

Miners' Exchange Block
Southeast corner of Main and Wall Streets
Idaho City
Boise County
Idaho

HABS No. ID-14

HABS,
ID,
8-1001,
9-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. ID-14

MINERS' EXCHANGE BLOCK

- Location: Southeast corner of Main and Wall Streets, Idaho City, Boise County, Idaho.
Longitude: 115° 49' 53" Latitude: 43° 49' 42".
- Present Owner: Barzilla Young is purchasing the Miners' Exchange Saloon on contract from Maybel Earl. The County Recorder and Auditor's Office, which is also housed in the Miners' Exchange Block, is owned by Boise County.
- Present Occupant: Miners' Exchange Saloon, Kitchen, and the County Recorder and Auditor's Office.
- Present Use: The Miners' Exchange Saloon and Kitchen occupy two of the three sections, and the County Recorder and Auditor's Office occupy the remaining section.
- Significance: The Miners' Exchange Building is one of a half-dozen red brick structures in Idaho City built during the city's first decade. Important as a part of a homogeneous historic district as well as an example of a territorial building, the Miners' Exchange has been thoroughly renovated and is one of the most successful commercial restorations in Idaho.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Dates of erection: The block consists of three connected parts: the Miners' Exchange Saloon on the south side, the Miners' Exchange Kitchen in the center, and the County Recorder and Auditor's Office on the corner of Main and Wall Streets. Each section has a different building record. John Claesy's saloon, the central section, was built in the autumn of 1865. The Idaho World of September 23, 1865 states, "If anybody wants to observe the patterns of enterprise let them inspect John Claesy's brick building..." which was just being completed.

By 1867, Claesy added a Club Room where the present saloon is, "This established and popular saloon has now attached to it a new large and elegantly furnished Club Room...: (Idaho World, June 1, 1867. Vol. I, No. 8)

The County Recorder and Auditor's Office was originally a general store, known as Vantine and Company. A fire in 1867 damaged the store, which was rebuilt afterwards. The store was again damaged by a second fire in August 1871. Vantine and Company then moved to the west side of Main Street, but in September of 1871, G.W. Crafts, W.B. Vantine's partner, decided to rebuild the store on the old site. By October 5, the carpenters were finishing the roof, and by October 12, the new store was finished. Vantine and Company, now owned by Crafts, who took over after Vantine's death, once again opened for business on the southeast corner of Main and Wall Streets.

2. Architect: Unknown.

3. Original and subsequent owners: The Miners' Exchange Saloon and Kitchen stands on lots 2 and 7 of Block R in the townsite of Idaho City Plat of 1915. Reference to the title of the lots is in the Deed Books located at the Boise County Recorder and Auditor's Office, Idaho City, Idaho.

- 1864 Deed, December 29, 1864, recorded in Deed Record 4, pp. 676-678. Louisa McKibben to John Claesy for \$600.
- 1865 Deed, March 15, 1865, recorded in Deed Record 5, pp. 326-327. Charles W. Marden to John Claesy for \$375, "Being twenty-seven feet running from east to west and 25 feet of the lot owned and claimed by said Charles W. Marden and John Claesy's Saloon."
- 1869 Deed, August 17, 1869, recorded in Deed Record 12, pp. 157-159. John Claesy to William Baird and James Judge for \$3,500.
- 1872 Deed, June 22, 1872, recorded in Deed Record 13, pp. 213-215. Sold at auction to the highest bidder, James Judge, administrator of the estate of William Baird, to William Tincher for \$2,600.
- 1891 Deed, April 20, 1891, recorded in Deed Record 17, pp. 17-18. F.F. Church, public administrator of the estate of Anna Tincher to Mary Hang for \$2,500.
- 1903 Quit Claim Deed July 1, 1903, recorded on July 13, 1903, in Deed Record 124, pp. 531-532. Mary Hang to W.R. Reeves for \$2,500.
- 1905 Deed, July 22, 1905, recorded on September 12, 1905, in Deed Record 28, p. 424. W.R. Reeves and Maud Reeves for \$2,500.
- 1907 Deed, July 20, 1907, recorded on July 20, 1907 in Deed Record 31, p. 329. W.N. Reeves and Isabella Reeves to Melvin Wiegel for \$2,500.
- 1915 Deed, September 21, 1915, recorded on January 30, 1917 in Deed Record 41, p. 527. Lots 2 and 7, Block R to Melvin Wiegel from Probate Judge John H. Myer.

- 1936 Quit Claim Deed, June 10, 1936, recorded on June 19, 1936, in Deed Record 48, p. 60, Lot 9, Block R, N.A. Carpentier to Melvin Wiegel for \$50, "Except for a strip of land 3 feet wide on west side of said lot Nine."
- 1945 Deed, July 18, 1945, recorded July 19, 1945 in Deed Record 51, p. 149. Lots 2, 7 and 9 from Melvin Wiegel to Harvey N. and Leona M. White.
- 1946 Deed, May 6, 1946, recorded on May 8, 1946 in Deed Record 51, p. 345. Lots 2, 7 and 9 Harvey N. and Leona M. White to Walter and Vesta Ann Braybeal.
- 1948 Deed, December 31, 1948 in Deed Record 52, p. 467. Lots 2, 7 and 9 Walter and Vesta Ann Braybeal to Ivan and Rheta Bunker "subject to a certain mortgage to Mauricio Guery dated October 6, 1947."
- 1949 Deed, August 30, 1949, in Deed Record 52, p. 589. Lots 2, 7 and 9 Ivan and Rheta Bunker to John W. Desmond "subject to mortgage to Mauricio Guery..."
- 1952 Deed, April 3, 1952, recorded in Deed Record 53, p. 583. Lots 2, 7 and 9 John W. and Nerissa Desmond to A.J. and Joseph A. Deymonaz.
- 1954 Quit Claim Deed, April 23, 1954, recorded in Deed Record 54, p. 322. A.J. Glaydce, Joseph A. and Dora Deymonaz to J.W. and Nerissa Desmond.
- 1956 Decree, Estate of John W. Desmond, August 1956, in Deed Record 57, p. 538. Upon the death of John W. Desmond (March 5, 1955) lots 2, 7 and 9 pass to his widow Nerissa.
- 1957 Warranty Deed, May 22, 1957, recorded March 15, 1966 Deed Record 58 p. 137. Lots 2, 7 and 9 Nerissa Desmond Holliday (formerly Nerissa Desmond) to Lee and Maybel Earl.
- 1967 Decree, April 13, 1967, recorded in Deed Record 58, p. 459. Estate of Lee Earl, upon the death of Lee Earl (June 3, 1966) Lots 2, 7 and 9 pass to Maybel Earl.
- 1973 Mortgage, Maybel Earl to Barzilla Young.

The County Recorder and Auditor's Office. Lot 8, Block R of the townsite of Idaho City Plat of 1915. Reference to the title of this lot is in the Deed Books located at the Boise County Recorder and Auditor's Office, Idaho City, Idaho.

- 1865 Deed, April 12, 1865, recorded April 15, 1865 in Deed Record 5, p. 513. C.C. Higby, et al, to W.D. Vantine for \$3,500.

- 1871 Deed, October 6, 1871, recorded January 12, 1872 in Deed Record 13, pp. 143-144. Carole Vantine to G.W. Crafts for \$21,000 undivided one-half interest.
- 1871 Deed, November 6, 1871, recorded in Deed Record 13, pp. 100-101. Carole Vantine to G.W. Crafts for \$1,400 undivided one-half interest in that lot situated on the southeast corner of Main and Wall Streets.
- 1876 Deed, October 4, 1876, recorded in Deed Record 14, p. 225. George Crafts to Boise County for \$2,200.
- 1915 Deed, September 21, 1915, recorded in Deed Record 41, p. 85. John H. Meyers, Probate Judge of Boise County to Boise County in accordance with the "metes and bounds...contained in Book Number 18 of Patents, p. 58" Lot 8 Block R in the townsite of Idaho City Plat of 1915.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: The building of Miners' Exchange Saloon was a collaborative effort. P.H. Nevins did the carpentry, Walters and Wallace the brick and plastering work, and Hays and Brothers the paint job. Claresy probably acted as his own general contractor, a common practice at that time. G.W. Crafts served as a general contractor for the new Vantine and Company in 1871.
 5. Original plan and construction: All three sections of the block are built of local red brick. The clay came from across Elk Creek and was reputedly half-baked because of its fragility.
 6. Alterations and additions: After the fire of August 1871, some additions in the rear of the building were erected, when William Baird owned the Miners' Exchange. The Idaho World reported, "a fine new awning has been erected in front of the building, substantial sheds in the rear..." (Idaho World, August 21, 1871, vol. VII, No. 44).

The County Recorder and Auditor's Office was remodeled in the mid-1870s. At this time the vaults for both the Recorder and the Auditor's Office were added. The Sheriff's Office, now across the street, once stood in the rear of the building. With the exceptions of a bricked-in fireplace and a chimney that were removed, the County Recorder and Auditor's Office is little altered.

By contrast, the Miners' Exchange Saloon and Kitchen were both considerably renovated in 1973. Barzilla Young and Martin Nelson were responsible for the complete restoration of the saloon and restaurant. Old floors in both sections were removed and replaced with new joists. Pine flooring was used in the saloon and linoleum in the restaurant. Plaster was chipped from the walls in the saloon, exposing the original bricks; new plumbing and wiring were installed in both sections. The old oak bar was restored. The front facade was repainted, new doors and windows added, and an old neon sign removed.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Exchanging gold dust for legal tender or credit was a common practice at the saloons in the early mining camps. In exchange for his gold dust, a miner frequently obtained a chit (coupon) to be used at the local stores. A common name throughout the northwest United States, the Miners' Exchange Saloon acted as a kind of bank.

The Idaho City Miners' Exchange Saloon has had a colorful history. John Claresy's saloon was "the place in Idaho." One of the oldest buildings in the state, it withstood two fires in 1867 and 1871 which devastated most of the buildings.

The saloon's original owner John Claresy was an interesting character. In August of 1867, the Internal Revenue Service agents seized his liquor cellar. Claresy applied for a \$1,300 reduction in his assessment, but convicted himself when, "He...stated that when gentlemen drank at his bar, he gave them good liquor, but to the Irish who came to drink, he dealt out the manufactured stuff." (Idaho World, August 31, Vol. 1, No. 34). Production of "manufactured stuff" was made in his basement, and sold for approximately a dollar per gallon. However, Claresy failed to report this enterprise to the IRS assessors.

On New Year's night of 1868-69, a famous dog fight was staged at the Miners' Exchange. The fight pitted John Foy's dog "Bull" against Sam Thompson's "Sank" for a purse of \$150. It lasted fifty-two and quarter minutes. Foy's dog killed Thompson's, but died of injuries several days later.

Melvin Wiegel owned the Miners' Exchange from 1907 to 1945. A combination saloon, restaurant, soda fountain and museum, Wiegel's was a well-known tourist spot. A columnist for the Capitol News wrote in 1932 that Wiegel, a taxidermist and photographer, had collected thirty-five stuffed deer heads, several deer, a giant elk head, several mountain goats and sheeps' heads and a stuffed mountain lion. Photographs of hunting scenes covered the walls.

Today the Miners' Exchange is a popular restaurant and bar. Wiegel's stuffed animals, four antique juke boxes, a one-armed bandit, an antique sheep shearer, period pictures, and a stand-up bar lend the place an authentic rather than commercialized air. The Kitchen, specializing in home cooking, also sells sodas and candy. The building is a good example of a successful restoration, transforming a dilapidated old building into a thriving commercial enterprise.

The County Recorder and Auditor's Office has been used by Boise County since 1976. Before that it had been a general store known as Vantine and Company.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views:

A photocopy of old photo shows men sitting in front of the saloon, late 19th or early 20th century. Original photograph at Idaho Historical Society, Boise, Idaho. Included in the HABS collection.

A photocopy of old photo shows people in front of Miners' Exchange, late 19th or early 20th century. Original photograph at Boise Basin Museum, Idaho City, Idaho. Included in the HABS collection.

A photocopy of old photo shows the saloon then owned by Melvin Wiegel in business from 1907 to 1945. Stuffed wild animals and birds decorate the saloon, date unknown. Original photograph at Idaho Historical Society, Boise, Idaho. Included in the HABS collection.

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deed Books: County Recorder and Auditor's Office, Idaho City, Idaho.

Interviews: John Brogan, Kitty Brogan and Harry Palmer.
May 29, 1974. Idaho City, Idaho.

Interview: Barzilla Young, June 1974. Idaho City, Idaho.

b. Secondary and published sources:

Adams Francis. Idaho City, Queen of the Gold Camps.
Idaho City: Idaho World, 1953.

Capitol News. Article, May 12, 1932. Boise, Idaho.

The Idaho Statesman. Newspaper articles, November 19, 1865.
Boise, Idaho.

The Idaho World. Newspaper articles, 1865-1875.
Idaho City, Idaho.

Prepared by Alan Minskoff
Historian
Historic American
Buildings Survey
Summer 1974

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Miners' Exchange Block is a typical example of the first early brick buildings constructed in the mining camps in the northwest United States. The use of brick emphasized the significance of the structure and protected it from the ravages of fire, which frequently swept throughout the camps.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The brick block is 90' wide. The 30' wide section of the northernmost portion of the block is 55' long, and the remaining portion of the block is 85' long. This L-shaped, eight-bay front block is one-story in height.
2. Foundations: Brick and stone.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The brick walls are a low-fired type and the mortar is made from local clay. The brick is painted. The frame additions on the east side of the central and southernmost sections have vertical board and batten siding. A band of corbeled brick work runs across the front gable end.
4. Structural system, framing: The block's structural system consists of two separate brick bearing walls between the kitchen and the Auditor's Office. Wood is also used for the framing of the west and east sides of the central and southernmost sections and of the ceiling and roof structure of the entire block.
5. Porch: A covered walk of wooden construction is located in the north and west sides of the block.
6. Chimneys: The building has three brick chimneys, two on the north side and one on the south side. Two metal flues are on the south side.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The plain brick arches above the doorways on the front face once contained fan windows, which opened. At one time, two of the arches on the front side also contained French doors serving as entry doors. The front doors have glass lights on top, and panels on bottom. A nine-light door is on the north elevation, while a door on the south elevation has five rectangular panels. A simple wooden board door leads to the rear addition.

b. Windows and shutters: All arched openings have folding steel shutters which could be closed in front of the windows and doors. In recent years, wooden six-over-six double hung sash windows were installed throughout the building. One window with sixteen lights is on the south side. Each of the gables (east and west elevations) have two windows which are double-hung sash with twelve lights each. A small opening with a hinged board and batten shutter is on the rear addition.

8. Roof: A gable roof was placed over the entire block probably when the southernmost and northernmost sections were constructed. The roof structure shows evidence of having been burned and of having been totally replaced with a new wooden frame, which was later covered with corrugated, galvanized steel. The front gable end is covered with horizontal siding. The rear gable end is covered with corrugated metal.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

a. Main Floor: The Boise County Recorder and Auditor's Office now occupies northernmost section of the block. The entrance opens directly into the Recorder's Office, and a vault opens directly off this space. The County Auditor's Office can be reached directly through the Recorder's Office. Another vault opens directly off the Auditor's Office. The central portion of the block now contains a restaurant, and the front entrance opens directly into the public dining space. A 1973 partition divides the large rear general storage room into two small storage rooms.

The southernmost section of the block now contains the Miner's Exchange Saloon. A small partition screens off the entry into this space, and in the east end of the space is the entry to a corridor leading to two toilet rooms and a janitor closet. A space twelve feet in width, the total length of the saloon, was added to the original building, and now functions as a game room. The east side of the central and southernmost portions of the block also have frame additions.

2. Stairways: A small stairway connects the large general store space behind the central section with the attic.

3. Flooring: The northernmost and central sections are covered with linoleum, and the southernmost section has wide pine flooring. The flooring and floor framing were replaced in all sections in 1973. The unfinished attic floor on the central and northernmost sections has an unusual construction detail. Four inches of earth fill has been placed over a layer of brick. This type of construction was a fire control measure.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The northernmost and central sections have painted plaster walls, and the southernmost section has brick walls. A frame partition was installed in the major space in 1973. The ceilings in the northernmost and central sections are painted tongue-and-groove pine boards, and a vaulted ceiling in the southernmost section was later finished with painted fiberboard.
 5. Doors: Wooden paneled doors are trimmed with 1" x 6" boards.
 6. Trim: The central section of the block still has an original paneled wainscot.
 7. Hardware: Some simple hardware, with surface mounted locksets and black glass knobs, survives on some interior doors. One iron door handle with intricate design still remains in the Recorder's Office.
 8. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating: General heating is provided by wood burning stoves. On the northernmost wall is a fireplace, and physical evidence suggests that a brick chimney was removed from this wall.
 - b. Lighting: Having undergone many changes, lighting is now of incandescent type. No original lighting remains in the block.
- D. Site: Situated on the southeast corner of the intersection of Main and Wall Streets, the block faces west.

Prepared by William B. McCroskey
Project Director
Historic American
Buildings Survey
Summer 1974

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Idaho City project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), in cooperation with the Idaho Bicentennial Commission in the summer of 1974. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, the project was completed by William B. McCroskey (University of Idaho), the project director; Alan Minskoff (University of Chicago), the project historian; Jack W. Schafer (University of Cincinnati), the project foreman, and the student assistant architects, Rae F. Noritake (University of Idaho), and Laurence Ferar (University of Oregon), and Mark T. Wellen (Texas Tech University). William Klein, a HABS staff architect in the Washington Office, edited the drawings in 1975. The written architectural and historical data was edited in April 1980 by Susan McCown, a HABS historian in the Washington office. The documentary photographs were made by Duane Garrett in 1976.