue of location.

At a smaller scale, the relative location and environment surrounding each town is important to maintaining the western image of the town. When it comes to the climate and physical landscape, the visitor often expects the formidable barren, dry lands they associate with the West. Part of this includes isolation. The towns are all isolated from modern urban environments, if not by extreme distances then by physical and visual
barriers like mountain ranges. In all cases the towns are surrounded by views of wild landscapes of sagebrush, mountains, and valleys.

For example, on the way to Virginia City, which is a mere 23 miles from downtown Reno, the visitor traveling Highway 341 will overlook the valley containing the city of Reno for most of the drive. The town of Virginia City itself is tucked behind Mount Davidson and has a “hundred-mile view” of uninhabited basin-and-range landscape stretching out to the east of the town. Towns like Aspen, Colorado, have a history of mining and modern history of tourism; however, the large urban environment that has grown up around the former historic mining detracts from an authentic experience of a mining town.

The three case-study towns were all built on the wealth of a precious metal strike. This is an important factor in choosing the towns as research topics for four main reasons. First, the towns have legitimate claims to an extended and influential history of mining unlike smaller mining operations that have attempted to capitalize on their mining history, or western towns that have been successful by means of vicarious association with mining activity. Second is that the size of each strike and its role in its respective region meant that each of these sites has had significant influences on popular culture at one time or another. The most apparent example of this is Virginia City and the popular television show *Bonanza*. Third, even the largest strike of a non-precious metal generally fails to captivate the imagination like the gold and silver strikes of Bodie, Virginia City, and Cripple Creek. The fourth and most important reason is that mining towns – especially those in the West – have distinctive patterns of growth and historic architecture due to rapid development and unique economic conditions. This is an important topic that
forms the basis for many of the current features in historic mining towns, and will be addressed at length in the following section.

Today these three towns are essentially completely reliant on the tourist service economy. No one lives in Bodie, which is a California State Historic Park supported by visitor admission fees, but if it had been abandoned to natural forces and unregulated sightseeing, the town probably would not exist today. Cripple Creek and Virginia City have a population that relies on the success of the town. Many of the residents are employed by the businesses in the town, or are business owners themselves. In many ways the development of the communities are limited, often as a means of preserving an image, but also as a result of economic and political pressures. The town may not have a grocery store, or it may have one that isn’t situated on the main street of town. It most certainly isn’t a Safeway or Wal-Mart; corporate chains and architecture are difficult to find in this kind of community. In the case of towns where gambling has been legalized, most of the commercial buildings available were quickly filled with a frenzy of casinos. Even the most basic amenities may be difficult to find in the casino-dominated landscape.

The three case-study towns are each representative of a different path taken in the preservation, development, and presentation of a mining town that has made the transition to a tourism economy. In each case, the town is not necessarily unique, nor is it the most extreme example of its kind. Cripple Creek was one of three Colorado mining towns to adopt legalized gambling, but has developed in moderation compared to Black Hawk. In turn, Cripple Creek has been developed far more than Deadwood, South Dakota, where gambling is also legalized. Each of the historic mining towns where gambling has been legalized have shared similar changes in building preservation and
landscape management. Cripple Creek is used as the primary case study as far as it illustrates these major influences on the cultural landscape of a mining town-turned-gambling Mecca.

Bodie, California, is one of the most famous and popular ghost towns in the United States, which is at least partially attributable to the arrested-deterioration (or arrested-decay) preservation work done to maintain the site since it became a State Historic Park in 1962. The mining ghost town is a popular feature of the West, because it emphasizes the contrast between the boom days of mineral extraction and the economic bust. It is also seen as an explorable historic artifact, often believed to be unaltered from its original state, except for natural decay. Deterioration is expected in the ghost town, hence the decision with Bodie to preserve the landscape by arrested decay, rather than actively restore any part of the park. The techniques and mentality behind its preservation make it an interesting study site. Bodie is unique because it is part of the State Historic Park system, and is the best-preserved example of a ghost town. The majority of ghost towns have been lost to time. Once abandoned by the majority of their population, they either succumbed to the elements, or were stripped for building materials.

Virginia City, Nevada, mimics more common themes in building and landscape preservation throughout the nation, as well as those commonly seen in western towns that have at one time or another engaged in tourism. Many mining towns in the West have turned to tourism – including Jerome, Tombstone, Bisbee, and Oatman in Arizona alone – though the degree to which they have commercialized varies. Tombstone is at the high end of that scale, as a town that was mainly restored and rebuilt to cater to a tourist economy. On the other end of the scale, towns like Tonopah, Nevada, have mining-
related attractions but also have an active economic sector that is not based on their mining history. Virginia City is a representative case study because the emphasis on and importance of its mining history is conveyed through the landscape. Virginia City in many ways fits the national model of Main Street preservation, where the main street is the central feature maintained as a historic representation of the community.
Chapter 2. Methodology and Literature Review

This study employs a number of sources to collect information on the history and contemporary trends related to each of the three case studies. Sources on tourism, the mythic West, and popular culture are applied in the examination of the towns’ histories from the perspective of the tourist economy and influences on the cultural landscape. Sources include academic literature, novels, and articles, as well as incorporating tourist literature such as brochures, signs, and websites, and official records like those kept by the Colorado Department of Revenue.

In addition, a number of maps and photography will be used to supplement the text. In addition – where appropriate – graphs, tables, and timelines will be included. While this thesis examines changes in the cultural landscape, it will not include comparisons of historic and contemporary photography, or rephotography for this purpose. The focus is more on general patterns than specific instances of change, and specific examples will be cited as they relate to more general or important themes. Maps will be used in several ways: to convey information about the locations discussed, specific landmarks within towns, and the layout of the towns; and to show regional patterns relating to topics such as the legalization of gambling nation-wide.

Academic research provides the theoretical and historic basis for this thesis, but there is also a portion of research that is of a more subjective nature. This thesis will incorporate personal experience and observations into the interpretation of the towns, as gathered from fieldwork. Fieldwork includes travel to each of the three main sites, as well as many of the secondary examples, taking photographs, engaging in tourist activities, and otherwise observing the towns. For example, in Bodie engaging in tourist activities
meant taking the Standard stamp mill tour, walking tours, and exploring the area.

The two following chapters will establish the basis for discussion of the three case studies: the historical patterns that have shaped the development of western mining towns, and topics related to historic preservation and authenticity. The three case study chapters will expand on the relevant history and current state of the mining towns that are the primary cases. Within the context of these case studies, the thesis will develop on the specific issues relating to landscape management that are associated with each respective town, major changes that have occurred in the landscape, and the role of tourism and the mythic West in influencing management practices.

It is relevant that there is a gap in literature surrounding the topic of tourism in historic mining towns. In most cases, literature about tourism and the West is either too specific (i.e., focused on a certain town: Christensen 2002; Clements 2003), or too wide-ranging (focused on conceptual problems like the mythic West, sublimity, etc… Garreau 1981; Hausladen 2003; Nye 1994). In each case the author provides clues to the nature of tourism in western mining towns, and also often addresses the changing cultural landscape; however, they do not address this particular issue in great detail. Richard Francaviglia has done the most important work on the mining town as an often-neglected part of America’s heritage landscape in *Hard Places* (1991), but the work has a limited discussion when it comes to tourism in the historic mining town. His work also only briefly recognizes the emergence of gambling in western mining towns like Deadwood and Cripple Creek, which is to be expected considering that the book was published in
1991; the earliest mining town to legalize gaming⁴ was Deadwood in 1989, followed by three Colorado towns in 1991. At the time, there were no clear indications of the long-term consequences of the legalization of gaming in a historic mining town.

The literature available also tends to examine western tourism from the perspective of ranching and related activities like dude ranching and rodeos, neglecting the importance of mining in the region’s history (Christensen 2002; Rothman 1998). While many people first and foremost associate the West with ranching and cowboys, the abundance of mining and mining-related attractions should not be ignored. Nor should one ignore the prolific use of mining themes, imagery, and history to promote communities in the West.

Moreover, many academic studies on historic preservation, heritage, and tourism focus on East-coast locations, especially New-England villages and sites like Colonial Williamsburg, which reflect patriotic themes in American history (Levin 2007; Magelssen 2007). While the Mythic West is definitely a strong, symbolic part of America, it is representative of Turnerian themes of independence, ingenuity, and endurance more than founding-father virtues and patriotism, and in this sense it deserves separate treatment as a region.

There are four main topics in literature that are important for this research, which in many cases overlap: history, the mythic American West and popular culture, historic preservation, and tourism. History is mainly used to establish context within the region and for particular sites, since my focus is more on the events, policies, and other factors

---

⁴ Excluding the state of Nevada, where gambling was legal 1869-1910, and from 1931 to present.
that have contributed to the state of the cultural landscape in modern times. When it comes to the history of a specific mining town, it is often easier to find personal accounts than it is to find technically accurate descriptions. For example, many former residents of Bodie wrote books about the town, like Ella Cain’s *The Story of Bodie*, or Warren Loose’s *Bodie’s Bonanza*. Other accounts, though not written by residents, still fall under the category of story-telling like George Lyman’s *Saga of the Comstock Lode*, and Ettinger’s *Best of Virginia City and the Comstock Lode*.

While these books may perhaps give a more engaging and triumphant version of the history of the town, recalling many of the popular stories about the happenings of the town, they are not as complete or balanced a resource as Marguerite Sprague’s *Bodie’s Gold*, or Ronald James’ *The Roar and the Silence*. These sources provide a complete history from the inception of the town through modern times, and unlike many books, they do not skip over the less glamorous periods of bust and the extended decline of the resource economy.

The history of the Comstock is especially difficult to filter for myth and tall tales, as people like Mark Twain and local newspapers were often sources of entertainment as much as they were sources of information. Certain stories, though inaccurate or untrue, became part of the lore of the town and appear as fact in many of the mid-20th century histories of the Comstock Lode. Newer histories (like Marguerite Sprague’s) are often more accurate, and attempt to delve beneath the layers of western myth and story telling. That said, the more personal or story-telling-type accounts are not worthless because of their inaccuracies. They are quite useful in identifying the character of the town, the most famous tall tales, and the preconceptions the general public is most likely to have about
the town. Some, like Marshall Sprague’s *Money Mountain: the story of Cripple Creek gold* include both sides, reading like a novel but including indexes of relevant data pertaining to the gold strike.

The modern history of western mining towns – not limited to the three case studies – is a clue to themes of tourism development. *Red Lodge and the mythic West* by Bonnie Christensen and Clements’ *After the boom in Tombstone and Jerome, Arizona: decline in western resource towns* provide a history of mining towns through different eras of development that relate to differing themes of popular culture. The former stresses common themes of western tourism, like the dude ranch and the invention of the rodeo in Red Lodge, Montana. Clements examines the differing fates of two Arizonan mining towns, Tombstone becoming a commercialized tourist attraction where history is filtered for entertainment purposes, while Jerome has taken the quieter route of historic preservation and heritage tourism. Jensen and Blevin’s *The Last Gamble: betting on the future in four Rocky Mountain mining towns* addresses the consequences of the modern legalization of gambling in Deadwood, South Dakota, and three Colorado towns including Cripple Creek.

Popular culture and the mythic West are in many ways difficult topics to pin down, but are important in understanding the way in which the region has developed in recent decades. Most authors writing about the west recognize the significance of the mythic West in shaping the landscape, especially in western towns that have developed tourist economies (Christensen 2002; Hausladen 2003; Francaviglia 1991 & 1996; Loewen 1999; etc.). In understanding the role of the mythic West, it is important to point out that the myth isn’t some Eastern concoction, or external pressure acting on western
towns. Nor is the region impervious to national beliefs about the West. Put simply, there is a feedback loop between the west and perceptions of the west, where one influences the other, and vice versa. Red Lodge is an example of this, where author Bonnie Christensen notes that “local western identities… have become inextricably intertwined with national ideas about the west” (2002, xvii).

When it comes to the topic of reading the cultural landscape, works by D.W. Meinig, Peirce Lewis, J.B. Jackson, and Yi-Fu Tuan provide a basis for work. At a level more specific to the topic of the cultural landscape of mining towns, literature by Richard Francaviglia is valuable. *Main Street Revisited* and *Hard Places* both directly discuss factors that have influenced the landscape of historic mining districts. Some of the narratives specific to the sites I am investigating are also of importance, such as DeLyser’s *Authenticity on the Ground* (1999), which combines research with first-hand observation and fieldwork to explain how authenticity has been constructed in the landscape. Similarly, Robert Guilford Taylor provides an in-depth account of the development of Cripple Creek over time, including maps of the mining district and the urban extent of the town in *Cripple Creek* (1966).

Historic preservation is a major theme of interest when examining the cultural landscape of former mining towns. Studying the theories, politics, and problems associated with historic preservation raises many issues relating to how to understand the landscape that has been preserved in mining towns. Also, eras of shifting paradigms related to preservation are apparent in changes in the landscape of many historic sites, including Virginia City. Editors Alanen and Melnick compiled an academic piece that addresses issues relating to the preservation of cultural landscapes in America, including
shifting paradigms, selectivity in preservation, and major issues of contention in how to preserve a landscape (2000). This is an important subject that will be covered in chapter 3, and referred to in later sections.

Literature, even academic literature, on the topic of tourism and gambling is often didactic or written from a clearly biased perspective. In the case of Blevin and Jensen’s works on the legalization of gambling in three small Colorado towns, their loyalty to the community over the corporate casino developments is clear in wording and emphasis of certain topics; “local retail and wholesome stores were cannibalized by gaming operations” (Gambling as a Community Development Quick Fix, 117). The inanimate casino, symbolized by the prominent slot machine, is seen as a threat to the same community that went to great lengths to bring gambling in to save their towns. As implied by the Blevin and Jensen article, residents thought of gambling as a quick fix for their economic difficulties, and were not prepared for the consequences of legalizing gambling in the three Colorado towns. The burden of maintaining the integrity of the landscape, however, falls on the community and legislature, both of which failed to take reasonable measures to prevent this “cannibalization.”

Similarly, Jon Christensen criticizes Virginia City from the perspective of San Francisco, almost begrudgingly admitting that the silver town was a major economic hinterland that played a vital role in creating San Francisco’s current status. Its fall from greatness is apparent in his writing: “Virginia City is now a tourist trap that clings tenaciously to the skeleton of the Comstock… the Comstock is a story of a boomtown that went bust in the late 1870s and ever since then it has been looking for a way to promote its history” (Christensen 1998, 92). It is implied that history-based tourism, in
the case of Virginia City, is not based in any genuine desire to preserve and promote the town’s history. His bias toward San Francisco is apparent when he cites a quote from Franklin Walker: “There was a popular saying that Washoe people hoped to go to San Francisco rather than heaven when they died” (94).

Tourism in the historic mining town develops through more of an organic process than many critics give credit for. There is rarely deliberate and community-wide cooperation to develop the town as an exploitative tourism industry; more often authors do state that a town lacked a business organization, but instead the town was developed commercially by a number of unconnected entrepreneurs. In cases where a town becomes overly commercialized, the culprit is a combination of a lack of legislative restriction on the historic site, and a tragedy of the commons. It should also be noted that, as in the case of Virginia City and Cripple Creek, today’s commercial center was yesterday’s business district; these sites historically faced commercialization. Many authors seem to work under the assumption that there is something intrinsically distasteful or wrong about tourism and the commercial development of communities, which is partially related to stereotypes of the nature of tourism and the tourist.

The tourist is often understood as someone who is ignorant, shallow, and gullible, a person who is more interested in traveling to collect experiences and souvenirs, generally in order to show them off (Jakle 1985). Another part of this description that is wide-spread in literature about tourism is that it is commonly understood that the tourist travels for selfish reasons, and that the landscape must be altered – or, as is often implied by this negative stereotype, bastardized – in order to entertain the tourist and their expectations. The authentic experience of the western town is often though to be lost to
showy displays with cowboys and Indians, for the sake of entertainment. Throughout this thesis I have been and will be using the terms ‘tourist,’ ‘visitor,’ and ‘traveler’ interchangeably. No negative or positive associations should be connoted from the use of one term over another in any given context.

Combined with common perspectives on the importance of preserving American communities, and especially historic districts like many mining towns, the idea of developing the landscape with the express purpose of tourism often comes off as blasphemy. The idealist would like the history to be told, not sold. Changes in the landscape associated with tourism are viewed as negative developments that destroy the character of the town. Furthermore, it is often assumed that history is intentionally altered by residents, business owners, tour guides, and other local entrepreneurs, as though they have modified history to suit their own selfish needs, “as if to say, ‘All that matters is what sells’” (Christensen 1998, 99). More often than not, the culprit is inaccurate history itself, in the form of literary sources like Dan Dequille’s Big Bonanza, where reality is difficult to separate from mythical story-telling. In the following chapter, subjects related to preservation, historic districts, and the contentious issue of authenticity will be addressed in more detail.
Chapter 3. Historic Designation and Authenticity

The three primary case studies for this thesis – Bodie, California; Virginia City, Nevada; and Cripple Creek, Colorado – have all been designated as Historic Districts under the National Historic Landmarks Program, a part of the National Parks Service. The specific movement behind adding each of the three sites to the National Historic Landmarks list will be addressed in the case-study chapters, but there are some characteristics that apply more generally to historic mining districts, as will be discussed here. It is important to note that several mining towns, including these three, were designated as historic landmarks on the same date: the Fourth of July, 1961.

Likewise, a large number of the places that were designated on this date were mining towns. Forty-seven places were designated in the United States on the Fourth of July, 1961. Of those, fifteen – approximately one-third – were mining towns and one was a railroad connected to a historic mining district. This list could be expanded to include Pike’s Peak, Colorado, and the Pike’s Stockade; the Historic Landmarks Program regards Pike’s Peak as a natural symbol of western exploration and expansion; however, the classic slogan “Pike’s Peak or Bust” refers to the landmark’s role in the Colorado Gold Rush. There are also a number of mining sites that were designated after this date, including Jerome Historic District, Arizona; Bingham Canyon open pit copper mine, Utah; and the Georgetown-Silver Plume Historic District, Colorado (all designated November 13th, 1966).

There is some significance to the designation date alone, the Fourth of July being the most patriotic of all American dates as well as one of the most celebrated holidays in a mining camp. It is important to note that there were high levels of patriotism present in
western mining towns, which played important roles in financing American military efforts. This is even apparent in Nevada prior to statehood, since residents of Virginia City, Austin, Gold Hill, and other mining towns donated funds to Civil War efforts and brawls erupted over allegiance (Lyman 1934). The designation of the large number of mining town as Historic Districts in the 1960s could also be connected to a newer group of inhabitants. As early as the 1930s and 1940s, artists, writers, and musicians took interest in defunct mining towns because of their isolation, small-town atmosphere, affordable housing, and inspiring landscapes. Towns like Virginia City, Jerome, and Bisbee had thriving art communities by the 1960s, and played an important role in the artistic side of the counter-culture movement. Virginia City’s Red Dog Saloon is famous as a site where artists like Janis Joplin and the Grateful Dead played in the mid-1960s (James 1998).

What else contributed to the designation of so many mining towns to the National Historic Landmarks (NHL) program in 1961? The NHL had existed in one form or another since the 1935 Historic Sites Act, but the practice of designating historic sites didn’t begin until 1960. The forty-seven landmarks designated on July 4th, 1961, were some of the first added to the list. The NHL predates the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), created in 1966. As the National Register states, prior to 1966 “the Federal government recognized only places of national significance, many of which were publicly owned” (National Park Service 1994). All NHL sites were automatically added to the NRHP in 1966, but one of the important factors of the NRHP was that it recognized sites of local and state-level importance.

Many authors conducting research on mining towns mention major gaps in
research in the field, as well as neglect in some areas of the preservation of history and landscapes. In many cases, the problem is that there has historically been a general lack of positive interest in mining and industrial landscapes. To many, the mining landscape represents the exploitation of the land, a common metaphor being the rape of mother earth, and thus it is not a popular or glamorous side of American history. In addition, the mining town often represented sinful human traits of excess, vice, lust, and greed. The passage of time has allowed for distance from these associations, and a change in the perceived character of the mining town. Attributes that would be perceived as negative today have now adopted an element of nostalgia due to the passage of time, as Francaviglia states, “regarded with nostalgia only after [mining operations] are finished” (1991, 205); or, as Magelssen puts it “the reason this history is so attractive is precisely because it has been dead for so long” (xxi).5

The inclusion of mining sites as National Historic Landmarks in 1961 marks a significant shift in thinking that occurred around that era in connection to revisionist histories creating a new image of America. The people of America were no longer just interested in glorifying the lives of the presidents and other almost-mythical national figures, or patriotic national monuments representative of American ideals. This shift was not just a matter of the interests of the American people and what they wanted to include in their travel itinerary, but rather encompassed the definition of what it meant to be American. Industrial and manufacturing landscapes like the mills of Lowell, Massachusetts, hold a significant role in America’s heritage that is representative of the

---

5 This quote does not refer to mining landscapes in particular, but commercialized historic sites in general.
working class that was vital in powering the nation to its current status. This is especially true of the mining landscape; at a basic level, precious metals like gold and silver were important sources of funds for war efforts, as well as boosting the national economy, while other metals provided the materials to support the growth of domestic industry, and coal and anthracite mines produced the energy necessary to run these industries.

A critic of preservation might express the following sentiment: preservation efforts are necessarily selective, and as such they can often end up equivalent to beautification or gentrification, neglecting the industrial side of the landscape in favor of Victorian buildings. To these critics, today’s mining landscape has been transformed into “assemblages of genteel buildings—not the gritty landscape of everyday industrial life that characterized the mining district during its active period(s)” (Francaviglia 1991, 180). This is an unfair argument for several reasons.

As will be addressed in the following chapter, one part of the historic mining town’s landscape that is underrepresented today is the mining and industrial structures, while main street businesses and select residences are maintained, preserved, and restored. These are the parts of the landscape that remained in use after mining ceased. In Francaviglia’s words, prior to inclusion in the National Historic Landscape program these landscapes were passively preserved: “preserved unintentionally through continued traditions of use, ownership, and design” (Francaviglia in Alanen and Melnick 2000, 48). In comparison, mining structures were often salvaged for material, leaving nothing to preserve.

Furthermore, many of the structures were not designed to last for centuries, but were built out of inexpensive materials to serve short-term production. The landscape
today reflects the transience of the mining economy rather than showing exactly what the
town looked like in the mining days. It should be emphasized that even though it appears
unfortunate that the landscape is incomplete today, retrospective examination should
make the reasons for this clear. At the time that mining operations shut down and moved
away, the buildings were not considered to be significant part of the town’s landscape
and history; they were certainly not historic structures, though they did have a place as a
part of the heritage of some towns. While long-time residents were often saddened by the
end of the mining era and the mining structures disappearing from the landscape, there
was no justification for keeping the mining structures and preserving them for later
generations.

The National Register of Historic Places includes buildings (the most common
type of place designated), structures, sites, objects, and districts. Since the mining town
case studies fall under the category of district, this will be my focus; however, buildings
and structures are also important. A district is defined as “a significant concentration of
sites, buildings, structures, or objects united historically or aesthetically” (National Park
Service 1994, viii). Many mining towns are designated as Historic Districts because they
are composed of a number of buildings dating back to the historic era of mining, uniting
them historically, but it could also be argued that they are united aesthetically as
evidenced by the discussion related to mining town’s urban center in the next chapter.
There is often continuity in the architectural style, era, and materials that unite the district
aesthetically. In reviewing the list of National Historic Landmarks, it appears that most of
the mining-related designations made by the program have been districts, likely for these
reasons, though there are also a number of sites, buildings, and structures.
What gives a town, building, or landmark historic significance? Bill Schmickle, in his book *The Politics of Historic Districts: a primer for grassroots preservation*, writes that one of the common objections to the creation of a historic district is what he calls “George Washington syndrome”: “Why is my property historic? George Washington didn’t sleep there!” (2007, 7). The reasoning behind creating a historic landmark is not always clear to the layman. While there are a number of government programs and local associations involved in the preservation of the historic landscape, there are fairly standard parameters used to determine whether a site can be considered historic, and these are used to justify designation in a site nomination form.

Another objection to historic preservation is what Schmickle calls the “sacred cult of the merely old,” by which he is referring to the viewpoint that historic preservation efforts have lost legitimacy and meaning by being too inclusive. The cult of the merely old defines historical importance by age, rather than as a site of significant events or a part of a community’s heritage. This shows another misconception about the preservation process. It is generally understood that the place should be at least fifty years old, though exceptions are made. The NRHP identifies basic criterion categories, as indicated in the accompanying figure 3.1. These are not entirely objective guidelines, though. Buildings or landmarks might have little or no value as sites of important historic events, but may still have high value as a part of a town’s heritage. Similarly, the place might be a representative example of an important part of America’s heritage, or more ambiguously, a symbol of American ideals. The website for the National Historic Landmarks Program states that the National Historic Landmarks are places that “possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the heritage of the United States.”
Fig. 3.1. NRHP criteria for evaluation from NHRP 1994, the same guidelines are used to present day.

At the local or state level, the criteria for designation often focuses more on regional culture and heritage than broader roles in history. For example, the Office of Historic Preservation in California’s mission statement is:

“…to preserve and enhance California's irreplaceable historic heritage as a matter of public interest so that its vital legacy of cultural, educational, recreational, aesthetic, economic, social, and environmental benefits will be maintained and enriched for present and future generations.”

(http://ohp.parks.ca.gov/)

There are many organizations at the state or local level that participate in landscape preservation, including the state-level historic preservation offices (SHPO) and officers created in 1966 under the National Historic Preservation Act which created the NHRP. Local governments can work in conjunction with NHRP programs, but can also work
independently on preservation efforts. Community organizations and associations can also be important to heritage preservation. In *Lies across America*, James Loewen makes the point that the community is often self-motivated to record, preserve, and document their own history and heritage whether or not it is considered to be of significance to government historic programs. This includes the creation of landmarks, statues, and community heritage centers and museums.

Returning to the issue of what constitutes a historic district, it is important to realize that the purpose of a historic designation is not to restore the community to some former period in history. For one, the district might be maintained as a cultural landscape where several different eras of architecture and development tell a story of the community. A preserved site is not the same thing as a historic recreation; it is a way of preserving important structures or sites, not a way of recreating a bustling 19th-century mining town. Nor is the historic district’s purpose to protect every facet of the district from the encroachments of modern technology or development. It is generally of primary importance to maintain the character and historically significant parts of the landscape, and to protect the sites from deterioration and demolition. Historic designation alone does not protect a site; often preservation and restoration efforts are dependent on local taxes, legislation, zoning, and local preservation commissions (Morris 1992). This is clear in the case of Virginia City, which, since designation, has lost a significant portion of the buildings and structures within the historic district, specifically in the former “Barbary Coast” (James 1998).

Authenticity is a significant point of criticism from visitors to a Historic District, and also from researchers and historians of the site. What many Historic sites are charged
with today is the task of balancing a commercial economy against historical integrity and authenticity. But what does it mean for a site to be authentic? The concept of authenticity has been debated for decades due to the subjective nature of the term. While it cannot be quantified, there is a clear difference between the accuracy of the history presented at a site like Bodie as compared to Cripple Creek where the historic authenticity is maintained as a sideline to, and in many ways a mere justification for, the business of gambling tourism. The tourist can differentiate between different classes of authenticity; one would recognize a distinct difference between what Richard Francaviglia refers to as an actively preserved heritage landscape, like Bodie, and imagineered heritage landscapes that one might visit on movie sets or at theme parks. Even the distinction between the former class of landscape and restored heritage landscapes (Tombstone, Arizona; Williamsburg, Virginia) is often clear. Difficulties arise, however, when one tries to draw sharp lines defining what is authentic, and when one tries to justify these divisions. For example, the Virginia City Historic District is in many ways authentic and historic; however, current business practices in many of the historic buildings detract from some visitors’ experiences of authenticity.

While I wish to avoid arguments of relativism concerning the definition of “authenticity,” it is clear that the perception of authenticity in the historic landscape is dependent on the viewer. Delyser’s article “Authenticity on the Ground” is based on this subject, as she notes that Bodie’s staff, historians, former residents and other people who are close to the place will understand it differently from a tourist who lacks familiarity with the landscape. This is also addressed in Magelssen’s *Living History Museums*: there is an environment of trust in which the tourist approaches history experiences with an
open mind, and often takes in information without questioning its accuracy. Similarly, in visiting a state- or nationally-designated historic landmark, the tourist expects to be experiencing an authentic landscape, and is more willing to accept that the history presented is accurate.

This is not to say that the visitor automatically and openly accepts any information given to them at the historic site – Delyser contradicts this notion by mentioning that quite a few visitors to Bodie State Historic Park will ask questions related to the town’s authenticity – but it does mean the visitor may have trouble distinguishing between authentic and inauthentic parts of the landscape. In the case of living history museums, the topic of Magelssen’s research, the massive amount of detail put into sites that claim to hold a high standard of authenticity, like the historic recreation at Colonial Williamsburg, often provoke visitors to look for anachronistic flaws in the site and pick apart the site’s authenticity. A detail as small as a pierced ear on one of the living history actors can be a giveaway, and visitors delight in pointing out aircraft overhead to the actors.

For the most part, Historic Districts like Virginia City are not subjected to as rigorous a standard as the living history museum. Virginia City’s slogan invites the visitor to “Step Back in Time,” but it does not attempt to recreate the town as it was in the mining boom days. The tourist to Virginia City expects to visit an authentic historic mining town, but also generally accepts that the site has experienced changes through to modern time. The tourist is not visiting a recreation of what was, but a remnant of what was. Ronald James mentions that some tourists in Virginia City are displeased by things
like the modern signage, telephone and electric lines\(^6\), or the presence of slot machines; “it seems like the true history of the silver legacy might be comprehensible if one could push through the distracting gauze of T-shirts and candy shops, the old drunks, and the tinny clinking of slot machines” (Christensen 1998, 92). Some visitors view these things as detracting from the authentic character of the site.

This is reflected in the building code restrictions that Storey County has placed on the Virginia City Historic District, for example the law prohibiting the use of neon signs, and requiring a permit for any new signage. Similarly, the Virginia City Historic District has a “certificate of appropriateness” application that must be approved by the county before modifications can be made to structures in the district. While guidelines and local laws vary, new construction in Historic Districts is often allowed if it fits the character and aesthetics of the town.

Modern intrusions are not flaunted in Virginia City, though many businesses entice customers inside with signs in their windows inviting tourists into the air-conditioned bars to enjoy a few cold beers in the summer heat, or into the heated stores in the bitter winters. Certainly the visitor is willing to accept modern technology to a certain extent, insofar as it does not disrupt the aesthetic composition of the town. As much as possible, intrusions like air conditioning units are concealed from view.

At this point it is important to discuss authenticity and the tourist experience in terms of safety. The mining landscape is full of safety hazards, some of them not even

---

\(^6\) The first two examples, though fairly common complaints, are not really modern intrusions. Historic photographs of the town show telegraph, phone, and electric wires; as will be elaborated on in a later chapter, signage was often even gaudier and more pervasive at the peak of the mining rush than it is today, as businesses fought for attention (James 265).
known. Open mine shafts are a hazard throughout Nevada, for example, enough so that the Nevada Division of Minerals produces bumper stickers and magnets featuring the phrase “Abandoned mines: stay out and stay alive,” accompanied by a menacing skull and crossbones. Most tourists would agree that the dangers associated with many parts of the mining landscape are not an integral part of an authentic experience.

This relates to one of the more important features of a mining town with a modern tourist economy: the mine tour, and to a lesser extent, the stamp mill tour. Virginia City, for example, has the popular Chollar and Ponderosa mine tours, while Bodie has the Standard Mill tour. Real historic mines – or for that matter, other mining structures including stamp mills – have a number of unsafe features. The tourist is interested in learning about the dangers historically associated with mining jobs, such as cave-ins, underground fires, explosions, falls down mine shafts, sudden flooding, etc, but they do not themselves want to be at risk of these dangers.

In many cases the tourist experiences either a realistic recreation of a mine or select portion of a real mine that is restored and routinely maintained to safety standards. In the former case, the visitor’s experience depends on attention to detail put into the construction of an authentic recreation of a mine, even if they are aware that it was not a real operational mine during the historic mining period. An effective mine recreation can be created with bare rock walls of a tunnel dug into the side of a hill, accented with realistic beams and mining equipment, and complemented by a detailed history given by a tour guide. In comparison, a simulated mine (especially one above ground or in a building’s basement) with fake rock walls is not as effective. The finicky visitor, like Christensen was when he visited Virginia City, is unwilling to suspend disbelief while
touring a recreated mine like the Ponderosa – to experience an authentic mine they want
to see the real deal, like the restored Chollar mine in Virginia City.
Chapter 4. The Historic Landscape of the Mining Town

The mining town has distinct features that make it a unique research subject. Richard Francaviglia notes that mining districts across the nation, and even internationally, have remarkably similar layouts and appearances in many respects. This section will address many of the common visible characteristics of a mining town and its historic development, including architectural styles, building materials, and the physical landscape. In the sections addressing the three individual case studies of this thesis, little time will be spent covering the history of each town. The purpose of this section is to establish the general patterns that occur in the 19th-century mining town that are significant to the landscape and the present-day appearance, as well as to avoid repetition in later descriptions; quite a few examples will refer back to topics discussed in length here. While the topics covered in this section can be generally applied to mining towns, especially those in the western United States, it must be emphasized that there are always exceptions to the rule.

The following analysis is largely based on Francaviglia’s *Hard Places* and Aschmann’s *The Natural History of a Mine*, and is supplemented by various mining towns’ histories as well as personal observations. The following description applies to mining towns that are based on a large number of independent speculators and mining operations, which leads to a more organic and vernacular growth process that is more commonly associated with western mining – This as opposed to the company mining town. The variations related to the mining company town will be addressed briefly at the end of this section. In the following segments I will address the growth patterns of the urban, industrial, and residential portions of the mining landscape.
THE URBAN CENTER. The original discovery of a mineral strike leads to several phases of growth that occur in rapid succession. The first wave of miners, prospectors, and speculators generally built tent cities and makeshift shacks. Marguerite Sprague mentions that crude shacks were built out of whatever the miner could scavenge or had brought with him, ranging from scraps of wood or canvas to salvaged tin and boxes, or sometimes even carved into the side of a hill or cliff (2003, 13, 16-17). This is in part because in many cases materials like brick, stone, and wood suitable for building were either not available in the immediate area or not available in significant quantities.

It is also because the first people to travel to the site were testing the waters, in a sense. It was a well-known fact that the western mining landscape was transient, and many sites proved to be short-lived. In some cases, such as the Mt. Pisgah hoax that occurred near Cripple Creek, swindlers might stage a mineral strike by claiming that a particularly rich assayed sample of ore came from a site, and then selling their land stake at an inflated price (Sprague 1953). This often involved the fraudulent practice of “salting” a property to improve sale value. Salting was to insert rich gold or silver ore into a mine pit, and then point out the ore to potential investors; if an assay was required, they would extract some of the ore they had salted in the mine to ensure an impressive assay.

The point of this is that the original growth of the mining camp is not a permanent landscape – as is apparent in the fact that it is referred to as a ‘camp’ in the early stages – but the community does move towards permanence as it becomes evident that the region will support long-term mining. This reluctance to invest in a new mining camp is apparent in the history of many mining camps, where it often took a few years to bring in
investments for large-scale mining operations. In the early stages of growth, there was still a lot of active prospecting and land speculation occurring, and the landscape was pocked with pits and marked with land claims. Only a few mines would be operational or produce any significant amount of ore within the first year or two after the discovery, which means that there were a limited number of industrial structures in this period. There were no processing facilities like stamp mills, or in some cases miners employed inefficient methods like the Spanish patio process. The area around each mine and the mine’s structures produced a population nucleus, as the miners took up lodging in areas close to their place of work.

In the early stages of production the ore was transported for processing outside of the region, as in the case of Virginia City mines which sent their ore to San Francisco, California, and Dayton, Nevada, before a number of stamp mills were nearer to the town’s mines. It was expensive to transport ore over long distances, especially by means of mule teams, so once a mining district began extracting large quantities of ore it became important to develop local processing facilities as well as railroad connections to nearby economic centers. The completion of a railroad line connecting the town to the regional economy was often a sign that the town had matured. Conversely, it was clear that the mining days were over when the railroad tracks were salvaged. The establishment of a post office was a similar marker of legitimacy, and also marked the death of the mines when it closed.

The mining town was not necessarily platted into any organized grid like many American towns are, nor was the downtown the result of community planning, but rather it grew haphazardly around features like a major river, canyon, or transportation route.
The community was inhabited before planning efforts were made, and over the following years the town had to work to catch up when it came to developing roads and public infrastructure. The 1890 Virginia City Sanborn map, sheet 1, reports “C Street has been graded… The other streets are ungraded, without any attempt at uniformity of grade, and are merely driveways, consequently buildings set above and below each other in odd confusion.”

Virginia City’s cultural landscape was obviously influenced by the strike’s location perched on the side of Mt. Davidson, which made the linear shape of the town more practical. The steep slopes of the mountain made travel east-west travel difficult, but north-south easier, which was important both in shaping the location of housing in proximity to workplaces, and also in the placement of industrial buildings that ore was transported to. In *The Roar and the Silence*, Ronald James describes the precariousness of east-west transportation within the community: “in the nineteenth century runaway wagons became a daily—and unremarkable—occurrence” (xx). The development of the town of Cripple Creek was also influenced by the landscape. Growth followed the Cripple Creek stream, but was also limited by ravines and mountain spurs (Taylor 1966).

As the mining strike grew, standard businesses such as general stores and saloons were built in the town, often crude structures of wood and canvas at first and later wooden structures with false fronts. The main street and commercial center developed around businesses and amenities catering to the miners, including boarding houses and hotels that house many miners. The main street had prominent and distinct characteristics that resulted from the rapid construction of the town as well as the unique economic conditions associated with the mining strike. These characteristics include the dense
development of the downtown, uniformity of architectural styles, and emphasis on the appearance of facades.

This occurs in part because the increasing in-migration to the town led to housing shortages and high property values. While property values were generally high community-wide, downtown parcels bordering main streets were especially valuable. Parcels in the commercial district tended to be much deeper than they were wide since property prices related to competition for footage abutting the street. This is apparent in

![Fig. 4.1. Detail of 1890 Sanborn map of Virginia City, sheet 4. C Street was the main street and commercial district of Virginia City, Nevada. Nevada in Maps, University of Nevada Reno.](image-url)
Sanborn fire insurance maps, as in the examples of figure 4.1 and 4.2 of downtown Virginia City and Cripple Creek. The standard size for main street lots sold in Cripple Creek was 25 feet of street footage and 125 feet deep; the planned sale price was $25 for inside lots and $50 for corner lots, illustrating the importance of street footage (Taylor 1966).

The downtown region was also built up within a relatively short period of time. One result of this is that all of the buildings tended to employ the same architectural style – western mining towns prominently feature Greek Revival, Italianate or Victorian styles, depending on era and contemporary trends. One of the popular design elements of Greek Revival architecture in western mining towns was the use of cast-iron pillars that imitate columns, which were built into the first-floor brick façade of buildings. Today this is seen in a large number of the facades along the main street of Virginia City, and indicates that the era of architecture was the 1860-70s because of the architectural style and also the contemporaneous popularity of using cast-iron for detailing on facades. In the case of Virginia City, these pillars likely post-dated the 1875 fire. While there are property
records and Sanborn maps that record the construction date of many of the downtown properties, it is interesting to note that it would be possible to date buildings according to these pillars. As shown in the examples of figure 4.3, the cast iron pillars are stamped by their production company and in some cases a production year.

The wooden false-front, considered to be part of the Victorian style (Francaviglia 1991, 154) was another common characteristic of mining-town building facades. This was in large part an inexpensive way of adding size to the structure, and also mimicking

![Fig. 4.3. Pillars framing the doors of two Virginia City buildings. The pillars are stamped at the bottom with the name of the foundry that produced them. Modern painted detailing highlights ‘Gold Hill Foundry’ on the right and ‘U.I. Works T&R’ on the left. In the image on the left there is also a third pillar stamped ‘Fulton Foundry Virginia,’ referring to one of the more prominent Virginia City foundries. Pictures by author.](image)
the brick or cast-iron Victorian architecture of urban row buildings (153). Francaviglia, along with many architectural scholars, notes that while false fronts were common nation-wide, when it came to the West they were so ubiquitous as to be considered a symbol of the western boomtown (Fig. 4.4).

The façade was the most important feature of the building because it faced Main Street and was the most visible part of the building; due to the density of construction, the side walls often were not even visible as businesses were built wall-to-wall like row houses. Given the density of the urban center and the large number of competing businesses, it was especially important for the façade to look good. In many cases the best building materials were used on the façade, while cheaper and lower-quality materials were used to construct the rest of the building. It was also important for the business to be visible, which included the proliferation of signs alerting the passer-by of the services available at that location.
The prosperity of the mining town meant that many of these businesses changed the design of their facades according to changing architectural fashions, such as the emergence of large windows in storefronts in the 1840s and 1850s. Large plate windows had the dual purpose of displaying goods and making the business more accessible to shoppers, in a sense opening the business to the street – not to mention the distinguished urban look it could give the building (Francaviglia 1996, 23-24).

The combination of wood building materials, the arid climate of the West, and the dense construction that was characteristic of mining towns made them especially susceptible to highly destructive fires. Most towns experienced at least one fire over the course of the boom period. Bodie, for example, had major fires in 1892 and 1932 (Sprague 2003), and Cripple Creek’s two fires back-to-back in 1896 left approximately 5000 people without shelter (Sprague 1953). Virginia City’s three large fires destroyed the town’s business district in 1863, 1871, and 1875 (Ettinger 1995, 28-29).

As devastating an event as fire was, it played an important and common role in shaping the mining town’s landscape. The risk of fire led many to build with fire-resistant materials like cast iron, adobe, brick, and stone. Sometimes these materials were used as a preventative measure, but other times they were used only after a fire had destroyed the wooden structures. More important, if part of a mining town was destroyed by fire during the boom years or early stages of decline, the community’s response was to quickly rebuild bigger and better. It was a matter of civic pride as well as economic necessity; the reconstruction effort reflected the health of the mines, and failure to rebuild hastily was thought to indicate that funds – and the mines – had dried up. The appearance of hesitation, uncertainty, or resignation in the face of such a disaster as fire could send
stock prices plummeting as investors lost faith in the future of the mines. Rebuilding efforts also influence the landscape in that a major portion of the landscape is rebuilt with some extravagance in the newest architectural styles and the best materials available. Taylor refers to Cripple Creek as a phoenix, as a new, more permanent and urbane city arose in the wake of the great fire of 1896 (1966, 82-84).

Fires that occurred after the mining boom, during or after the financial decline of the town, were not met with an as aggressive effort to rebuild. Fire could sound the death-knell for already struggling mining operations, and businesses or families might choose to move away rather than rebuild. In the later stages of the mining town, fire often removed the last traces of largely-abandoned sections of the community such as the Chinatown and red light district, as happened with Bodie’s 1932 fire. In this case, fire can remove evidence of an important part of the historical landscape of the town.

As the economy declined in a mining town, many businesses ended up empty and abandoned. Often the town lost its prestige in a very physical way; not only was the county seat transferred to a new, more prosperous town, but major buildings such as the courthouse, hotels, county buildings, union halls, or churches, were dismantled and transported to new sites.

INDUSTRY. Corrugated metal was a popular building material for mining structures for several reasons (see Fig. 4.5). The design of the materials made it strong in comparison to its weight, making it an ideal material when it came to transportation to remote mining camps. Corrugated metal could be nailed in place just like wood, but could also easily be removed and reused. This was of special significance when a mining town’s economy began to decline; the mining company could easily pack up its buildings
and transport them to a new site.

Evidence of mining-related structures in the modern landscape is often subtle, such as the remaining foundation of stamp mill buildings on the hills surrounding a mining town. Once mining operations have closed down in a town, industrial buildings and equipment related to mining are generally not just abandoned. Equipment and materials like cast iron, corrugated iron, and brick were salvaged and transported to new mineral strikes in the region, just like the town’s buildings were. In addition, many of the structures were demolished or removed in later years because of the safety risk they pose; mainly to children that might explore the building or transients that may try to live in the
buildings. As mentioned, the mining structures often were not designed to stand the tests of time, so after several decades of corrosion and decay following the closure of the mines and mills, walls and roofs were at risk of collapse, and floorboards and stairs ready to crack.

RESIDENTIAL. So far discussion has mainly addressed the development of the downtown region of a mining boomtown, but there are important patterns relating to residential areas and peripheral businesses as well as minority groups inhabiting the town.

While the rustic miner’s cabin was generally a feature of the mining town throughout its life cycle, the presence of larger residences grew as the proportion of women and children in the population increased. Miners with families were not the first to move into the region, since a miner with a family could not afford to take the risk of moving to a strike that might not be successful. Once the mines proved to be productive the prospect became more inviting. James (1998) notes Virginia City’s jump in population of women and children that occurred between the 1860 and 1870 censuses, as well as the establishment of community facilities such as schools, churches, and family residences. The longer a mining district operated, the more family-friendly it became (Francaviglia 1991). As George Lyman emphasized in his portrayal of the Comstock Lode, miners and professionals alike had grown jaded since the California Gold Rush, as many a booster claimed their site to be the next El Dorado, and, more often than not, the strike produced little. Suspicion produced a “wait-and-see” attitude toward the western mining camp.

Similarly, very little of the parts of the landscape associated with prostitution –
the red light district and cribs – appear with the initial population boom. One of the conventional images of mining-town prostitution is that the fallen women descend on the infant boomtown like vultures, and, as the idiom goes, the fool and his money are soon parted. This is seen in a description of Cripple Creek: “prospectors and miners swarmed into the Cripple Creek district, and right on their heels were gamblers and prostitutes, swindlers and footpads.” (Dallas 1985). Cultural bias against this industry of vice certainly plays into this inaccurate depiction, as well as the openness with which many of these women plied their trade (James 1998). In reality, travel was costly and time consuming so listening to unsubstantiated boosterism could lead an unwise prostitute to a town that lacked the business to support her trade.

The part of the landscape that was most often neglected in the later years of a mining town was the residential buildings. As the economy declined, the town’s remaining population tended to cluster into the better homes, generally upper and middle-class residences near the center of town. The rest of town was not just at the mercy of fires, weathering, and deterioration, but was also commonly cannibalized for materials or firewood. Because of this, the upper and middle class residences and the downtown businesses in former mining communities are the parts of town best preserved to the present day.

Many people who bought property in the bonanza days of the mining town paid high prices for residences, as land and housing was in high demand. As the town began losing population, and the mines were no longer a major draw, residential property prices

---

7 According to Merriam-Webster, a footpad is a criminal who preys on people traveling by foot; essentially a highwayman.
plummeted. Those who were able to sell their properties sold for a small fraction of what they had originally paid for them, while many others could not even find a buyer while the property values continued to drop below asking prices (Clements 2003). In some cases buildings were abandoned, and were more useful as sources of firewood than residences.

A common theme already mentioned was the practice of dismantling buildings and transporting them to prosperous new mining towns. The newer mining town was experiencing the same shortage of housing that the old town once faced, so homes were moved to areas with high demand. Locals of Virginia City claim that many of its residences spread throughout the state to Goldfield, Tonopah, Reno, Sparks, Yerington, Carson City, and even Las Vegas (James 1998).

THE COMPANY MINING TOWN. Company mining towns tend to look distinctly different from mining towns that were developed by a number of investors. The town site undergoes a more rigorous planning process, leading to evenly sized, spaced, and shaped lots, as well as an organized street grid. All buildings were built of the same architectural style, creating uniformity of residences. There was generally only one general store in the town, which was company owned, so the company town lacks the dense urban center filled with competing businesses. The mining company invested in building homes, schools, community centers, churches, and other infrastructure for employees and their families, which has an unfortunate consequence when the mine closes. At this point the buildings, as they belong to the company, may be closed to the public or salvaged for materials, or in some cases the entire town is leveled when it is no longer of use; “what the mining company giveth, the mining company taketh away”
PRESERVATION AND THE MINING TOWN. It should be repeated that preservation is necessarily selective. Not all historical events were considered significant enough to be preserved or documented when they occurred, or did not appear to have any historic merit, and have been lost to time. Arguably, a large portion of the heritage that has been preserved in a mining town has to do with the major events, people, and legends associated with the location. For many years the focus was on prominent figures like mine owners and bankers and their impressive mansions, as opposed to the working man and his living conditions. As mentioned, this is especially true of company mining towns where the dominant mining company has produced a complimentary history that praises the role of the company in the town and nation’s history.

Modern revisionist histories have incorporated far more complete depictions of “the way is was,” as the name of Virginia City’s mining and history museum goes. Parts of the history and society of the site that had previously been ignored or neglected, such as the role of minority ethnic groups, have experienced growing popularity. Increasingly, the tourist is interested in learning about – and, when practical, experiencing – the day-to-day life of a man who worked in a stamp mill, a mine, or even a Chinese laundry. Francaviglia refers to the visible and invisible roles of the socially stratified mining district, including women and ethnic groups that provided important services in support of the mining industry despite being excluded from jobs in mines and mills. Ethnic groups, in particular, were often not directly prohibited from mining jobs, but were squeezed out of the industry in a roundabout manner: in order to work in the mines, one had to belong to the miner’s union, and only certain ethnic groups were allowed to join.
From discussion of the urban, industrial, and residential areas of the mining town, it is clear that many parts of the landscape would not survive long enough to be included in the Historic District if a mining town was designated a historic landmark, nor in any town planning efforts to preserve historic landscape features. Thus in discussing Bodie, Virginia City, and Cripple Creek, I will be referring both to the elements of the landscape that have survived, and those that haven’t. The emphasis of the discussion will be on the former as the foundation of the cultural landscape of the tourist economy, but the latter also holds a role in the changing cultural landscape over time.
Fig. 5.1. Bodie State Historic Park. Dishes and utensils have been arranged on the kitchen table, and the cabinet left open to display other items. Photo by author.
Fig. 5.2. Timeline of significant events in Bodie’s history. Sources for events: Sprague 2003, Delyser 2003, Young 2006.
The ghost town is not a concept that is limited to mining towns, but western mining – more than any other economy – seems to characterize the ghost town. Nell Murbarger’s *Ghosts of the Glory Trail*, along with a number of other books on ghost towns, recognizes that the majority of ghost towns are former mining camps. The boom-and-bust cycle associated with western mining provides one of the more alluring portions of the back story for the ghost town: once there was a city here with a population of thousands and great riches of gold and silver, but today it lays abandoned and nothing of this opulence remains. While there are a number of western agricultural towns or failed attempts at utopian societies that became ghost towns, tales of failed crops and water supply issues lack the poignancy of the mining bust.

The definition of a ghost town varies depending on the source, with some believing it can apply to towns that still harbor a significant population (such as 100 or more persons), the caveat being that the town was at one time much larger, and had far more people. The other two case studies, Virginia City and Cripple Creek, are both referred to as ghost towns by some people despite having a current population of over one thousand people. Others define the ghost town as completely deserted, or with less than ten remaining residents, while still others define it as a true ghost of a town: a site where there is little or no remaining evidence of the town that was once there; this form of the ghost town requires the most imagination from the visitor, and is more popular as a relic-hunting or metal-detecting site. Bodie fits into the second of these categories, because there are still structures remaining but it does not have any significant permanent population. Since it opened to the public as a State Historic Park (SHP) in 1962, it has at most housed a few dozen State Park rangers.
For some visitors, there is a literal side to the idea of a ghost town. Delyser, in the opening of her 2001 article, recalls a story of two children peering in the window of the Bodie house she was in and proclaiming that she was the ghost of a man. Historically in mining towns, the myth of a ghost was most commonly associated with the mines, often with someone who had been killed in a mining accident. In the case of Bodie, it was the ghost of a white mule that was thought to be the harbinger of death for miners if they ever returned to the mines. Outside of the mine, ghost stories are largely a modern invention capitalizing on the town’s historic nature. The old, creaky, dusty, and lonely, vacant Victorian buildings in any town can create an eerie setting for stories about murders and tragic deaths. It is easy to make the leap to fictitious accounts of apparition sightings, bumps in the night, and mysterious events occurring in the building, and then conjecture that there may have been a rape or grisly murder at the site that has produced this negative energy (Ghost Trackers).

Bodie park rangers and historians do not indulge visitors with many stories containing ghostly apparitions, but tourists’ imaginations do connect the ghost town with ghostly residents. This is also true of populated ghost towns like Virginia City and Cripple Creek, which both have multiple properties listed on many online indexes of haunted sites. The Southwest Ghost Hunters Association (SGHA) lists the Palace Hotel, Hotel St. Nicholas, Victor Hotel, Buffalo Billy’s Casino, the Old Homestead, and the Imperial Hotel – all in Cripple Creek – as sites of paranormal activity. The City of Cripple Creek website actually lists the event of “Ghost Hunting Overnight Investigation,” held at the Jail Museum, among events like the 4th of July celebration and Donkey Derby Days. Meanwhile in Virginia City, there is a business that holds “ghost
tours” nightly for the paltry sum of twenty dollars, and signs in the Undertaker Paranormal and Metaphysical Center storefront (the site of the Wyatt Earp and Billy the Kid headstones) claim that the visitor can get his picture taken with a ‘ghost.’ It is clear that this is a form of entertainment, but its popularity is rooted in the authenticity of the old, dilapidated buildings and legends of the historic mining town.

Beyond superstitious distortions of history, Bodie is a good example of the exaggerations that arise in statistics documenting a mining town. After the site’s discovery in 1859, the town was slow to take off. This was due in part to the terrain and inclement weather in the region, as well as difficulties in raising interest in and investments for the development of large-scale mining in Bodie. There is no population census data available prior to 1880, though Marguerite Sprague (2003) estimates from primary source materials that there were about fifty residents in the mid 1860s. Most first-hand accounts cite 1879 as the year of peak population, with estimates ranging as high as 12-15,000 people in sources including The Story of Bodie, a popular account written by Ella M. Cain, Bodie resident and member of the Cain family that worked to save Bodie as a State Park.

For a long time Bodie’s official brochure stated the popular number of 10,000 residents, a figure that has been copied into many non-academic descriptions of Bodie. Today the official park brochure states a peak population of 8,500; however, this too may be an exaggerated number. The majority of first-hand accounts estimate 6,000-8,000. Michael Piatt, author of Bodie: the mines are looking well…, details the debate over Bodie’s boom-period population in the essay “What the Historic Record Reveals About Bodie’s Peak Population.” The 1880 census reported a population of a mere 5,416, much
to the chagrin of the town’s residents, as this number fell short of the claims that Bodie was a growing urban center that would soon be a great city like San Francisco.

There are several common justifications for the discrepancy between the census data and witness reports. Marguerite Sprague mentions the possibility that the large ethnic populations of American Indians, Mexicans, and Chinese might not have been counted. She also mentions the possibility that only homeowners and jobholders were recorded, leaving out a large number of “transients” living in boarding houses and hotels. Piatt dismisses these explanations, though, citing a Master’s thesis by Corri Jimenez that found a large number of ethnic peoples, prostitutes, and boarding house occupants among those people recorded by the census, and tallied a number very close to the recorded population of 5,416.

The exact peak population of Bodie may never be agreed upon, but the point of this line of discussion is that Bodie was believed to have reached a significant population at one time during the mining bonanza – a population that many argue was in fact larger than records indicate. The large population adds to the mystery of the ghost town, where common legend states that the town’s last residents abandoned their homes and businesses in such a hurry that the homes are still filled with possessions, including dishes left on a kitchen table. The peak of the population and mining boom was also the era that spawned the popular legends of the Bad Man of Bodie and the little girl’s prayer, “Goodbye God, we’re going to Bodie.”

The latter emerged in print in the late 1870s. It was printed in many sources, and rebutted by Bodie’s own press with an article claiming the girl had been misquoted; she had actually said “Good, by God, we’re going to Bodie!” The validity of either account is
questionable, as different articles cite the girl as being from different towns (Sprague 2003). However, the prayer has lived on in testament to Bodie’s new status as a desolate ghost town.

The second Bodie legend, of the famous Bad Man of Bodie, originated from the 1878 article entitled “The Bad Man of Bodie” published in a San Francisco paper. After the Bad Man gained popularity as a western character, Bodie originally tried to dispel the rumors of its lawless nature. However, by the time the boom years were through, Bodie had embraced the character, and Bodie’s paper followed the adventures that Bodie’s Bad Men were having in new mining towns (Sprague 2003). The popularity of the Bad Man character was reproduced in the 1925 film titled *The Bad Man From Bodie*, and later in the 1941 film *The Gunman From Bodie*\(^8\) starring Buck Jones as Bob “Bodie” Bronson.

Bodie hasn’t had any permanent population recorded by the U.S. Census Bureau since 1940, as shown on the Bodie timeline (Fig. 5.2). It was not, however, by any means abandoned or a ghost town. There was a serious decline in Bodie’s economy before World War II, even as the early 1900s, as Wells Fargo discontinued service to the town in 1911. The origin of the abandonment myth has been linked to a 1915 article on Bodie that was part of a series titled “Ghost Cities of the West.” It is the earliest known reference to Bodie as a ghost town full of abandoned artifacts, where the failed mining town’s residents were like rats abandoning a sinking ship, so compelled to move on to the next mineral strike that they carelessly left their belongings behind. The article also claimed that the remaining population consisted of only a few old men. This was not the

\(^8\) *The Gunman From Bodie* was filmed in the mountains north of Los Angeles according to IMDB.
case; census data puts Bodie’s population at 698 in 1910, and there were still mines in operation (Sprague 2003).

Bodie’s railroad tracks were torn up a few years later in 1917 due to the decline of the town. Then, in 1942, the closure of mines non-essential to war efforts mandated during World War II marked a turning point for the already struggling town. When the mines closed, there was a significant out-migration of residents. By November of 1942, Bodie’s post office closed. The closure of the post office is an important milestone in the ghost town’s history. Murbarger mentions quite a few cases where the few remaining residents of the town would make great efforts to keep the office’s business active enough to justify keeping it open. In several cases, the postmaster was allowed to pay for food and goods with stamps, while another town’s former residents would go out of their way to return to the town to buy stamps and support the post office. The loss of the post office was not just symbolic; discontinuation of mail service meant severed ties between the community and the outside world, as well as a new dependence on the nearest town. The closure of Bodie’s post office in 1942 brought finality to the town’s decline.

There were very few people living in Bodie year-round by the end of the War. Instead, many former residents maintained their Bodie properties as summer houses. The reason it appeared that the residents had left in such a rush that they had abandoned their belongings was because they had not in fact really left. As the legend of the ghost town of Bodie spread after 1915, the town started to experience tourists who wanted to see the ghost city, and, in many cases, take home relics from the site. Unfortunately what they believed to by relics and artifacts abandoned in the town were in fact personal belongings. A 1924 letter from town resident J.S. Cain informs a Bodie home-owner: “I
regret to tell you all the boxes containing your household goods have been broken open and all the material has been taken by the auto travelers, many cars come here daily and they take anything they can haul away in their machines” (Sprague, 148). Bodieites\textsuperscript{9} left their doors unlocked, which meant that tourists often walked right into their houses, and were at times surprised to discover people living in them (Sprague, 162).

After World War II, the Cain family – a prominent family in Bodie’s history – hired several caretakers to protect the town from tourists’ stealing and vandalism. Unfortunately they could not stop rapid loss of artifacts from the town, including the loss of the firehouse bell, furniture from homes, and even attempts to rob graves of precious items buried with the dead; resident Ed Goodwin, on the subject of tourists, said “they just went in there and raped the place” (Sprague, 180). Personal items like grave headstones and family photos were permanently lost to relic-hunters, though in some cases items have been returned by tourists with guilty consciences\textsuperscript{10}.

The ghost town brings up an unfortunate side to tourists’ souvenir collection. Part of the definition of the ghost town is that it is abandoned, and thus for many visitors it follows that what remains at the site is up for grabs. To some tourists this means that it is acceptable to enter homes and take souvenirs from drawers, or even parts of the buildings themselves. However a code of respect of property has emerged among many ghost-town visitors. Entering buildings to take personal items is violation of private property – especially since there is the chance that the building and its contents are not really

\textsuperscript{9} A commonly used term referring to Bodie’s residents, and today used to refer to some of the long-term park rangers.

\textsuperscript{10} There are some rumors on the ghost-hunting websites that items taken from Bodie are haunted, and will bring bad luck to the thief. While this is, of course, not true, hopefully it will discourage visitors from collecting souvenirs from the landscape.
abandoned – but it is acceptable to keep items found in the grass along the side of roads. Ghost towns that are not protected by historic status, park rangers, or their remaining residents are more susceptible to scavengers – not just by tourists, but also people looking for aged wood, brick, or furniture for personal use and resale.

The problem of relic hunters damaging the historic landscape is by no means limited to the ghost town. For example, Wild Bill Hickok’s grave in Deadwood, South Dakota, has faced a number of threats since his death in 1876. From the very beginning there were rumors of grave robbers pillaging the site or even stealing his body. The monument on his grave was completely destroyed by 1891 by visitors chipping off pieces as relics, and was replaced. It was destroyed again by 1904, and again replaced. Measures like adding a fence around the site, and later a cage, still did not deter vandalism in the form of relic hunting (Rosa 1996). When it comes to historic buildings, many relic hunters chip away a piece of brick or chunk of wood as a souvenir, like having a piece of the Berlin Wall. They might think that the small piece they took is inconsequential as a part of the large structure, but these damages add up. The problem with relic hunting isn’t just the destruction of historic buildings and monuments, but also the loss of archeological artifacts that could provide important evidence of historic events – keeping in mind that one of the reasons for designating a site as historic included the site’s potential to yield historical information.

At some historic sites, these acts of vandalism and stealing can be blamed on local tourism, but are not carried out by the tourists themselves. Gift shops, souvenir stands, or even online dealers sometimes sell items that could be considered to be archeological artifacts, which have been taken from the historic landscape. This has been seen
throughout the Western United States with trade in Native American artifacts and sometimes remains, despite illegality. Specific to the mining town, this might include objects like nails, railroad stakes, and children’s toys such as jacks and marbles. While selling the town’s artifacts might seem innocent for an item as simple as a nail, as a whole the practice can lead to the deterioration of the town, which piece-by-piece leaves the site in a tourist’s luggage.

Dismayed by the vandalism occurring in Bodie, the Cain family lobbied for the state of California to add the site to the State Historic Park program. The state decided that the site would form a unique historical park as a ghost town, and as such restoration projects did not make sense. Instead, it was the first park to employ the method of arrested decay to preserve the town as it was. This means that no improvements were made to existing properties, the only work done on the site is to stabilize buildings and prevent further deterioration: this can include patching roofs, adding supports, and replacing broken window panes.

The first park rangers arrived in 1962, and the State Park was opened to the public. In a sense Bodie was never completely abandoned; the remaining Bodieites passed the torch to the state Park Rangers as they left, and a number of rangers still inhabit the park year-round.¹¹ Today the state park of Bodie enforces the idea that the ghost town is something that can be explored, but not disturbed, and what you find there must stay there. However, laws prohibiting souvenir-collection in state parks have not always been respected, and unfortunately the loss of artifacts and damage to structures

¹¹ There are a large number of park volunteers and seasonal employees who spend only weeks or months at the site, while only a small number actually live in the Bodie homes (Delyser 2001).
still occurs. Delyser mentions that the repairs she worked on during her time as a park employee included things like a break-in to one of the buildings, implying that the landscape still faces risks posed by visitors.

Bodie only has one building, the Miner’s Union Hall, which has been opened to the public as a combined museum, gift shop, and visitor’s center. The museum does not tell any complete story of the town’s history but instead is mainly a collection of artifacts, sometimes with little explanation, and the gift shop takes up a small nook near the information desk. In addition to the museum, park rangers and employees lead guided tours of the town and the Standard Mill. Self-guided tour brochures are also available, and a popular alternative to the guided tours. Compared to Virginia City and Cripple Creek, it is clear that the focus of tourism in Bodie, is on Bodie. There’s no clear reason why visitors would travel to the site if they were not interested in the town or its history, as that is all that is available.

The idea of a ghost town, even as a visitor’s site or tourist attraction, necessarily excludes commercial development. To open buildings as commercial businesses, or restaurants, or old-West saloons would negate the character of the town as an empty, lonely, and abandoned site. Tourists and critics alike both recognize the same characteristic that separates Bodie from commercialized towns like Virginia City; Bodie is a landscape that is open to interpretation from visitors, who “can see things the way they really were” (Delyser 1999, 617). This is not to say that visitors believe Bodie was always the way it appears today, but rather that the town is like a blank palette for them to attach history to. This as opposed to towns where the tourist must “push through the distracting gauze of T-shirts and candy shops” (Christensen 1998, 92) to find some
tangible basis for the town’s history. In a less negative respect, towns like Virginia City also convey information to visitors about what the town was like, instead of allowing them to form their own judgments. For example, this happens with the costumed period actors who wander the streets and interact with potential customers (many of them are trying to convince visitors to come see a show or take a tour). These actors show the visitor an archetypal character and style of dress of the mining town, and when acting in character, tell the tourist about the way the town used to be.

Fig 5.3 Visitors peek into the window of one of Bodie’s buildings. Photo by author.
In Bodie, interaction with and investigation of the landscape, aided by pamphlets, guidebooks, or park employees, allows the visitor to reconstruct the past. The tourist can, by peering through windows and studying the landscape, find clues and come to their own conclusions about the people who lived there and what the historic mining town was like. The tourist can stand at the main intersection of town and imagine the bustling activities of boom-era mining camp, or look into the hotel and picture working men lining the bar. On the other hand, they do not want to see these things re-enacted in modern day with cars streaming through town and other tourists filling bar stools in western-themed saloons.

Given that the landscape’s authenticity forms an important part of the Bodie experience, it is important to turn to discussion of the integrity of the site and structural modifications that have been made since it opened as a state park. There are approximately a hundred buildings in Bodie State Historic Park; this number has gone down from 125 the year the park opened, and will continue to go down as buildings reach a point of deterioration where they can no longer be preserved. Bodie was much larger at one point, but the Great Fire of 1932 destroyed most of the town. Since this fire occurred well after the mining boom, and the town was already considered to be a ghost town, there was very little work done to rebuild. The fire removed many of the last traces of Bodie’s once-prosperous Chinatown, as well as the red light district. A large portion of the buildings that remained after 1932 were either residences or built of brick.

The Great Fire also destroyed the commercial center of Bodie, which explains why the structures remaining at the site are distinctly different from the main-street attributes of other mining towns. Many of Bodie’s buildings are one-storied, do not have
false fronts or built-up facades, and stand independently from nearby structures instead of forming the classic continuous façade of businesses along the main strip. This is because many of them were residences, and many were not in the center of town. However, drawing conclusions from the location of buildings poses a problem, since a number of Bodie’s buildings have been moved from their original locations. In addition what appears to be the main intersection in town, of Union and Main Street, is actually a few blocks south of the original urban center, where nothing remains in the wake of the Great Fire (Delyser 1999).

Fig. 5.4. Though nothing remains near these two businesses on Main Street in Bodie, the wall-to-wall proximity would indicate that this was once part of the commercial district. Picture by author.
Bodie is also unique because it is remarkably complete, not just in terms of the number of standing structures, but also because of what is inside the buildings. Peeking into windows, the tourists can spot artifacts left behind. All of the artifacts found in Bodie are original to the townsite, nothing has been imported. In addition, artifacts have not been sorted according to an appropriate time period; items left behind by residents in 1950 remain just the same as items that date back to the mining boom of the 1880s. However, what many visitors don’t realize is that these artifacts were once arranged by Bodie’s earlier generations of park rangers, as is seen with the dishes on the table seen in figure 5.1, or the world globe and schoolbooks seen in the window of the Bodie schoolhouse (fig 5.5). Today the park’s policy “mandates that neither the artifacts

![Fig 5.5. Two dust-covered items displayed near the windows of the Bodie schoolhouse. Photos by Author.](image)
nor the dust on top of them be disturbed” (Delyser 1999, 615-6) in order to preserve the passage of time that has occurred.

The work that park employees do to arrest decay in the park sometimes includes projects that might be highly visible to the park’s visitors. Because of this, repairs and work done around the park are made to look old. While tourists might never notice a patched roof, a shiny new roof made of tin would catch the visitor’s eye. Dydia Delyser recalls pouring Coca-Cola over the tin roofing material to oxidize it, giving it an authentic-looking patina. Broken glass was replaced with flat-poured glass congruent with the historic style of the buildings. Square nails were used to affix weathered – but new – wooden siding to buildings, giving the same appearance as the original materials. In repairing a hole in the brick wall of the morgue, workers “ran courses of bricks at a downhill slope, careful to simulate the tendency of the existing bricks” (Delyser, 1999, 614-5). What constitutes authenticity is subjective, though, and disagreements over how to preserve Bodie’s structures were common between Bodie’s staff and supervisors (Delyser 1999).

Perhaps the most important element of authenticity, in this context, is that the work that is done on the landscape fits in with existing materials and structures. Walking through the site today, it is difficult to determine which buildings have been subject to what repairs. Some, but not a majority, of visitors to Bodie are aware that the site is maintained through the aforementioned methods. However, even they have trouble discerning new construction from the original buildings.
Fig. 6.1. The Virginia City Outlaws Wild West Gunfight show yard in Virginia City. Photo by author.
Fig. 6.2. Timeline of significant events in Virginia City’s history. Source for events: James 1998.
Part of the legend of any great mineral strike is that of the fate of its discoverer. Tragedy befalls the hard-working prospector, who never gets to enjoy the wealth of his discovery. W.S. Bodie died in a snowstorm within a year of locating placer gold at what would later become the Bodie Mining District. Cripple Creek’s discoverer, Bob Womack, drank heavily and lived off of the charity of those people who had grown rich from his discovery. In the same vein, Virginia City has a number of ill-fated discoverers. The Grosh Brothers were the first to discover the site, but both died before they could stake a claim. Henry Comstock, the man for whom the Comstock Lode was named, claimed the Brothers’ possessions and staked a claim near where they had been searching, which turned out to be fruitless; meanwhile a group of four miners, including the man nick-named Old Virginny who is supposedly the source of Virginia City’s name, discovered the rich lode that set off the silver rush. These five early discoverers all sold or traded their interest in the mine, unaware of the size and wealth that would soon come out of the lode. Legend has it that Comstock went insane and later committed suicide, while Old Virginny traded every mine share he had for whiskey and drank himself to death (Lyman 1934).

Virginia City has its fair share of historic characters and mythology, from Old Virginny to the silver queen Eilley Orrum, Mark Twain and the violently murdered prostitute Julia Bulette. Today many of businesses and attractions lining Virginia City’s main street, C Street, invoke these legends and legendary characters. There is the Julia Bulette Red Light Museum, Grosh Brother’s Antiques, Mark Twain Casino, Comstock Rock Shop, Old Virginny’s Shooting Gallery, and the Virginia City Outlaws Daily Wild West Shows (figure 6.1). Other attractions have been based on fictional history, such as
the Ponderosa Saloon and mine tour, and the Bonanza Saloon. Still other businesses use mining-related themes, like the Forever Christmas store\textsuperscript{12}, or themes of nostalgia like Grandma’s Fudge.

Virginia City’s commercial strip, as of February 2011, contained a dozen businesses that were souvenir or curio shops, four antique stores, and four locations where tourists can get their picture taken dressed up like a Comstock madam, miner, or gunslinger. The antique store in a sense is part of the “cult of the merely old” in that they are prevalent in historic districts as they play into images of nostalgia and eras gone by. The antique store in an isolated tourist site – like those that are the subject of this thesis – rarely has larger items like furniture that are difficult to transport. While many of the items are similar to your typical antiques store, there is some focus on smaller knick-knacks that can serve as souvenirs, especially items related to western themes. This can include things like spurs, knives, horse shoes, authentic Indian jewelry, and collectible coins.

The category of “souvenir shop” is a bit vague, considering that anything the tourist buys as a memento of Virginia City could be considered a souvenir. However, for the purposes of this tally I only included businesses that sell a variety of souvenirs, such as jewelry, minerals, T-shirts, western-themed clothing, dolls and toys, mugs, postcards, candy, knives, Indian dreamcatchers, and books and brochures. Items sold don’t necessarily have any historic significance or value, but serve gifts or as mementos of the visitor’s time in the town. When it comes to souvenirs there is a sliding scale of relevance of an object to the site it is being sold. In some cases souvenirs might bear little or no

\textsuperscript{12} The “ore” in Forever is emphasized on the sign by an ore cart set behind the letters.
relation to the site’s heritage, but rather are items associated with the American West in general, and can be found in souvenir shops throughout the West.

Thus in addition to these twelve souvenir stores, there are a number of stores specializing in authentic western wear, Indian jewelry, leather works, coins and silver jewelry, and mineral specimens. Some souvenir shops, like the Christmas store, Barrels O’ Candy, or Steve’s Army Surplus bear no clear relation to the history of the town, and at best make vague references to western or nostalgic themes. In addition to these establishments, there are also quite a few western saloons in Virginia City, including the Silver Queen, Ponderosa, Delta, Washoe club, and the famous Red Dog and Bucket of Blood. In some cases the saloon includes a casino floor with densely packed slot machines that generally take up at least half of the establishment. There are also establishments that are primarily casinos, but the saloon with gaming devices often differs from the casino because gambling is not the primary focus. It is more common that locals will spend time at these locations, and these businesses also more commonly offer entertainment such as live bands. Historically the mining-town saloon offered gambling and the gambling hall sold drinks, likewise today the distinction between the two types of businesses is blurred.

In the C Street businesses, the tourist can view attractions like the historic Suicide Table, the Mark Twain Museum, or the Silver Queen – a large painting of a woman with a dress composed of real silver coins. Families can go to the Way it Was Museum, have a group photo taken in western garb, or pan for gold near a fake miner’s shack. Adult tourists might prefer to gamble a bit, and have a few drinks at one of Virginia City’s saloons.
From this description, it is clear why many people refer to Virginia City as a tourist trap. A repeated theme in many criticisms of Virginia City is the mention of stores selling T-shirts and hot dogs, treating the town like a theme park instead of a historic site. In addition, many visitors are displeased by the anachronistic slot machines found in many of the businesses, with gaudy bright lights and loud music. Visitors come to see the historic site and preserved buildings while learning the site’s history, but instead find a landscape littered with “twentieth-century side effects of tourism and gaming” (James 1998, 265). Expecting an authentic experience, some visitors are disappointed by what they view as a landscape overrun by exploitative commercial development. Kitschy souvenir shops and gambling halls appear crass in the context of the Historic District, and are viewed as potential threats to the historic integrity of the site. As discussed, Virginia City is often referred to as a ghost town since only about a thousand people remain in the city that once held over 10,000. This can add to the shock of the tourist’s experience on C Street; instead of a quiet, quaint historic town, they find a site bustling with tourists and businesses.

This criticism is also common to other commercialized historic towns like Tombstone, Arizona, which has capitalized on the fame of the shootout at the O.K. Corral by changing the focus of its history from mining to the famous gunfighters. Many historic towns in the West share the same types of businesses and amenities available in Virginia City, though the degree to which they are developed and commercialized varies. The main difference is that historic mining towns in Nevada generally have gambling available, if even only a few slot machines, while gambling is not legal in most other regions (besides the towns that will be discussed in the next chapter). One thing that is
common among many western towns, especially those with mining histories, is the sale of mineral specimens. Souvenir stores often offer polished pieces of obsidian and quartz, while mineral stores sell a variety of fossils, specimens, jewelry, carvings, insects entombed in glass paperweights, and occasionally ore specimens from local mines. Few of the items sold at the mineral store are representative of the geology and resources of the region, but mineral souvenirs are still a pillar of the mining-tourism town.

While there are many similarities between the West’s many historic mining towns, each town generally has its own identity, differentiating one town from another through unique historic events, figure, or characteristics. Tombstone has the O.K. Corral, Deadwood has Wild Bill Hickok, and Oatman has created a niche for itself as the “burro town.” Along with souvenir stores and amenities typical to the historic mining town, Oatman has gained fame from the wild burros that roam the town’s streets. These burros are supposedly descended from the animals used by miners and prospectors during the mining days of the town. Many of the burros are not in fact wild, but domesticated animals that are tied to poles; the wild burros themselves are quite tame, having learned that tourists will feed them carrots and burro food purchased from local vendors.

What Loewen refers to as “local history wars” can occur when multiple towns try to claim an important event or, as is more often the case, a person, as a part of their history; the loss of an important artifact can mean the loss of tourism revenues. In the West, there are many famous historic figures that traveled throughout the region – one

---

13 This is similar to Virginia City’s camels. For a short period, Virginia City used camels as pack animals, and the animals were later set free. While no camels remain in the area (other than the occasional bigfoot-like sighting), the traditional annual camel races became popular in the latter half of the twentieth century.
town might get a plaque stating that Billy the Kid spent the night in a certain building, a second might have a landmark where he killed a man, while another claims his birthplace, and yet another is the site of his death. The main problem with this is that local history wars can erupt over the ownership of personal artifacts. Do they belong where the person was born, or died, or spread among important landmarks of their life? Certain popular items, especially the person’s body, can prove to be contentious. An example of this is Wild Bill Hickok, who was buried in a Deadwood cemetery, and the town has fought to keep the body because it is a tourist attraction (Rosa 1996).

In other cases, it seems that towns share events as a sort of common history. Tombstone’s shootout at the O.K. Corral – and in later years, recreations of the event – set a precedent for western towns (Clements 2003). The types of shootouts portrayed in western film and television were in reality rare, but Oatman stages a gunfight on its main street. Virginia City likewise has an arena where gunfights are held, with bleachers facing a miniaturized construction of a typified western town. Buildings behind the actors include a rustic outhouse, a saloon, and a Wells Fargo office. The poster for the Virginia City Outlaws Wild West Show give credit for stunts and acting to Tombstone, and is surrounded by pictures of dramatized shoot-outs (one shows a man flailing through the air, presumably having been thrown or shot off of a building’s roof).

While the description of a commercialized Virginia City may be accurate, it is not complete. The account given by Christensen, that tourists must “push through the distracting gauze of T-shirts and candy shops” in order to see the history is true in the sense that the commercialization of Virginia City may distract some visitors from the historic side of the town. All of the commercial businesses in Virginia City line C Street,
making it a dense cluster of businesses in some places. However, Virginia City has a number of authentic landmarks and buildings, as well as museums, events, and activities that aim to teach visitors about the history of the great Comstock Lode. Tourists travel to see and experience the landscape, as well as visit museums and historic buildings. The amenities available, including souvenir shops and casinos, are secondary to the heritage and history. Sites like the restored Fourth Ward School, Piper’s Opera House, Mackay Mansion, and Chollar mine tour are popular attractions; in fact, Ronald James claims that the most-visited site in Virginia City is the cemetery, which is distinctly void of commercialization.

Commercialized historic towns like Virginia City have historically been what influenced by popular culture and visitor’s expectations of what the town should look like. Red Lodge, Montana, in the process of developing its own identity as a western
tourism town in the 1930s, adapted many of the main street buildings to look more like
to people were seeing in Western films. This meant building rustic-looking wood cabins at
campgrounds, as well as covering the Victorian facades of the town’s historic buildings
with vertical, unpainted clapboard, favoring “wood rather than brick, rustic instead of
industrial” (Christensen 2002). It wasn’t until the 1980s that this trend was reversed, and
the real historic buildings were restored.

Virginia City also went through a period of rustic wood facades. The iconic
television show Bonanza, set at the fictional Ponderosa ranch to the west of Virginia City,
gained widespread popularity in the early 1960s. Tourists began traveling to the Historic
District to see the town they were familiar with from television. The television show was
not filmed in Virginia City, though, and the Victorian-style brick buildings of the town
did not resemble the false-fronted wood buildings seen in Bonanza. Businesses in the
town soon discovered that they could provide tourists with a more authentic western
experience by covering their facades, like Red Lodge, with unpainted clapboard. This
resurfacing of the town occurred during the 1960s and 70s, and by the end of the era very
few of C street’s businesses were unaltered. At the same time, some of the town’s
businesses adopted Bonanza-themed names like The Ponderosa Saloon and the Bonanza
Casino.

Then, like Red Lodge, in the 1980s the facades began to come down in favor of
restoring the original buildings and architecture. This was in part because Bonanza’s
television run ended in 1973, but also because historic preservation groups and residents
believed the wooden facades had hidden an important part of Virginia City for the
purpose of attracting tourists. But pressures from these groups did not cause the change.
Rather, an important deciding factor was the implementation of tax credit projects and incentives to restore historic structures. Business owners and visitors alike were recognizing the importance of the historic architecture that was behind the wood fronts, but tax incentives mobilized the era of change. While Bonanza historically played an important role in shaping the town’s landscape, today little evidence remains. All but one of the wooden facades had been removed from Virginia City’s historic buildings by the 1990s: the Bonanza Casino is the last remaining business to retain the vertical clapboard, which it has maintained to the present day (James 1998).

Fig. 6.4. The Bonanza Casino and Café, the last historic structure in Virginia City to retain the vertical wooden clapboard façade popular of the post-Bonanza tourism era. Photo by author.
Another era that influenced the landscape was the popularity of Virginia City as an artist community in the 1940s and 50s, and as a site of the counter-culture movement of the 1960s. The counter-culture era symbolically renewed the relationship between Virginia City and San Francisco. In the center of the counter-culture movement in Virginia City was the Red Dog Saloon, a popular hang out for Bay Area poets, authors, and musicians. A 1996 documentary, *The Life and Times of the Red Dog Saloon*, details the role the saloon – and Virginia City – played in the music scene of the 1960s. Virginia City still has a role in the Rock and Roll scene today, as saloons like the Bucket of Blood have live shows most weekends. The saloon was also famously featured on the cover of the rock magazine *Spin* when Foo Fighters front-man Dave Grohl wore a Bucket of Blood shirt; the magazine cover is framed and hung over the T-shirt racks in the Saloon.

Similarly, Virginia City is a part of alternative culture as a popular motorcyclist mecca. The hill climb over the Davidson Range to Virginia City is a popular detour from Reno’s annual Hot August Nights car shows, as well as the Street Vibrations motorcycle festival. Motorcyclists enjoy the scenic ride to the town, which now caters to the group with a number of leather goods stores and souvenirs specific to this particular group of tourists.

Virginia City has had and continues to have many faces, but what it comes down to is the question of whether the commercial development is merely a distraction from the historic landscape, or does it in fact weaken the historic integrity of the Historic District? Other than the *Bonanza* era of altered facades, and the loss of a portion of the Historic District due to neglect during the same era, the main influence of commercialization has been in Virginia City’s signage. Business owners have not made major alterations to
buildings, outside of painting the buildings and putting up signs, and these types of alterations are regulated by the “Certificate of Appropriateness Application” process required by the Storey County Building Department.

Virginia City’s website invites visitors to “Step Back in Time,” and promotes activities like the Chollar mine tour, the historic Fourth Ward School museum, a ride on the Virginia and Truckee Railroad, the Way it Was museum, and other attractions that are strongly rooted in the town’s history. While it does have a commercial side, the history is still alive and preserved in the landscape. Furthermore, while C Street may have businesses that distract from the historic nature of the town, the historic buildings are still visible and impart historic information to the visitor who studies them. Virginia City can be explored just the same as Bodie, though, as discussed, it may be more difficult for the tourist to visualize the town the way it was in the golden era of the mining boom.

Virginia City, unlike Bodie, is a town that is in use. It has a permanent population of around a thousand people, many of whom are dependent on the town’s tourism. This brings up another side of tourism: the visitor-visited relationship. While Bodie is built on the premise that visitors can peer into homes, explore the town, and thus learn about it by interacting with it, these practices are not so welcome in populated tourist towns like Virginia City. There are a number of historic and restored residences in the town that are occupied, and the homeowners do not welcome tourists to explore their properties. In addition, there are some parts of the town, like the Catholic Church, that serve the community as well as being historic sites that the tourist might visit. It is important to remember that the town is lived in and has infrastructure supporting its residents, as well as being a historic district.
Fig. 6.5. A Bank of America, set below C Street, serves the community. Photo by author.

The fact that Virginia City is also a community means that there is new construction in some places. This is mainly restricted to residences, but also includes the new school, and the large Silverland Inn. The Silverland Inn – built as a Ramada Inn in 2006 – is a few blocks south of the commercial blocks of Virginia City, and has been a source of criticism because the building does not match the town. The scale is much larger than most of Virginia City’s buildings, and the architectural style is only vaguely western; without western objects sprinkled around the property, such as an ore cart and a stage coach, the building would have little connection to the western landscape.

Virginia City and similar commercialized historic mining towns have experienced
changes in the landscape associated with the expansion of the local tourism industry and the diversification of the economy. As a populated community, landscape management involves practical considerations, not just blanket preservation and restoration efforts. On the other hand, as a Historic District, Virginia City has maintained reasonable standards for the appearance and upkeep of many of the historic buildings. The parts of the landscape that are often considered to be objectionable – signs, slot machines, and various businesses – are generally not permanent parts of the landscape, and thus do not represent permanent damage to the town’s character. Slot machines and signs could be removed or changed, window displays could be altered, and businesses come and go regularly.
Chapter 7. Cripple Creek: Gaming Tourism in the Historic District

**Fig. 7.1.** A portion of the Cripple Creek District Museum. Photo by author.
Fig. 7.2. Timeline of significant events in Cripple Creek’s history. Source for events: Taylor 1966, Blevins and Jensen 1998, Cripple Creek & Victor Gold Mining Company, Department of Revenue of the State of Colorado.
Robert Guilford Taylor, in his book *Cripple Creek*, notes that there has been some tourist interest in the town since 1900. After World War II – in particular the closure of mines non-essential to war efforts mandated by War Production Board Order L-208 – businessmen in the area tried to develop the town as a tourist attraction. In 1953, the free Cripple Creek museum opened, and several mine and mill tours opened between 1949 and 1956. The majority of investment in developing the town’s tourist economy went toward Bennett Avenue and its historic buildings. However, there was no coordinated effort to develop the site as a tourist attraction. Instead the commercial district filled with “disjointed attractions, individually supported and of vastly varying degrees of quality and appeal” (Taylor 189). In 1966, Taylor wrote about a main street that sounds quite similar to the tourism development of Virginia City and other commercial historic districts, “following the common pattern of tourist meccas” (Taylor 192): businesses included pottery and curio shops, polished rock stands, photographers, antique and book stores, and the chance to pan for real gold. The legalization of limited gaming in the town, where casinos opened their doors in 1991, created a shift in the focus of tourism over the last two decades that differentiates the town from the style of tourism seen at Virginia City and other commercial mining towns.

It’s hard to imagine a saloon scene in a Western movie without the presence of gambling. While poker is most commonly portrayed, histories of mining towns cite a variety of card, dice, and luck games including roulette, craps, keno, billiards, dominoes, cribbage, and faro (Dixon 2005). Even the term “one-armed bandit,” referring to a slot machine, conjures up images of a western stagecoach robbery. Gambling is especially
pertinent in the western mining town, where money flowed freely at the saloons, and law
enforcement made little or no effort to prevent the activity. The Virginia City census
recorded 111 men who claimed their profession as “gambler” in 1870, and 60 in 1880.
Gambling also manifested in another way in the mining town; men staked their fortunes
in a game of chance that could make or break them, setting their bets on the land in the
hopes of finding the mother lode. As discussed in chapter 4, even the act of moving to a
new mining town to start a business could be a gamble. In Cripple Creek, “today’s
fortune-seekers” can try their luck on slot machines or table games (City of Cripple
Creek, Attractions).

In more recent years, gambling establishments in the state of Nevada have tapped
mining themes. There are thirteen casinos across the state with names including the word
“nugget” (see figure 7.3). Reno also has the Silver Legacy Resort Casino with a western
mining theme. The façade of the Silver Legacy that faces the main boulevard mimics the
pattern of mining town business districts, with large plate windows showing displays
themed after a western saloon and general store. The story behind the name is that the
casino was built on the site of a great silver mine discovered by Sam Fairchild, and, as
the sign over the casino entrance states, “Est. 1895.” Besides being a showy part of the
casino’s entertainment, the implication of building a casino on a great mine is that this is
a lucky place where one should try their luck on a one-armed bandit. In reality, the casino
was built in 1995, Sam Fairchild does not exist, and there was never a silver discovery at
– or for that matter, near – the site. Inside the casino, the central attraction is the 120-foot-
high mining rig. The Silver Legacy’s website boasts: “Sam Fairchild's legendary silver
mining rig is a wonder for all guests to behold, a spectacular souvenir from a bygone era
of mining wealth and now a fabulous Reno attraction.” Like Sam Fairchild, this structure is also a fake; as a part of the Legacy legend, the casino purports that the rig is a replica of the one used by Fairchild, and sits directly over the original mine site. Despite elaborate descriptions detailing the rig’s operation, the piece of machinery and its purpose do not correspond to any known mining technology; it merely looks like mining technology (Christensen 1998).

The connection between gambling in the mythic west and the mining town is seen in the modern legalization of gambling in four towns—Deadwood, North Dakota, and Central City, Black Hawk, and Cripple Creek in Colorado—where the activity seems to

Fig. 7.3. Map of “Nugget” casinos across Nevada.
Fig. 7.4 Kenny Rogers The Gambler slot machine in Las Vegas, themed after Kenny Rogers’ famous song, album, and television-movie series by the same name. The latter, a five-part series, follows an old-west gambler. Photo by author.

fit with the traditions and character of the historic mining towns. All four were at one time significant sites of mining, and all four have a history of gambling spanning from the boom days of mining through to modern times. Deadwood in particular lays claim to a famous gambling-related legend, as Wild Bill Hickok was killed while playing poker in a saloon in Deadwood. Legend has it that his poker hand contained a pair of black aces and a pair of black eights, which has become known as the “dead man’s hand” (Rosa 1996). This tale is an important part of the town’s heritage tourism both before and after the legalization of gambling in 1989. Many visitors came to see his grave and the famous site of his demise, and later the gambling halls employed Wild Bill Hickok impersonators to entice players into their establishment.

Visitors to these four gambling towns might be under the impression that
gambling was a historic activity that only occurred during the mining boom, and that this history merely served as an excuse or guise to revive the industry of vice in the last two decades. However, records show that when it comes to gambling in the West, old habits die hard. Illegal gambling practices continued well into the twentieth century: in many cases saloons openly offered card games and slot machines and the activities were considered to be a normal part of life. Jensen and Blevins discuss this legacy of gambling in Western mining towns, in particular the outright defiance of Colorado law that was exhibited through the twentieth century. They cite a 1948 *Rocky Mountain News* article that “surveyed Internal Revenue Service records and listed 1,503 slot machines on which federal taxes of $150,300 had been paid for the 1947-48 tax year, despite the fact that slot machines were not legal in Colorado” (17).

Police crack-downs and raids failed to drive out the illegal activity, only pushing it underground temporarily. In some cases the owners of gambling devices accepted to pay fines while continuing operations, treating the fine like a service fee. Central City was famous for its opera festival, which included craps, blackjack, and roulette tables in plain sight – community officials and law enforcement approved of it as a source of revenue that would go toward community improvements. From the 1950s on the government made more and more efforts to eradicate gambling in the region, which was part of the reason Deadwood first proposed the legalization of limited gambling in 1989. The town was also suffering financially by the early 1980s, and was facing the risk of losing its National Historic Landmark designation if it could not raise funds to save historic buildings. Gambling was legalized under the provision that the Deadwood Historic Preservation Commission and county received a sizable share of the tax revenue,
which was to be spent on the revitalization of the Historic District. Thus gambling was a means of economic diversification, a part of the town’s heritage, and a way to prevent the loss of that heritage by maintaining the historic landscape.

For Deadwood, the success of legalizing limited gambling by far exceeded expectations. Tax revenues provided more than enough funds to preserve and restore the town’s historic buildings and character, including details like repaving the Main Street with brick. One of the important consequences of having too much money to spend on one historic district was that the Preservation Commission could afford to restore structures in cases where it would be cheaper to demolish them and build replicas; with lesser funds, they would not be able to justify these projects.

Three historic mining towns in Colorado took interest; they too had a prominent history of gambling, and they too were facing economic problems that put their historic landscape at risk. By the 1990 census, Cripple Creek’s population had dropped below 600; Central City and Black Hawk both had less than 400 residents (Moffat 1996). The economies of the three towns were at that time largely based on seasonal historic tourism, but their out-of-the-way locations and potentially harsh winters prevented any of the three from flourishing.

The original aim of legalizing gambling in the three Colorado towns was to diversify the economy and produce funds for local preservation efforts. However, as Jensen and Blevins point out, the critical difference between the legislation allowing limited gambling in Deadwood and the legislation that passed in Colorado is that the Deadwood Historic Preservation Commission directly received a large portion of the income from gambling, while in Colorado 28% of the tax revenue from limited gaming
went into the state of Colorado’s Historic Society; 20% of which was returned to the
towns, and the other 80% went to historic preservation and restoration throughout the
state. Spreading the funds state-wide made “Colorado the leading state in historical
preservation spending,” according to the Department of Revenue’s Division of Gaming
website.

While there might initially appear to be a benefit to the strategy of distributing tax
revenue throughout the state – especially considering that there ended up being an excess
of funds available for preservation in Deadwood – the overall consequence was one of
sacrifice. The three Colorado towns did not receive as much support for preservation as
they needed, not because of lack of funding but because of a lack of sufficient protection,
as historic districts, from the inertial forces of gaming development. While these three
towns bore the burden of the new industry, the economic benefits were experienced state-
wide. The three towns do receive a significant amount of the tax revenue, but not all of it
can be applied to preservation and restoration efforts. The growing gaming industry
means that the towns have to put far more funds into infrastructure such as road
maintenance and improving water and sewage systems to support the increased number
of visitors. It also means more county salaries, as gaming-related jobs must be filled and
the police force must be increased.

It should also be pointed out that these towns had legalized limited gaming from
1991 through June of 2009. As originally allowed, casinos could operate from 8am to
2am daily, with a bet limit of $5, and the only gambling allowable was slot machines,
poker, and blackjack. By limiting gambling, lawmakers hoped to limit the growth of the
casino industry as well as negative consequences to the integrity of these Historic
Districts. However, in July of 2009 Amendment 50 went into effect, allowing casinos to operate twenty-four hours a day, accepting bets up to $100, and adding craps and roulette games. 78% of the tax revenues attributable to Amendment 50 go to Colorado community colleges, and the other 22% to address gaming impacts in the region, in effect as of fiscal year 2010. Estimates given for the five years following the implementation of Amendment 50 show an expected $29 million to be distributed to community colleges in budget year 2011, and increasing to $63 million by budget year 2015.

The consequences of legalizing high-stakes gambling are not yet clear. However, this raises the question: will this expansion exacerbate problems of preserving the historic landscape while continuing to use funds to support the State? The amount of financial support being provided to state institutions like the Community College system and the State Historic Society could be viewed as a justification for the continued desecration of these select historic landscapes. While it would be considered an unfortunate loss, it is being balanced by the contributions made to society and the other historic sites. Certainly the towns’ residents and historic societies will always fight to prevent this level of destruction of the landscape, but the fact that gaming is heavily concentrated into these three towns means that they will face an uphill battle to continue to limit growth. The focus for the remainder of this chapter will be on the town of Cripple Creek and the influence of gaming tourism on the landscape.

Today Cripple Creek has thirteen gaming establishments, as shown on map 5.2, mainly lining Bennett Avenue. Bennett Avenue is not just the main street of town; the eastern half of the avenue, where most of the casinos are located, is also Colorado State Highway 67, a thoroughfare for the region. The original intention of legalizing limited
Fig. 7.5. Map of casinos in Cripple Creek, Colorado.
gambling was to diversify the economy by adding a new activity to the tourist economy. However, rather than diversifying it has led to an economy that is highly concentrated on gaming, as Blevins and Jensen note that many other businesses have been pushed out of town by the rush to develop existing properties into gaming establishments. Unlike Black Hawk, which was the most affected of the three towns, Cripple Creek still has a number of antique stores, souvenir shops, and restaurants as well as museums (see fig. 7.5). Cripple Creek also has far more abandoned store fronts; Central City and Black Hawk, located in canyons with limited buildings and space available for development, have ended up more restricted to gambling than Cripple Creek.

Cripple Creek has three museums and a heritage center. One of the museums is the Cripple Creek District Museum, which covers the history of the mining district, but the subject-matter of the other two, a successful brothel and the town jail, is indicative of the role of the mythic West and sensationalism in history. The Old Homestead – once a high-end brothel in the center of the town’s red-light district – is one of the more important historic buildings in the town, with a description listed in Cripple Creek’s NRHP 1966 nomination form stating that it was being run as a museum.

The Outlaws and Lawmen Jail Museum’s description on the City of Cripple Creek’s website reads:

*Like every western gold rush town, Cripple Creek had more than our fair share of miscreants and troublemakers. Fortunately, we also had a brave group of men sworn to keep the outlaws in line. Learn their stories in an authentic Cripple Creek jail museum... As you can imagine, the jail was never short of occupants... You simply won’t find a more authentic Colorado jail museum experience anywhere else.*

This description ignores two things. First of all, Cañon City is the closest city to the south
of Cripple Creek, and is arguably the site of a more authentic Colorado jail museum experience\textsuperscript{14}. But more importantly, Cripple Creek doesn’t have much of a lawless past to lay claim to. Like many mining towns, the majority of men that ended up in its jail cells were drunks or petty criminals; on top of this, there are several reasons that Cripple Creek lacked the typical cast of old-west criminals. For one, the town of Cripple Creek was not as isolated from proper society as towns like Bodie or Virginia City were. The nearest urban center was Colorado Springs, an upper-class community that included the ritzy Broadmoor, a resort and casino modeled after European casinos (Sprague 1953). Timing was also a factor since Cripple Creek is considered to be the last major gold strike in the West, discovered in 1890 and peaking around the turn of the century, by which time the lawless West was no longer so lawless.

Other activities available in the town that are non-gambling related and typical to the western mining town include the Mollie Kathleen Mine tour, Mt. Pisgah Cemetery tours, the Butte Opera House. As a part of economic diversification, the town also promotes outdoor recreational activities like snow and water sports, biking, hiking, off-road ATV and BMX trails, and hunting. The official website for the town of Cripple Creek touts all of these opportunities and more, while downplaying the emphasis on gaming in the town’s landscape and economy.

While there are a number of historic buildings and markers, museums and a heritage center with family activities, and recreation activities available in the region, the presence of gaming has created a distinct shift in tourist demographics. Cripple Creek has

\textsuperscript{14} The museum is located in Cañon City’s former women’s prison, mere feet away from the still-active city prison that was the site of famous Cañon City riots in 1929. It has been the subject of movies as well as a filming location.
family-oriented attractions, but as a whole it is no longer a family-friendly vacation destination. It is more suited for adults mainly because of the presence of gambling that fills many of the buildings along Bennett Avenue, and laws prohibiting minors from being on the casino floor. In addition, Colorado laws that prohibit smoking inside gaming establishments, unlike Nevada, and the casino fronts are lined with benches full of smokers and ashtrays. The amount of smoking in the densest area of casinos on Bennett, between second and third streets, makes the sidewalk an inhospitable place for young children.

The casinos themselves are a prominent feature of the main street. Some of their names are loosely based on Cripple Creek’s historic events or figures, like the Gold Creek Casino, J.P. McGills, and the Womacks Casino and Hotel. Others, such as Bronco Billy’s, Buffalo Billy’s, and the Brass Ass employ generic western themes. The casinos occupy some of Cripple Creek’s original buildings, and have preserved the general aesthetic of the historic mining town’s urban center. Bennett Avenue still illustrates the typical density and design elements of the commercial district, where wall-to-wall businesses still form an unbroken façade along most of the block. The buildings are mainly brick, built after the two major fires of 1896 that razed most of Cripple Creek. The architectural style is largely Victorian-era with Italianate embellishments; the buildings are mainly two- or three-storied, and many have narrow facades due to the historic sale of lots that were 25 feet wide and 125 feet deep - as discussed in chapter 4, on the importance of the façade and street footage. The businesses have modest signage, with no neon or other glaring anachronisms; as mentioned by Francaviglia and seen in Virginia City, the historic district’s signage includes typefaces that have an old fashioned
Fig. 7.6. Six distinct facades along East Bennett Avenue. The building in the foreground has a wide façade and contains one business, the Midnight Rose Casino. The historic 25-foot division of lots is more visible in the five structures to the right of the Midnight Rose.

appearance (1996, 141). Like Virginia City, Cripple Creek requires a certificate of appropriateness to be filed before changes can be made to structures, meaning that the City of Cripple Creek has some authority over the appearance of the main street.

The Bennett Avenue Historic District’s preservation ordinance lists a number of restrictions on the town’s development that are intended to preserve the integrity of the site as a historic district as well as create aesthetic continuity on the town’s main street. Many restrictions apply to the scale and form of buildings and the composition of facades, which, most importantly, should “be visually compatible” with neighboring
structures. New structures or facades “shall be designed to use the general building sizes, forms, rhythm, colors and features found in historic buildings” (Bennett Avenue Historic District Preservation Ordinance).

The legalization of gambling and establishment of casinos in the Cripple Creek Historic District has led to two threats to the historic buildings. The first is the prominent practice of façadism, and the other is the practice of demolishing the town’s original buildings and building casinos in architectural styles congruent with the district’s historic buildings, as in the case of Black Hawk’s Silver Hawk Casino. The growth of the gaming industry has been at odds with preservation efforts at times, especially when the expansion of casinos has meant the demolition of some of Cripple Creek’s original buildings.

Colorado law limits the number of gaming devices a casino can have by floor space, meaning that many of the alterations to the historic buildings and landscape have been aimed at increasing floor footage. Façadism has been commonly employed in Cripple Creek. By this I mean that the façade of a historic building is preserved and restored, while the inside of the building is gutted or a new structure is built behind the façade. The latter is more common in Black Hawk, where the lack of building space available made it more practical to build larger buildings behind the facades. In Cripple Creek the former method has been more common, and in order to maximize floor space in some cases the buildings have changed the ceiling heights, added basements, or expanded below the basement.

The expansion of the Double Eagle Casino in the early 2000s caused uproar as the street’s largest casino spread to encompass the entire 400 block of Bennett Street. In
order to make this expansion, three small historic buildings were demolished, and replica façades rebuilt in their place. Today the properties are a part of the Double Eagle, and contain a restaurant and ice cream shop. Many critics believe that casino interests are being favored over the historical integrity of the landscape, and that casinos are taking the easy – and inexpensive - route by demolishing structures instead of restoring them. In some cases, casinos may even be negligent and deliberately take actions that will threaten the structural integrity of historic buildings to justify demolishing them (Howard 2003). The Historic District’s preservation ordinance discourages “replicas or fake historic buildings,” however this exception seems to have been a worrisome development for preservationists.

On the other side of the argument, it was conceded that historic buildings can be quite brittle, and restoration efforts can be impractical if not impossible. A 2003 article sums up the worries surrounding gaming in a historic district: “Hungry for continued economic growth, officials on the City Council and Historic Preservation Commission… are becoming too lax in enforcing the city's historic codes, which only regulate what happens to a building's exterior” (Howard), where “authentic historic buildings could be demolished and replaced by new “pseudo-historic” structures that are more convenient for gaming tables and machines” (Blevins and Jensen 1998, 127).

In most cases of façadism in Cripple Creek, the interior was completely remodeled with little or no attention paid to the restoration of the historic building’s interior, which was merely modified to suit the needs of the casino. In 1992, only a year after gambling was legalized, Central City, Black Hawk, and Cripple Creek were all upgraded from priority two to priority one by the National Park Service, putting them in
the “most endangered” category, largely due to the practice of façadism. The alternative argument to this is that the town would have been endangered despite the casinos, due to the small population of Cripple Creek and the lack of funds available for preservation projects (Blevins and Jensen 1992, 123).

While the wide-spread opinion on façadism is negative, it is important to note that the practice does preserve the most important part of the building; the façade. Going back to chapter 4, I discussed the fact that the façade – being the only visible part of the building – was often made out of the best materials and built in the newest architectural fashions, presenting an attractive front to a building that might otherwise be unremarkable. One of the justifications for Cripple Creek to become a historic district was the uniformity and quality of period architecture, which in turn was mainly evident in the facades of Bennett Avenue businesses.

One of the ways in which gambling has taken over the landscape has been through transportation. There are a number of shuttle and bus services to the town daily, mainly from Colorado Springs, but many visitors drive to the town. As mentioned, Central City and Black Hawk face difficulties related to their location in a tight canyon, which includes the problem of parking – at one time it was proposed that Black Hawk would essentially serve as a parking garage, and bus visitors down the canyon to Central City (Blevins and Jensen 1998). The availability of parking has not posed as large a problem to the town of Cripple Creek, where many empty lots behind the east end of Bennett Avenue have been converted into parking lots. However convenient parking was another issue, “always a significant problem, often discouraging potential patrons from making the hour or more drive from the major population centers in the state, particularly
in the winter with the lack of available covered parking” (Walker Parking Consultants). Many of the casinos today advertise that they have covered parking garages available. In fact, one of the more remarkable modern structures in the town is related to parking: the Midnight Rose Parking Structure, which was designed to blend in with the historic structures of Cripple Creek’s downtown (fig. 7.7).

The Midnight Rose Parking Structure mimics the brick and architectural style of the town’s historic buildings, with tall, narrow building fronts and Italianate detailing. The facades have awnings, lights, and pane windows like those seen on the main street. These are, of course, just facades covering the six-level parking garage for the Midnight Rose casino, though this is only indicated to visitors through the “parking”

![Image](image.png)

**Fig. 7.7.** Over a dozen parking lots are visible in this satellite image of Cripple Creek, plus many casinos advertise covered parking garages for the winter months. The relatively large and tall white-looking building toward the center of the image is the Midnight Rose Parking Structure. Bennett Avenue is the northern of the two east-west roads, and the cross-streets, from right to left, are 4th, 3rd, 2nd, and 1st streets. Image from Google Earth, image date October 16, 2010.
Fig. 7.8. The façade of the Midnight Rose Parking Structure. The center building with blue trim is the historic Katinka building. Image from Walker Parking Associates.
The prominence of gambling in Cripple Creek may distract visitors from the history side of the town, and lead to accusations that the town is becoming a “theme-park-like replica -- like the phony New York skyline or the made-for-tourists Pyramid of Las Vegas” (Howard 2003). However, for those tourists that are looking to engage with the history and an authentic historic landscape, opportunities are still available, and many historic buildings remain unthreatened by gaming and growing casinos. The recent expansion of Colorado gaming law to include high-stakes gambling may yet have negative consequences for Cripple Creek’s Historic District, but only time will tell.

One building breaks the roofline – the historic Katinka building, seen in the center of figure 7.8 with blue trim – standing at two stories. The parking garage, built in 2002, was designed around this historic building, though only the Katinka’s façade and front eighteen feet were preserved. The Katinka was the only building modified by this project. The indented outline of the building is visible in figure 7.7.

Though the sign in this image is fairly subtle, the west-facing wall of the structure breaks the illusion with a large sign stating “parking garage,” and the blocky open windows characteristic of parking garages are not covered with the detailed windows seen on this façade.
Chapter 8. Conclusion

The mining town was an important force in developing the West as a region, including the exploration of the region, settlement patterns, and the expansion of railway lines. Mining operations in the West extracted great wealth from the earth, which both supported the nation and funded the growth of great American cities like San Francisco. The mining town plays an important role as a part of the American West. Yet this side of history is not what most people think of when they think about the West; for many, the mythic West evokes images of cowboys and rangeland, while the mining town is an oft-forgotten yet essential part of the fabric of the region.

The prominence of popular western character archetypes like the gambler, prostitute, banking baron, and barkeep can be attributed – at least in part – to the presence of mining in the area. Other characters, such as the nomadic prospector and the miner, are directly related to the west’s mining activity. There are also mining and mining-town structures that form an iconic part of the western landscape: the mine entrance, bordered by heavy wooden beams; the rig looming over the mine shaft; the miner’s shack; the stamp mill; the saloon. Similarly, mining accessories like ore carts, sluice boxes, picks, shovels, lanterns, gold pans, chunks of ore, and minerals become decorative pieces or symbols that hint at a history of mining. All of these – characters, structures, and artifacts – are found not just in Historic Districts or touristic mining towns; they are seen throughout the region as subtle representations of the history of the West. Mining-related imagery and tourism forms an important connection to the region’s past. Tourism in the western mining town captures the spirit of the historic West and the adventure of mining, and it can be educational at the same time that it is entertaining.
As previously discussed and emphasized by Richard Francaviglia, mining activity produces remarkably similar landscapes despite differences in the type of mining, the location, or the exact year of the town’s establishment. The distinct characteristics of a mining landscape have been accurately mimicked in film, recreated in attractions like Knott’s Berry Farm’s Ghost Town, and are recognizable to many Americans. Likewise, a number of events and traits are common to the mining town’s history and character.

The common history of things like gambling, prostitution, banditry, and gunslinging is often apparent in the attractions and amenities available in a mining town. Archetypes have developed from this common history as well as from popular interpretations of the mining town, including those found in boom-era news and literature, and those seen on the silver screen.

This in turn is reflected in the tourist landscape of mining towns. A common history of gambling activity, for example, is a major contributing factor to the current condition of Cripple Creek. The more recent popularity of mining towns-turned-ghost towns is seen in Bodie. Virginia City and similar commercial tourist sites employ a variety of popular archetypes of the mining town, and the history represented in the town includes broad themes common to mining town history. At a more general level, tourism in mining towns also employs themes of nostalgia, and tries to convey age and the passage of time through the landscape.

While there are many similarities and parallels between historic mining towns,

---

16 Knott’s Berry Farm bought the town of Calico, California, a former mining town. A number of the buildings were disassembled, transported to the theme park, and reassembled on location. The park’s Ghost Town is not an exact recreation, as only a portion of the buildings are originals from Calico; the rest of the buildings, as well as their arrangement, is designed by the park to mimic a mining town.
and their development of tourism industries, it is important not to conflate tourism with a process of homogenization. Commercial tourism does involve features borrowed from film, legend, ideas of the mythic West, and other mining towns. Only the shallow observer, however, would claim that the history and landscape of mining towns have been generalized and modified to the point where they have lost their individual characters and become indistinguishable from one another. Each community has a unique legacy passed down from the mining history in the region, and this legacy is manifested in the landscape and features of the tourist economy.

At a basic level, the town’s history can be influenced by the magnitude and type of mining strike that occurred at the site: the type of metal being extracted, the quality of ore, the size of the lode, and whether the mining is underground, placer, or open-pit. More than that, the community supporting the mines develops differently in each situation, and the legacy is shaped by the events and figures unique to the town. Bodie and similar ghost towns are a reminder that mining towns all have different fates; not all survive the closure of the mines. Mark Twain is a major figure who has influenced the character of Virginia City, a fact that is apparent both in the history and in the landscape of the town. Oatman, Arizona, the burro town, provides a third example of how the unique circumstances surrounding a mining town can both affect and define the nature of its tourist industry.

There is a dichotomy of perceptions of the landscape when it comes to tourism in mining towns. In academic and popular literature, tourism often evokes negative responses and is considered to be a disingenuous practice. Furthermore, tourism is seen as having a negative impact on the landscape and culture of the visited region, as the
place becomes financially dependent on certain traits, ideas, or expectations. In Hawaii, for example, native practices like the hula dance and making lei necklaces have been emphasized through generations of tourism. What critics of tourism often don’t recognize is that tourism is a serious and significant subject of study. Examining the role of tourism in shaping historic landscapes – not just those of mining towns – is important to understand the landscape management practices of historic sites.

Daniel Boorstin makes an unintended point when he states that tourist meccas contrive “an artificial product to be consumed in the very places where the real thing is free as air” (99): the historic mining community often does create products and experiences catered for tourist consumption, but the real thing – the authentic and historic landscape – is just as available. The authentic experience is not always free, which is clear in the case of Bodie as the park charges entry fees; however, it might be more appropriate to compare the authentic landscape to air in the sense that it is ubiquitous and a necessary element of the historic mining town experience. The landscape forms the basis for the tourist economy and serves as a visual support for the western and mining-related themes of local tourism.

The nature of a mining town changes as time passes. Most western mining towns experienced their boom between 1860 and 1900, meaning that these towns, while historic, are still relatively recent. At this point it is safe to say that the time has passed for collecting oral histories and personal accounts from residents that experienced the mining boom, and contemporary residents have not necessarily lived in the town for very long. The population of historic mining towns often remains relatively stable, but there has been significant turnover of people moving to or away from the towns since the early
1900s. This means that there is a growing disconnection between current generations of residents and the historic landscape, calling into question the future of preservation.

Many historic buildings and neighborhoods have already been lost to time and neglect. In the case of Bodie, once a building is lost (and, according to Delyser, usually at least one building is lost every winter) it is lost forever; it is not restored, and no reproductions are built on site. In Virginia City and Cripple Creek, at least, large-scale restoration efforts can slow the affects of time.

It is unclear what the future will bring for these historic mining towns, but changes will likely be related to the continuance of tourism in the town. As such, it is important to understand the role and different manifestations of tourism in these mining towns as they affect the historic landscape. The demographics of tourism in historic mining towns have included a large number of people who grew up in the era of western film and television. As that generation ages, quits traveling, and passes away, the mining town faces the problem of attracting younger generations. The impact of this may already be influencing the mining town, as younger generations have shown more interest in visiting sites as they employ historic tourism, rather than as contrived attractions. While most of the touristic mining towns aim toward furthering economic diversification to prevent obsolescence, the means of diversification poses the risk of altering the nature of the town. As seen in the case of Cripple Creek, attempts to diversify may introduce industries that end up dominating the landscape.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Delyser, Dydia. 2003. ‘Good, By God, We’re Going to Bodie!’: Ghost Towns and the American West. In *Western Places, American Myths*, ed. Gary J. Hausladen, 273-


Heath, Kingston Wm. 2006-7. Assessing Regional Identity Amidst Change: the Role of


Piatt, Michael H. 2003. *Bodie: “the mines are looking well...”: the history of the Bodie mining district, Mono County, California*. El Sobrante, California: North Bay
Books.

