At the Vertex of Water and Stone

Preserving Landscape and Memory in Rapid City

Eric Steven Zimmer

From the saddle of a bicycle, there is no easy way up Skyline Drive. Access from the south requires a long, slow grind up Tower Road, Flormann Street, or Catron Boulevard. Further north, Quincy Street winds from the historic West Boulevard neighborhood towards the hogback where a massive, concrete brontosaurus peers out over Rapid City. The grueling climb offers many rewards. In several places, the grind melts into luxurious coasts high above the rooftops of Rapid City. A clear day offers views to the southeast, all the way to the dusty Badlands, which are visible between the homes, radio towers, and tall ponderosa pines that line the road. To the southwest, the white, granite glint of Mount Rushmore sits beneath the summit of Black Elk Peak.

This vista helps explain why, for thousands of years, the natural resources and allure of the Black Hills have drawn people to hunt, explore, pray, recreate, and live in and around what is now Rapid City. The community sits where the open prairie meets rocky hills and thick forests. For generations, area residents have shaped their lives in response to the opportunities and limitations of these surroundings. High ridges on Skyline Drive and Cowboy Hill, flowing waters in Rapid Creek and Canyon Lake, pine forests, and grasslands fill the city limits. Rapid City's scenery attracts visitors and transplants, and their backgrounds and worldviews inform how they understand the area. Anyone can feel a strong connection to the landscapes, waterscapes, and skyscapes in and around Rapid City.

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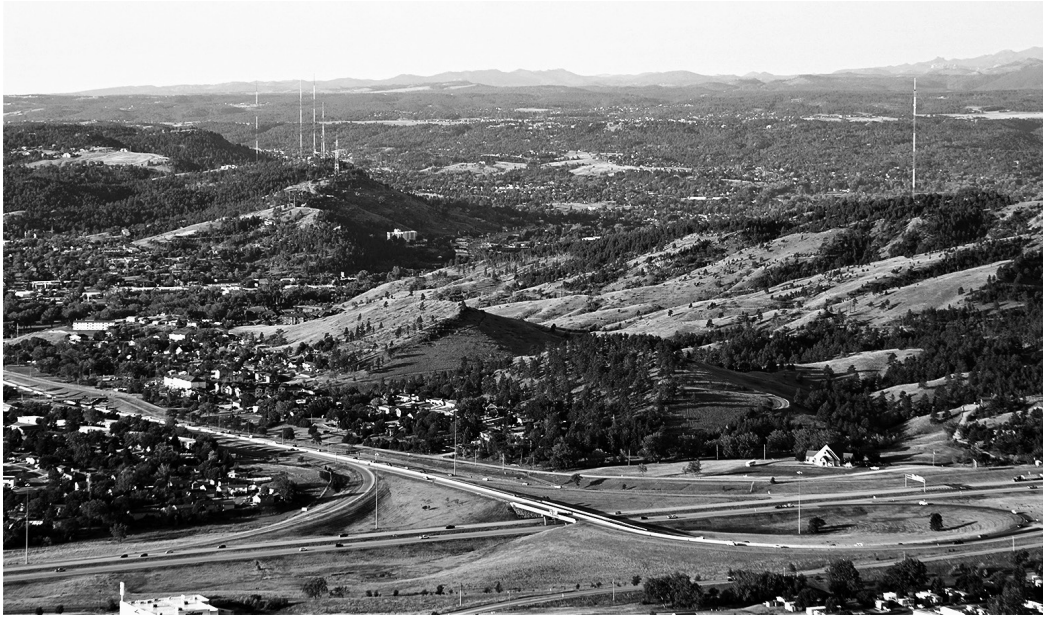

This photograph, taken by the author, shows Skyline Drive and Cowboy Hill as they appear today. Trees, grasses, and the ridgeline blend with roads, homes, businesses, and infrastructure.

The settlement of Rapid City was part of the imposition of Euro-American land ethics onto the Northern Great Plains.[1] Throughout Rapid City's history, as in much of the American West, competition for land and natural resources has shaped and reshaped the landscape while fueling tensions over public and private management, industry and development, and preservation and conservation. Natural forces have also altered the environment through slow processes such as erosion and climate change, as well as sudden disasters like floods, fires, and blizzards.

The landscape that endures in the city's public parks and open spaces has played a critical part in building and sustaining community iden-

1. See, for example, Paul W. Gates, "The Homestead Act: Free Land Policy in Operation, 1862–1935," in *Land Use Policy in the United States*, ed. Howard W. Ottoson (Washington, D.C.: BeardBooks, 1963), pp. 28–46. He argues that the U.S. government saw no inherent value in western lands, believing that only the sweat and toil of settlers would establish their worth. This view, of course, failed to account for the ways in which Indigenous peoples had been living on and using land and water for millennia.

tity and character. In many cases, it has been preserved by private citizens and public policymakers at the behest of their constituents. Indeed, local interest in historic preservation began as early as 1886—just ten years after Rapid City was first laid out. At the time, it was articulated by a small crowd of residents who gathered in a dimly lit express office to trade stories about the early days. Many of these tales referred to landmarks and structures. One story focused on a particular cottonwood tree on a city founder's property. Another told of the log house that served as the city's first hotel. For "the crowd of newcomers" in the room, that night marked one of many early efforts to interpret the city's past and foster a shared understanding of its significance and meaning.[2]

Since 2019, my colleague Eric John Abrahamson and I have been working with the Rapid City Historic Preservation Commission (RCHPC) to update its planning documents, an activity funded in part using federal funds from the National Park Service (NPS), U.S. Department of the Interior. As part of that process, we studied the history of historic preservation in Rapid City, held several community outreach events, and examined local history through a variety of lenses.[3] The RCHPC was formed in the 1970s. As in many American communities, its work has traditionally focused on the built environment, especially the evaluation and protection of historic homes and business in and adjacent to the downtown area.[4] Academic and community approaches to historic

2. *Rapid City Journal*, 29 July 1886. On the history of historic preservation and issues related to place and memory, see Max Page and Randal Mason, eds., *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Daniel Bluestone, *Buildings, Landscapes, and Memory: Case Studies in Historic Preservation* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011); Robert R. Archibald, *The New Town Square: Museums and Communities in Transition* (New York: AltaMira Press, 2004); Catherine Cameron and John B. Gatewood, "Excursions into the Un-Remembered Past: What People Want from Visits to Historical Sites," *Public Historian* 22 (Summer 2000): 107–27.

3. This essay is adapted from a series of short, investigative pieces Abrahamson and I developed to help the RCHPC broaden the community's understanding of its history. To read the Historic Context Document update, Preservation Plan, and each of the topical essays, see https://www.picturercpast.com/about.html.

4. See Jeff Buechler, "City of Rapid City Historic Context Planning Document," prepared for the Rapid City Historic Preservation Commission, 1989; Michelle L. Dennis, "Comprehensive Preservation Plan for Rapid City, South Dakota," prepared for the Rapid City Historic Preservation Commission, 2009.

preservation and interpretation have evolved rapidly in recent years, in part as a response to national conversations about race, memorials, and memory.[5]

With these trends and our interest in maintaining the vitality of the city in mind, we thought broadly about Rapid City's history and helped create a conceptual framework for promoting preservation in ways that align with local culture and the needs of our growing community. We have continued to follow the regulations and best practices outlined by the NPS and the South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office.[6] We have also been inspired by emerging approaches to historic and cultural resource management such as Historic Urban Landscapes (HUL), a framework adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2011. HUL "considers cultural diversity and creativity as key assets for human, social and economic development" and "support[s] the integration of environmental, social, and cultural concerns into the planning, design, and implementation of urban development."[7]

Taking a wider view of history and historic assets enables cities and towns to work with residents and leaders to use the lessons of the past to make informed decisions about planning and development. Understanding the meaning and value of the natural world from multiple cultural perspectives is one way to support this work. As the preserva-

5. See for example, Thomas F. King, *Our Unprotected Heritage: Whitewashing the Destruction of Our Cultural and Natural Environment* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Liz Almlie, "An Uneasy Fit: History in Historic Preservation," *History@Work,* 3 Feb. 2015, https://ncph.org/history-at-work/an-uneasy-fit. See also the special edition of *The Public Historian,* "Open House, Reimagining the Historic House Museum," *Public Historian* 37 (May 2015).

6. National Park Service, "Historic Preservation Planning Program," http://www.nps.gov/preservation-planning/; South Dakota State Historic Preservation Office, "The South Dakota Preservation Plan, 2021–2025," http://history.sd.gov/Preservation.

7. "New Life for Historic Cities: The Historic Urban Landscape Approach Explained," UNESCO World Heritage Center, 2013, p. 9, http://whc.unesco.org/en/documents/123569. HUL is only one of several emergent frameworks that account for the role of culture, wildlife, and environment in historic preservation. Other examples include "Traditional Cultural Properties" and "Indigenous Cultural Landscapes." See National Park Service, "National Register of Historic Places—Traditional Cultural Properties (TCPs): A Quick Guide for Preserving Native American Cultural Resources," 2012, https://www.nps.gov/history/tribes/documents/tcp.pdf; National Park Service, "Indigenous Cultural Landscapes," https://www.nps.gov/cajo/learn/indigenous-cultural-landscapes.htm.

tion scholar Daniel Bluestone writes, "We develop a more complex understanding of historic preservation by exploring its associations with efforts to conserve scenery and natural areas."[8]

Historians and historic preservationists can partner with conservationists, tribal members, outdoor recreation groups, landscape architects, city planners, and other stakeholders to document, understand, interpret, protect, and ultimately enjoy the natural elements that are so intimately intertwined with the built environment and the character of communities like Rapid City.

Today, Rapid City is the second largest city in South Dakota. Situated in the central Black Hills, it is the urban hub of a vast and sparsely populated hinterland that extends hundreds of miles in any direction. The Black Hills formed when a large, oblong section of igneous rock lifted through the earth's mantle some sixty-five million years ago, breaking through the limestone crust to expose the large, stone center of the Hills. Forests thick with ponderosa pine, blue spruce, and cedar trees cropped up here in and around this central ring. Woods are interspersed with meadows with prairie grasses and shrubs and are home to an array of animals, including deer, elk, beavers, squirrels, raccoons, skunks, and rabbits. Abundant numbers of bison, bears, wolves, and mountain lions once inhabited the vast prairies surrounding the Black Hills. Most of the large predators and bison were killed off or pushed out as Euro-Americans displaced early Indigenous inhabitants, though coyotes still frequent the area and mountain lion populations in the Hills have increased in recent years.[9]

Rapid City sprouted from the vertex of water and stone. A long, narrow ridgeline splits the town. Residents can look up at the ridge from any side of town or peer down over the vast distance visible from Skyline Drive or Highway 16. The ridge forms the backbone of the city and includes two main parts from south to north: Hangman's Hill, which Skyline Drive traverses, and Cowboy Hill, which begins immediately

8. Bluestone, *Buildings, Landscapes, and Memory,* p. 104.

9. Daniel G. Driscoll and Janet M. Carter, "Hydraulic Conditions and Budgets for the Black Hills of South Dakota, Through Water Year 1998" (Rapid City: U.S. Geological Survey, 2001): 3. See also Frank Van Nuys, *Varmints and Victims: Predator Control in the American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015); Bud Dalrymple, *The Gray Wolf of South Dakota* (Rapid City: Clout International, 1981).

north of Rapid Creek. The Black Hills are an island in a vast sea of prairie, and as historian and Skyline Wilderness Area advocate Robb Campbell put it, "This ridge runs all the way through the city. It's symbolic. [It's] what makes Rapid City a city *in* the Black Hills, not a city *near* the Black Hills."[10]

Rapid Creek transverses the ridgeline. Fed by runoff from winter snows, spring rains, and smaller tributaries like Castle Creek, Rapid Creek originates in limestone springs west of the city. It flows from west to east along a narrow bed, then pools against the dam at the man-made Pactola Reservoir. From there, the water snakes towards Rapid City, where it fills Canyon Lake on the west side of town.[11] The creek connects the central hills to the eastern prairie as it passes through "the

10. Dan Daly, "Skyline Wilderness Area a 'Hidden Treasure,'" *Rapid City Journal,* 30 July 2005. Emphasis added.

11. David F. Strain, *Black Hills Haycamp: Images and Perspectives of Early Rapid City* (Rapid City: Fenske Printing, 1989), pp. 210–12.

Water from Rapid Creek gathers in Canyon Lake on the western edge of town. Canyon Lake Park, which offers twenty-nine acres of recreation, is one of the oldest parks in the city.

Gap," a large dip in the ridgeline between Hangman's Hill and Cowboy Hill. Over the years, the creek, the Gap, and a second gap in the Hills presently occupied by the passage of Interstate 90 on the north side of Cowboy Hill have become vital entry points for access to the Black Hills. The creek continues past Rapid City and empties into the Cheyenne River about thirty miles east of town.

For centuries, Rapid Creek has made this location a passing place. Untold generations of Indigenous peoples camped on its banks and utilized its resources.[12] Some stopped briefly on the way to hunt or trade. Others stayed longer after trekking to the area for extended sessions of individual prayer or healing. Still others stayed for weeks or months, holding elaborate ceremonies, camping seasonally, or assembling for large meetings. These activities lent structure and rhythm to early life on the northern plains. For this reason, the Black Hills landscape is imbued with deep meaning and ancient, dynamic connections to place, people, and community. The Black Hills constituted, as the ethnoarchaeologist Linea Sundstrom writes, "a complex sacred geography" in which various Native groups held deep cultural, spiritual, and ceremonial ties to locations throughout the region.[13]

Like in the rest of the Indigenous world, the early Black Hills and the prairies that surround them were complex and contested places. Life on the high plains was challenging. Tribes faced a volatile, unforgiving climate while seeking access to natural resources such as water, wood, stone, and game. They adapted and responded when violence and new diseases threatened their populations or new goods, tools, and technologies brought innovations to their lives.[14]

Native peoples' knowledge of the landscape aligns with archaeological evidence establishing their enduring presence in what is now Rapid City. A map by Amos Bad Heart Bull, a Lakota man, captured an

12. Linea Sundstrom and Wini Michael, "Archaeological Investigations in the Gap at Founders Park, Rapid City, South Dakota: A Report Prepared for the City of Rapid City, South Dakota, March 2009," pp. 2, 7.

13. Linea Sundstrom, "The Sacred Black Hills: An Ethnohistorical Review," *Great Plains Quarterly* 17 (Summer/Fall 1997): 206.

14. See Sundstrom, "Sacred Black Hills," which lists Lakota, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kiowa, Kiowa-Apache, Arikara, and Mandan connections to the Black Hills region. See also Jeffrey Ostler, *The Lakotas and the Black Hills: The Struggle for Sacred Ground* (New York: Viking, 2010).

Indigenous perspective on the Black Hills region around the turn of the twentieth century. He noted that Rapid Creek had long been utilized for winter camps. There, the trees and bluffs offered respite from intense prairie winds. In separate accounts, both Bad Heart Bull and the venerated Oglala holy man Nicholas Black Elk connected Rapid Creek—or Mniluzahan in their language—and the surrounding valley to a Lakota spiritual story.[15]

Indeed, Rapid Creek was a vital artery that brought water from the Hills to the prairies. It was a locus of Indigenous activity, as evidenced by hundreds of tool grooves and other stone markings in the area. They document that the Indigenous presence along the creek reaches back as far as two thousand years.[16] Native people, meanwhile, remained there through much of the twentieth century. Around 1900, a handful of Native families lived in Rapid City. Most had relocated from area reservations to live near their children, whom federal officials had forcibly enrolled at the Rapid City Indian School, built on the western outskirts of town in 1898. These families assembled semipermanent camps along Rapid Creek. The waterway extended at different times from the Roosevelt Park area in the east all the way to the boarding school campus, or what local people call "Sioux San."[17]

The most prominent Native villages—known as the Osh Kosh Camp, or simply "Indian camp"—originated in the 1920s or 1930s. The main camp was located on the banks of Rapid Creek underneath tall cottonwood trees along what became the greenway just south of Omaha Street and between Osh Kosh Street and Twelfth Street/Founders Park Drive.[18] The camp existed until 1954, when community leaders purchased a plot of land beyond Rapid City's northern limits and moved the camp and most of its Native residents to the area that became known

15. Sundstrom, "Sacred Black Hills," pp. 187–92.

16. Sundstrom and Michael, "Archaeological Investigations in the Gap at Founders Park," pp. 7, 24.

17. Scott Riney, *The Rapid City Indian School, 1898–1933* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999); Heather Dawn Thompson, Kibbe Conti, Scott Riney, and Karin Eagle, "An Inconvenient Truth: The History Behind the Sioux San (Rapid City Indian Boarding School) Lands & West Rapid City," *Rapid City Journal* insert, 4 May 2017, pp. 3–4.

18. Bev Warne, "Rapid City's Leaders Face a Historic Opportunity," *Rapid City Journal,* 7 Nov. 2020. On the location of the Osh Kosh Camp, see the fold-out map of downtown Rapid City in "City Plan: Rapid City, 1949," Local History Collection, Rapid City Public Library.

The *Rapid City Journal* printed this image of tents in the Osh Kosh Camp in 1953. The neighborhood, which primarily housed Indigenous residents, was destroyed the following year.

as the Sioux Addition.[19] This removal compounded the segregation of Rapid City neighborhoods at midcentury. The consequences of this process continue to resonate in the community today. This challenging history, along with the deaths of dozens of Indigenous children at the Rapid City Indian School in the early twentieth century, has sparked considerable community conversation in recent years.[20]

Non-Native settlement of Rapid City began in the 1870s. Amid the Black Hills Gold Rush, a small group of settlers arrived at the same rocky outcropping long used by Native peoples. In 1876, they founded Hay Camp and laid out Rapid City.[21] In the decades that followed, Rapid City grew from a modest cow town and trade outpost into a dominant urban center. As the community grew, new developments radiated out-

19. Thompson, et al., "An Inconvenient Truth," pp. 12–13.

20. A Native-led community research initiative called the Rapid City Indian Boarding School Lands Project has been researching this story and working with community leaders to begin the healing process. Plans to build a memorial to the children on former boarding school property are underway. The author has served as a volunteer historian for the Rapid City Indian Boarding School Lands Project since 2015. To learn more about this initiative, visit http://www.rememberingthechildren.org.

21. Ross P. Korsgaard, "A History of Rapid City, South Dakota, During the Territorial Days," in *South Dakota Historical Collections,* vol. 38 (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society, 1976), pp. 515–60; "Rapid City History: Early Account of the Laying Out and Settlement of the Town," *Daily Deadwood Pioneer-Times,* 26 Feb. 1903.

After destroying the Osh Kosh Camp and moving its residents to the Sioux Addition, the city turned the area into the open greenspace seen in this photograph.

ward from the downtown core. The city's residents used water from the creek for livestock, irrigation, and in homes and businesses. The creek also produced hydroelectric power, helped process gold, and floated timber to factories for processing.[22]

The sister mining towns of Lead and Deadwood were the most populous and prosperous communities in the Black Hills for a half century. Rapid City, meanwhile, struggled to find a foothold. During the 1890s, for example, the city's population declined from 2,128 to 1,342.[23] The town established new businesses and was supported by government investments that suppressed the Native population, opened the region to homesteading, and created and managed state and national parks, forests, and monuments.[24] Amid this symbiosis of government support and private enterprise, Rapid City grew. It became a vital access point

22. See Strain, *Black Hills Haycamp,* pp. 210–12; Eric John Abrahamson and Eric Steven Zimmer, *Expanding the Energy Horizon: A History of Black Hills Corporation Since 1883* (Rapid City: Black Hills Corporation, 2018), pp. 34–35; Martha Linde, *Sawmills of the Black Hills* (Rapid City: Fenske Printing/Jessie Y. Sundstrom, 1984), pp. 57–59.

23. "Population of Rapid City, SD," Population.us, accessed 24 Mar. 2021, https://population.us/sd/rapid-city.

24. On the role of state and federal investment in the Black Hills economy, see Howard R. Lamar, *Dakota Territory: A Study of Fronter Politics* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University

for tourists and retail shoppers and a key shipping hub for raw materials. Rapid City was the largest city in the Black Hills by the 1930 census. But its growth was just beginning.

Rapid City boomed during and after World War II, fueled by three overlapping forces. First, the national baby boom brought some seventy-two million American babies into the world between 1946 and 1964.[25] Second was the establishment and expansion of Ellsworth Air Force Base. Originally named the Rapid City Army Air Base, the facility had opened shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor. The base closed briefly after the war but reopened as relations between the United States and the Soviet Union chilled. It eventually became a headquarters for bomber fleets and Cold War-era Minuteman Missiles. Ellsworth's expansion brought federal building contracts and thousands of Air Force

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Press, 1958); Suzanne Barta Julin, *A Marvelous Hundred Square Miles: Black Hills Tourism, 1880–1941* (Pierre: South Dakota Historical Society Press, 2009).

25. Sandra L. Colby and Jennifer M. Ortman, "The Baby Boom Cohort in the United States: 2012 to 2060 (Report No. P25–1141)," U.S. Census Bureau, May 2014, p. 2.

personnel and their families to the Rapid City area over the course of several decades. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, for example, Ellsworth employed some seven hundred civilians and 6,600 active-duty military personnel.[26]

Finally, migration from the rural hinterland—including area reservations—continued as families relocated to Rapid City looking to capitalize on the new jobs associated with the base and the expanding tourism economy. All told, the city's population grew from 13,844 in 1940 to nearly 42,000 by 1960.[27]

This incredible growth caused a housing and construction boom, and Rapid City added more than a dozen new schools in burgeoning suburbs to keep up with demand. One resident, writing to oppose a proposed community investment in an outdoor tourist attraction, described the situation in a 1948 letter to the editor of the *Rapid City Journal.* "Why should we still be dreaming up ideas to bring the tourists here?" she asked. "Rapid City outgrew its britches long ago. The city can't take care of what's already here. The housing shortage is terrific, the school situation is dreadful, and the city streets and sidewalks are 'X&%!!"[28]

The baby boom subsided in the mid-1960s. Rapid City's population would continue to slowly increase for about twenty years, before spiking again—albeit less drastically—in the late 1980s and 1990s. By 2010, the city had around sixty-eight thousand residents; today the number is about seventy-eight thousand.[29]

Through all of this, Rapid City remained a passing place. The creek continued to serve as both the source of domestic and industrial water and the town's central passage. In different generations, wagon trains, railroads, highways, and airports would connect the city to the outside world. The community itself became known as the "Gate City," given its

26. City of Rapid City, "This is Rapid City 1980," p. 5; City of Rapid City, "This is Rapid City 1990," pp. 4–7; both are pamphlets held in the Local History Collection at the Rapid City Public Library.

27. "Rapid City, South Dakota Population 2021," World Population Review, accessed 24 Mar. 2021, https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/rapid-city-sd-population.

28. Rosemary C. Whiting, "Against Amphitheater," *Rapid City Journal,* 22 Apr. 1948.

29. "1950 Census of Population: Preliminary Counts: Population of South Dakota, By Counties," Bureau of the Census, Series PC-2, no. 18, 21 Aug. 1950; Nathan Thompson, "Rapid City's Population Now More than 78,000, City Says," *Rapid City Journal,* 9 Mar. 2021.

central location and easy access to the Black Hills. Major commercial arteries like Omaha, Main, and St. Joseph streets parallel the Creek's path through town, and a main exit from Interstate 90 brings travelers toward downtown, where they cross the creek before continuing into Rapid City.

Throughout these waves of growth and expansion, the banks of Rapid Creek were home to both the wealthiest and poorest members of town. Recognizing the beauty of creekside property, early developers planted towering poplar and cottonwood trees along the banks, which offered shade and scenery to the new neighborhoods at water's edge.[30] The picturesque area near Canyon Lake, for example, was a desirable location for residential homes and vacation cabins. A 1907 flood destroyed the first dam at Canyon Lake and slowed plans for residential developments along the creek. Rebuilt by the federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the 1930s, the dam enabled the creation of a large recreation area, which included a swimming beach and diving platform, by 1950.[31] This made the area popular again, and despite the risk of flood, residents rebuilt along its edges.

A few miles downstream, however, communities of less affluent—and primarily Indigenous—people lived in temporary homes along the creek between Sioux San and the base of Cowboy Hill. Over time, working-class, non-Native families also built homes along the creek, making these spaces a cultural crossroads where residents of different backgrounds met and intermingled. According to Cecelia Montgomery, a Lakota woman who grew up in the Osh Kosh Camp, most Lakota families "camped because they couldn't afford to rent anywhere; [the Warren-Lamb Lumber Company] paid them very little wages. They were living in tents and some people bought shacks and moved them down there; it was a regular little reservation. They had outdoor toilets and everybody had to use the same water hydrant."[32]

30. Strain, *Black Hills Haycamp*, p. 211.

31. Peggy Sanders, *The Civilian Conservation Corps In and Around the Black Hills* (Charleston, S.Car.: Arcadia, 2004), p. 118. Bev Pechan and Bill Groethe, *Remembering Rapid City: A Nostalgic Look at the 1920s Through the 1970s* (Chicago: Arcadia, 2002), p. 56; Heidi Bell Gease, "Canyon Lake the Heart of a Neighborhood," *Rapid City Journal*, 1 Feb. 2002.

32. Cecelia Montgomery, quoted in *Honor the Grandmothers: Dakota Women Tell Their Stories*, ed. Sarah Penman (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2000), pp. 77–112.

Despite these conditions, Native families built a community at Osh Kosh. James Emery, a Lakota elder and advocate, described how the Native community's emotional attachment to this area persisted after the 1954 removal to the Sioux Addition and the 1972 flood wiped away the Native homes that had either remained or been reestablished in that area. "As far as the Indian was concerned," he said just a month after the event, "most of these places, that was home-sweet-home to him. That was the only place he knew. He loved it there. There was home life there. . . that was home-sweet home."[33]

Rapid Creek had flooded several times and the dam at Canyon Lake, which controls the creek's flow through town, had even burst once before, in 1907.[34] But the night of 9 June 1972 was different. By then, Rapid City had grown substantially, and many Native and non-Native residences as well as businesses and main corridors filled the floodplain. The rain poured down, and when the dam burst, it sent a gush of water and debris into the heart of Rapid City. The disaster killed at least 238 people and injured 3,000 more. It destroyed more than 1,300 homes and 5,000 cars, doing more than $160 million worth of damage ($1.04 billion in 2021 dollars).[35]

After the tragedy, Rapid City enacted flood zone restrictions and created a long, narrow greenway that abuts the creek. An infusion of federal, state, and charitable funds helped Rapid City rebuild and recover, and scenic parks, ponds, and a bike path filled in the flood zone. Many wealthier households moved up onto ridges overlooking scenic vistas or set back into the forest.[36]

The greenway provided a flood buffer and spaces for recreation. But its creation also compounded the processes of displacement that moved

33. James Emery, transcript of an oral history conducted 11 July 1972 by Stephen Ward, South Dakota Oral History Center, https://vimeo.com/channels/sdoralhistory/78842793. The Osh Kosh Camp had been condemned and forcibly relocated to an area north of Rapid City called the "Sioux Addition" in 1954. See Thompson et al, "Inconvenient Truth."

34. Janet M. Carter, Joyce E. Williamson, and Ralph W. Teller, "The 1972 Black Hills-Rapid City Flood Revisited," USGS Fact Sheet FS-037-02 (2002), https://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/fs-037-02/.

35. United States Geological Survey, "The 1972 Black Hills-Rapid City Flood," https://www.usgs.gov/centers/dakota-water/science/1972-black-hills-rapid-city-flood?qt-science_center_objects=0#qt-science_center_objects.

36. See Strain, *Black Hills Haycamp*, pp. 210–12.

Destroyed houses and cars were among the immediate consequences of the 1972 flood, but the cleanup and redevelopment effort forever altered the city.

many less affluent families to other parts of Rapid City. Today, this general observation holds true: inside Rapid City, more affluent neighborhoods exist on the west end of Rapid Creek, and the further east the creek flows, the less affluent the neighborhoods become. Income levels only increase as the creek passes by newer developments in and around Rapid Valley.[37] Meanwhile, unhoused people and families have continued to inhabit area along the creek in the downtown area, and especially those extending towards the eastern edge of town, into the 2020s.[38]

37. As an example, in the western census tract where Rapid Creek enters the city limits, the median household income was $96,455 in 2018. Heading east, the creek flows through tracts with median incomes of $79,578; $58,644; $46,552; $55,788; $33,009; and $29,345. At the eastern edge of the city, the median income spikes to $46,895 then $61,688 before the creek continues out of town towards the Cheyenne River. "Median Household Income by Census Tract, Rapid City, SD, 2018 ACS 5-year Estimate," prepared by Benchmark Data Labs, 2020. Copy in the author's possession.

38. See, for example, Richard Two Bulls, "New Homeless Camp Established Along Rapid

Rapid Creek flows between Founders Park and the base of Hanson-Larsen Memorial Park. The waterway has been vital to commerce and development throughout the city's history.

Managing Rapid Creek itself has also been an ongoing process. Like the forests and prairies that surround it, the creek has served a variety of purposes. In addition to providing water to the residents and businesses of Rapid City, for example, the creek contributed to state initiatives aimed at conserving and managing natural resources in the Black Hills. After claiming land and building a home near an "immense and ever-flowing spring" in 1879, a local settler named Daniel Cleghorn began cultivating trout.[39] Fifty years later, his operation inspired the state of South Dakota to establish the Cleghorn Springs Fish Hatchery on what would become the west side of Rapid City. The state added twenty-two nursery ponds to the complex in 1949. To this day, the

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Creek Demands Action from Mayor, City," *South Dakota Public Broadcasting*, 17 Oct. 2020, https://www.sdpb.org/blogs/news-and-information/new-homeless-camp-eastablished-along-rapid-creek-demands-action-from-mayor-city/.

39. *Daily Deadwood Pioneer-Times*, 9 Apr. 1879.

South Dakota Department of Game, Fish & Parks grows and harvests fish to be released into lakes and streams throughout the area.[40]

Yet the massive, midcentury surge of people and activity also polluted the creek. The population grew so quickly that some neighborhoods, both in and beyond the city limits, developed without city ordinances that regulated their size and layout. This meant that people were building in the floodplain, drilling wells, installing septic tanks, and building access roads—all with minimal consideration for the risks, to residents and the creek, that this construction posed.[41]

By 1949, the creek became so polluted that one reporter called it "South Dakota's Largest Sewer." Along this "six-mile cesspool," the story read, "outdoor privies" and rat-infested trash piles combined with "horses, chickens, and goats" that residents allowed to "roam the local creek area that lies less than four blocks from the fancy store fronts of Main Street."[42] A 1957 study by the Pennington County Health Department noted that many creekside homes west of Canyon Lake had inadequate wastewater systems that were leaching into the creek and groundwater. Residents, meanwhile, were digging wells perilously close to this contaminated water. Eventually, the state and county public health departments declared Canyon Lake unsafe for swimming.[43]

Concerned citizens and downstream ranchers complained to South Dakota and the U.S. Public Health Service. In 1963, officials set up seventeen sampling sites between Pactola Lake and the Cheyenne River.[44] The samples showed clean water above Rapid City, then low water quality in town and downstream. Industrial wastewater was only partially

40. "Cleghorn Springs State Fish Hatchery," South Dakota Department of Game, Fish & Parks, https://gfp.sd.gov/cleghorn. See also, "Stage Set for Dedication of Cleghorn Springs Fish Hatchery Near Here Tomorrow Afternoon," *Rapid City Journal*, 5 July 1930; Pechan and Groethe, *Remembering Rapid City, History,* p. 21.

41. See South Dakota State Department of Health, Division of Sanitary Engineering, "Water Pollution Investigation: Rapid Creek, Dec. 1963, Pactola Reservoir to Cheyenne River" (Pierre: 1964), p. v.

42. Duane McDowell, "Length of Rapid Creek Through City One of Big Health Hazards," *Rapid City Journal,* 4 May 1949.

43. R. Keith Stewart and Carol A. Thilenius, "Black Hills Lakes and Streams: Stream and Lake Inventory and Classification in the Black Hills of South Dakota, 1964" (Pierre: Department of Game, Fish and Parks, 1964), p. 36.

44. "Water Pollution Sampling Slated on Rapid Creek," *Rapid City Journal,* 2 Dec. 1963; "Pollution Study Report is Ready; Hearing to Come," *Rapid City Journal,* 2 Apr. 1964.

treated and many municipal wastewater facilities were producing partially treated water or being bypassed altogether. The final report called sections of the creek "unwholesome and unfit for domestic use," "unsafe as a source of public water supply," and "harmful to fish and plant life." City leaders were called to Pierre to testify in 1964.[45]

Rapid City took steps to rectify these issues in the years that followed. Wastewater treatment and careful monitoring by various local, state, and federal agencies have helped maintain a safe supply of drinking water.[46] Yet concerns over water quality in Rapid Creek have not disappeared. As recently as 2018, a South Dakota Mines study found "that genes from potentially deadly forms of E. coli bacteria were present in significant numbers in Rapid Creek throughout and below Rapid City."[47] In 2020, moreover, a national watershed advocacy group designated Rapid Creek one of the nation's most endangered rivers due to the efforts of mining operations pursuing permits upstream from the city.[48]

The ridgeline that runs on the north-south axis in Rapid City has also played a key role in the community's development. It bisects Rapid Creek just west of downtown, in the heart of the Gap. The neighborhoods on the eastern face of this hogback are the oldest in town. The community expanded from downtown in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with a mix of smaller, middle-income homes interspersed among towering, Victorian-style houses along West Boulevard.

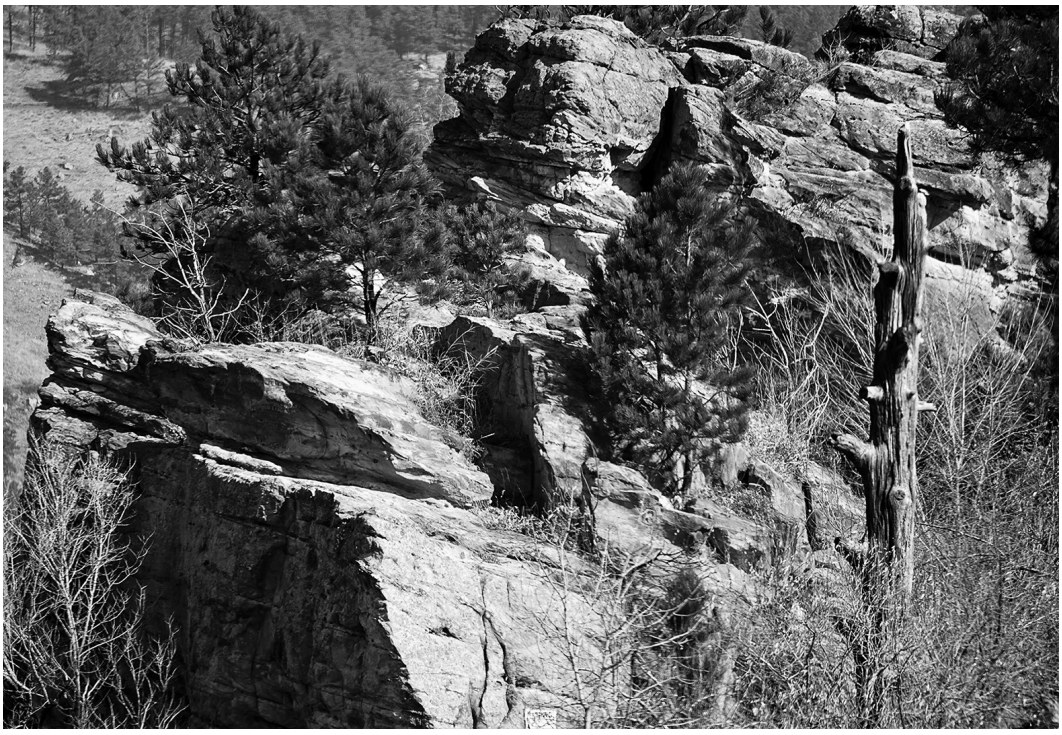
Hangman's Hill illustrates the ridge's prominent place in local history. In June 1877, a local man discovered three outsiders camping at the base of Cowboy Hill, near the creek. It was an era of violence and tension between Native and non-Native people. According to the au-

45. "Rapid Creek pollution Hearing Before State Committee Thursday," *Rapid City Journal,* 3 June 1964. See South Dakota State Department of Health, "Report on Water Pollution Investigation: Rapid Creek," p. v.

46. J. S. Zogorski, E. M. Zogorski, and T. E. McKallip, "Sources and Summaries of Water-Quality Information for the Rapid Creek Basin, Western South Dakota," U.S. Geological Survey Open-File Report 90–115 (Rapid City: U.S. Geological Survey, 1990).

47. Bart Pfankuch, "Studies Reveal Health Hazards in Big Sioux River, Rapid Creek," *Sioux Falls Argus Leader,* 29 Aug. 2018.

48. Seth Tupper, "National Group Puts Rapid Creek on Endangered Rivers List," *South Dakota Public Broadcasting,* 14 Apr. 2020.



Hangman's Tree, seen at the far right of this image, stands on the side of Skyline Drive. It serves as an ominous reminder of a violent incident in the area's early history.

thor Robert J. Casey, who tried to reconstruct the story in the 1940s, the man mistook the campers for Indigenous people and reported them to the sheriff. The officer quickly formed a posse who arrived at the men's campsite and found six horses tied to a tree. On the thin evidence that three men with six horses meant the men must be horse thieves, the sheriff had them arrested and imprisoned in a small, temporary jailhouse east of town. Before the judge could arrive from Deadwood, a mob broke the men, one of whom was still a teenager, out of jail, hauled them to the top of Skyline Drive, and executed them on what came to be known as "Hangman's Tree."[49]

49. Robert J. Casey, *The Black Hills and Their Incredible Characters* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1949), p. 32.

What began as an attempt at swift justice and a warning to would-be thieves ended up having a paradoxical effect on local memory. On one hand, the story of the hanging became part of the frontier lore of early Rapid City. In Casey's telling, residents preserved the site for decades after the event. City leaders even replaced the original, withering Hangman's Tree with another one to mark the site. Yet, over time, locals began to regret the incident. Many participants, Casey wrote, came to deny their involvement and other Hills towns viewed the incident as a stain on Rapid City's reputation. Still today, *a* Hangman's Tree (if not *the* Hangman's Tree), stands near the top of Skyline Drive, though it is on private property and inaccessible to members of the public.[50]

Despite this early, violent incident, the Skyline Drive area was a place where early generations of residents and children hiked and played.[51] Building on this legacy in the 1930s, the WPA undertook several enhancements to the area. Most notable was Skyline Drive itself, which the WPA completed in November 1935. The new road wound from the base of Hangman's Hill to the top of the ridgeline and connected with Highway 16 to the south. Winding up the new road in the 1930s, visitors passed a series of other projects underway, as well as a memorial to longtime Black Hills newspaper publisher Alice Gossage.[52]

Dinosaur Park was another popular WPA project. Conceived to honor the legacy of C. C. O'Hara, a respected president of South Dakota Mines who passed away in early 1935, the park came to include a visitor's center and parking lot situated across from a large stone staircase that leads up to a series of walking paths. Once atop "Dinosaur Hill," visitors stroll around several large, concrete replicas of dinosaurs that once lived on what became the northern plains.[53]

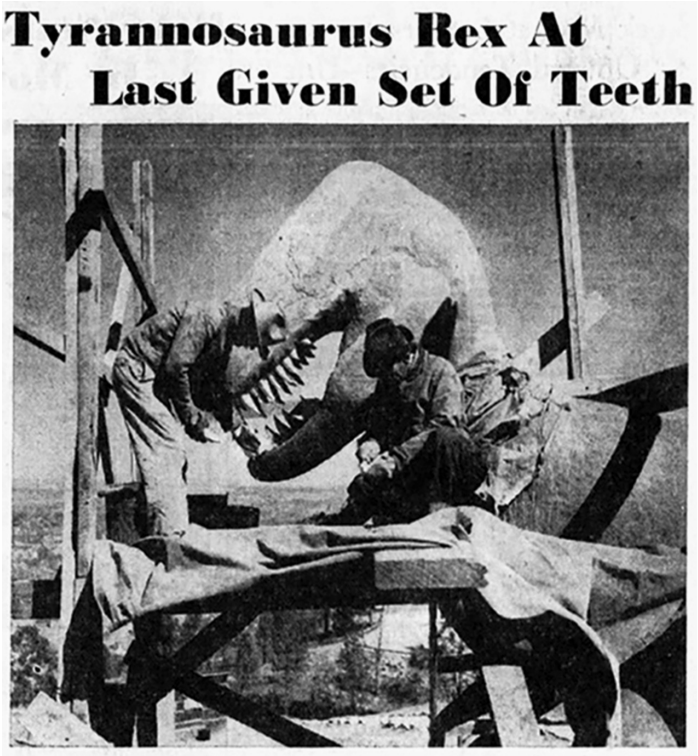
In addition to honoring O'Hara's legacy, local boosters saw the project as a way to deepen Rapid City's ties to the growing Black Hills tourism economy. By creating "one of the most unique, attractive and educational recreation spots anywhere to be found," wrote George Mans-

50. Ibid.

51. See Eric Steven Zimmer, *The Question is "Why?": Stanford M. Adelstein, A Jewish Life in South Dakota* (Rapid City: Vantage Point Press, 2019), pp. 51–57.

52. "Sky Line Drive To Be Completed," *Rapid City Journal,* 19 Nov. 1935. The Gossage monument was later moved to Halley Park in the Gap.

53. "Dr. C. C. O'Hara Passes Away at Home in Rapid," *Lead Daily Call,* 21 Feb. 1935.



The *Rapid City Journal* highlighted the construction of Dinosaur Park in its 23 April 1938 edition. The site was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1990.

field in 1936, the Skyline Drive and Dinosaur Park projects could attract visitors and "afford to the people of Rapid City a short pleasure drive for themselves and their friends," all while providing much needed Depression-era relief.[54]

Others saw Dinosaur Hill as a poor use of natural space and a waste of government resources. One man steamed in a letter to the *Rapid City Journal*: "We have Skyline Drive, a road which leads nowhere, accomplishes no useful purpose, which marches up a hill and marches down again. And now at a cost of $24,000," he complained, "we are to have a bevy of pink elephants in commemoration of our illustrious reptile

54. George Mansfield, "Letter to the Editor," *Rapid City Journal,* 10 Mar. 1936.

dead."[55] Despite this protest, the park was completed in 1938, part of a broader trend that saw the establishment of several dinosaur-themed parks across the United States.[56] Over the years, Dinosaur Park has made occasional appearances in national media and advertising campaigns. A Rapid City couple managed the visitor's center until the late 1960s, when the city took over.[57]

The Skyline Drive area included two other nature-themed attractions. First was the Skyline Fossil Forest, an admissions-only exhibit that displayed samples of petrified wood excavated from the hillside. In the 1960s, a fire destroyed the attraction, which the city's chamber of commerce had managed.[58]

A graduate of the South Dakota Mines civil engineering program designed another project in the area, an earthen stadium carved into a natural bend in a hillside overlooking a meadow that could serve as a stage. Some locals hoped that the amphitheater might host the Black Hills Passion Play, a popular reenactment of the Christian crucifixion story, which the town of Spearfish had hosted for years. The WPA cut terraced steps into the side of the hogback, which, though overgrown, remain visible today. Although the amphitheater did not host the large performances its designers had intended, its construction reflected the common midcentury marriage of work relief, landscape development, and support for the tourism economy.[59]

In the decades after Skyline Drive and its amenities were built, Rapid City continued to grow. The top of the ridge was the logical place for several broadcast companies to situate their studio or communications towers, as it allowed them to use the altitude to transmit radio and television signals across a vast airspace. Independence Day fireworks

55. George S. Reeves, "Letter to the Editor," *Rapid City Journal,* 6 Mar. 1936.

56. Ross J. Wilson, "Encountering Dinosaurs: Public History and Environmental Heritage," *Public Historian* 42 (Nov. 2020): 126.

57. "Dinosaur Park, Rapid City," The Living New Deal, https://livingnewdeal.org/projects/dinosaur-park-rapid-city-sd/. See for example "Stegosaurus with Sex Appeal," *Dunkirk (N.Y.) Evening Observer* 15 June 1938; "Dakota Parks Trace History," *San Antonio Express and News,* 22 Apr. 1962; "A Monster Emerges from the Mist," *Cedar Rapids Gazette,* 10 Sept. 1986; "OK, Big Smiles!," *Chicago Tribune*, 17 Mar. 2002.

58. "Sky Line Drive To Be Completed," *Rapid City Journal,* 19 Nov. 1935.

59. "The Amphitheater," interpretive sign at Skyline Wilderness Area, installed by Troop 131 of the Boy Scouts.

blazed over the ridge each summer. Boy Scout Troops and the Jaycees held annual cleanup days. Recreating on and around Skyline Drive became a common part of life in Rapid City.[60]

In the 1960s and 1970s, the community debated carving a tunnel through the base of the ridge to increase traffic flow between the east and west sides of town. Concerns over the impact to private property and area ecology halted these plans.[61] Meanwhile, the quiet forests and stunning vistas made the Skyline area desirable for housing developments. As large homes filled the hillsides on both slopes of the ridge, a group of conservation advocates and outdoor enthusiasts began searching for ways to protect parts of the hillside from development. By the 1990s, an informal network of game trails had become popular routes for local hikers. As plans for further residential development began to take shape, a nonprofit group called Skyline Preservation, Inc., organized to protect the Skyline Wilderness Area in 1999. By 2005, the group held 105 acres on the eastern slope after the city passed on an opportunity to acquire the property. Working alongside other organizations like the Black Hills Mountain Bike Association, Skyline Preservation, Inc., developed trails and infrastructure while carrying out environmental mitigation techniques to use the land responsibly.[62]

As the project progressed, some neighborhood residents were skeptical of increased public activity near their property. Other community members were confused by signage and rules and regulations about whether, for example, mountain bikes could be used in the Skyline Wilderness Area, since bicycles were prohibited in federally protected preserves like the Black Elk Wilderness in the Black Hills. Advocates worked through these issues and donated roughly 184 acres to the city around 2008.[63] Since then, multiple investments from the Rapid City Vision Fund have supported trail maintenance, wayfinding and sig-

60. "Final Plans Set for Fourth Fireworks Here," *Rapid City Journal,* 30 June 1948; "Jaycees, Boys Clubbers Clean Up Skyline Drive," *Rapid City Journal,* 4 Apr. 1965.

61. "Skyline Drive Ecology Must Be Part of Any Plans for a Road," *Rapid City Journal,* 26 Apr. 1970.

62. Dan Daly, "Skyline Wilderness Area a 'Hidden Treasure,'" *Rapid City Journal,* 30 July 2005.

63. John McLaughlin, "$1.4m Skyline Wilderness Park Project Open for Bids," *Rapid City Journal,* 8 Jan. 2015; Drew Matthews, "City Poised to Accept Skyline Land Donation," *Rapid City Journal,* 2 Feb. 2017.

nage, and the construction of several parking lots and trailheads. In 2015, for example, an expansion added ten additional miles of trails and a new parking lot, as well as enhancements to existing parking and the lot at Dinosaur Park. The Skyline area remains a popular place to live, play, and enjoy the city's natural beauty.[64]

Across the Gap, on the north bank of Rapid Creek, the ridgeline continues through the city. Like the hogback straddled by Skyline Drive, this ridge—known as Cowboy Hill—is a rocky outcropping of ponderosa pine, stone, and prairie meadows. For more than a century, it too has held a prominent place in local history.

Archaeological evidence and oral histories demonstrate the longstanding use of the creek bed and rocks at the base of Cowboy Hill going back thousands of years. Although the place likely had an Indigenous name—or perhaps several of them, used by different peoples at different moments in time—these monikers may be lost to history. In the 1870s, non-Native settlers founded Hay Camp at the bottom of the hill. There is no official account of how the hill came to be called "Cowboy Hill." A 1926 story from the *Rapid City Journal*, however, lends the following explanation: "As everyone knows Rapid City used to be known as 'Cow Town.'" As the "vast open ranges in every direction attracted cattlemen soon after the gold rush," ranchers began to fill in the hinterland. When they came to Rapid City for supplies or entertainment, "the riders approaching the town from the northwest kept to the north side of the creek." After setting camp there, many would head downtown to drink and revel. Townspeople could hear them rowdily shouting and firing guns into the air as they came and went downtown, and "in time the eminence became known as Cowboy Hill."[65]

As Rapid City transitioned from a rough cattle town to a bustling industrial and educational hub, Cowboy Hill took on new meaning. In 1912, a professor and a group of students at South Dakota Mines came up with the idea of painting a large "M," for "Miners," near the top of the hill as a publicity stunt and a display of school pride. For many decades, students climbed the hill with hand tools, sand, water, and whitewash

64. John McLaughlin, "$1.4m Skyline Wilderness Park Project Open for Bids," *Rapid City Journal*, 8 Jan. 2015; Daly, "Skyline Wilderness Area a 'Hidden Treasure.'"

65. "How Kola," *Rapid City Journal*, 19 Mar. 1926.

to brighten their school's emblem as part of its homecoming celebrations. Initially made of sandstone, the M was eventually reinforced by concrete. In the early years, students also doused it in kerosene and lit the M ablaze on "M-Day," allowing the flames to illuminate the night sky. In 1953, the students added smaller letters, "S" and "D," for "South Dakota," on either side of the M.[66]

This annual ritual became an important city event. So much so, in fact, that when Cowboy Hill changed owners in the 1960s, and the new owner attempted to stop the students from climbing across his property, the State of South Dakota intervened to grant an easement to the crest of M Hill based on the site's historical significance and continued

66. See "Cowboy Hill Will Be Decorated with Big 'M' Which Means 'Miners,'" *Rapid City Journal,* 13 Oct. 1912; "Hardrockers Celebrate Homecoming with More Work on Big Concrete 'M,'" *Rapid City Journal,* 4 Oct. 1951; "Burn 'M'," *Rapid City Journal,* 25 Oct. 1935. One article, which I believe to be erroneous, claims the "M" was created in 1911. See "High on Hill 'M' Draws Attention for 38th Year," *Rapid City Journal,* 6 Oct. 1949. South Dakota Mines was previously named the "Dakota School of Mines," and "South Dakota School of Mines."

This dam and substation along Rapid Creek, constructed at the base of Cowboy Hill in 1912, produced hydroelectric power for local industry.

use by students.[67] Later on, the South Dakota Mines Foundation acquired the parcel surrounding the M.[68]

The Cowboy Hill area also played a significant role in Rapid City's early industrial development. Between 1908 and 1912, a group of entrepreneurs purchased the water rights along Rapid Creek at the base of Cowboy Hill. They constructed a flume along the creek to run enough water to power an early hydroelectric plant that helped electrify the community.[69] The area was also the location of a series of beef processing and meatpacking plants. The first, called Rapid City Packing Co., opened north of the creek in 1910. It changed hands several times but continued to process, pack, and ship meats from Rapid City until a fire destroyed the plant in 2002. At the time, the facility was owned by Federal Beef Processors and employed around four hundred workers.[70]

A few years after the meat plant opened, in 1914, another pair of businessmen opened the Warren-Lamb Lumber Company. They ran a large lumberyard at the base of Cowboy Hill. For decades, the operation provided blue-collar jobs to white and Indigenous workers. Like the power company before it, Warren-Lamb invested heavily in a water flume in an effort to float logs efficiently from the central Black Hills down Rapid Creek to its plant. The scheme failed due to insufficient water flow, and the company relied on railroad transport instead. For decades, it harvested timber from in and around Custer State Park, along Slate Creek near Hill City, and other locations. The company appears to have closed in the 1930s but restarted its operations before going out of business in the 1960s.[71]

Cowboy Hill has also been part of the regional advertising and communications industries. Early retailers took advantage of the tall, sandstone cliffs facing the Gap to advertise their stores and wares. Like Skyline Drive, the top of the hill is home to radio towers, and in the 1960s, the Northwestern Bell Telephone Company installed a large aluminum reflector that helped bounce radio signals to the nearby town of Hermosa from the top of Cowboy Hill.[72]

67. "School of Mines Retains Rights to Cowboy Hill," *Rapid City Journal,* 18 Oct. 1967.
68. "Cowboy Hill on the Auction Block," *Rapid City Journal,* 23 Aug. 2006.
69. Abrahamson and Zimmer, *Expanding the Energy Horizon,* pp. 44–48.
70. "Beef Plant, Founders Park Timeline," *Rapid City Journal,* 29 Jan. 2012.
71. Linde, *Sawmills of the Black Hills*, pp. 58–59.
72. "Cowboy Hill Again Plays Key Communications Roll," *Rapid City Journal,* 25 June 1966.

Facilities near Cowboy Hill, such as the one pictured here, processed timber from the Black Hills. The lumber industry thrived in the area from the 1910s to the 1960s.

These industrial pursuits touched on another piece of Rapid City's environmental history: air quality and fire. The caption to a 1937 aerial photograph of Rapid City calls out the Warren-Lamb smokestack for, as the author wrote, "belching a dark cloud of smoke" from its smokestack at the base of Cowboy Hill.[73] As late as the 1990s, meanwhile, the Federal Beef Processors factory faced complaints about the pungent, unpleasant smells that it emitted, and neighbors cautioned their children from playing near the creek when it ran red with blood from the plant.[74] Meanwhile, over the last century, numerous fires have broken out on Cowboy Hill, Skyline Drive, and elsewhere. Sometimes, these fires started after reckless hikers and campers failed to douse their flames. Other fires were started by industrial endeavors. In 2012, construction equipment touched off a wildfire that burned some 150 acres

73. "Bird's Eye View," *Rapid City Journal*, 10 July 1937.

74. "Beef Plant, Founders Park Timeline," *Rapid City Journal*, 29 Jan. 2012; "Rapid City Meatpacking Plant Burns," *Black Hills Pioneer*, 30 Jan. 2002. Darla Drew Lerdal, transcript of oral history conducted 22 Aug. 2020 by Eric John Abrahamson. Copy is in the author's possession.

The Schroeder Wildfire, the smoke from which is seen here, burned around 2,200 acres on the west side of Rapid City from 29 March to 5 April 2021. It destroyed multiple structures and forced five hundred residents to evacuate their homes.

on Cowboy Hill.[75] The ponderosa pines on Rapid City's ridgeline, meanwhile, have been threatened by a mountain pine beetle infestation that has killed around 430,000 acres of trees in the Black Hills National Forest since the mid-1990s.[76] Despite these threats, both hills have retained much of their forest cover.

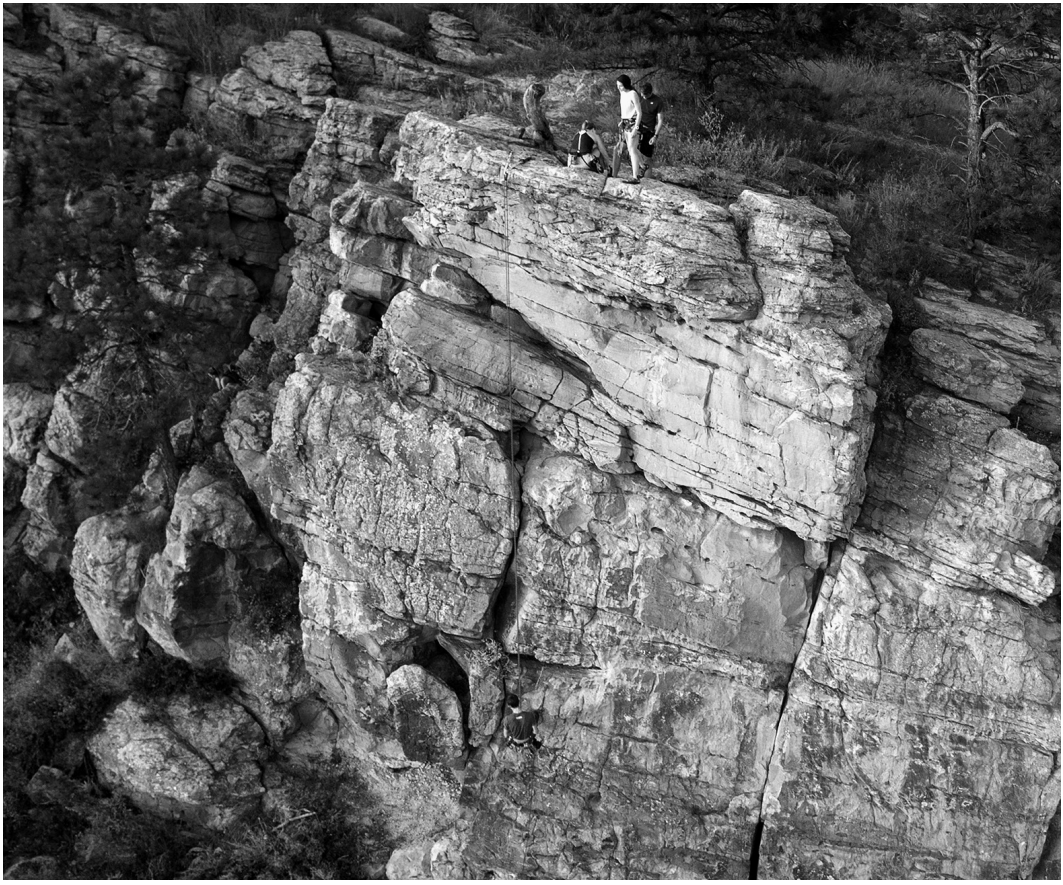
The Cowboy Hill area has also been a popular place to hike and recreate. In the 1920s, for example, the local YMCA sponsored activities and games on Cowboy Hill and the surrounding area. By the end of the twentieth century, the hillside had also become a popular location for mountain biking, rock climbing, and bouldering.[77]

75. "City Wildfire Offers Glimpse of Regeneration," *Rapid City Journal,* 1 May 2012.

76. "Mountain Pine Beetle," Black Hills National Forest, USDA Forest Service, https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/blackhills/landmanagement/?cid=stelprdb5113978; R. Keith Stewart and Carol A. Thilenius, "Black Hills Lakes and Streams: Stream and Lake Inventory and Classification in the Black Hills of South Dakota, 1964," in South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks, *Lake and Stream Classification Report* (1964), pp. 50–52.

77. "YMCA Boys Step Out in Hare and Hound Chase," *Rapid City Journal,* 21 Oct. 1920; "Cowboy Hill on the Auction Block," *Rapid City Journal,* 23 Aug. 2006.

Cowboy Hill remained private property until the early 2000s, when the hill and the surrounding area became known as Hanson-Larsen Memorial Park. Years before her death in 2004, Edna Marie "Eddie" Larsen, a South Dakota Mines graduate and longtime Hermosa resident, had established a trust to create a park to honor her parents' memory. When Cowboy Hill went up for sale in 2006, the trustees of her estate acquired the three hundred acre property. Since 2008, Hanson-Larsen Memorial Park has operated as an independently funded, self-sustaining nonprofit park that is open to the public. It includes over twenty miles of hiking and mountain biking trails and has become a popular spot for



A group of rock climbers rappel down a stone face on Cowboy Hill. Rapid City and the Black Hills have become extremely popular with the climbing community.

locals and visitors who travel to town for events like the Black Hills Fat Tire Festival, a mountain biking race, and other gatherings each year.[78]

As Rapid City looks to the future, it faces many opportunities to integrate history and memory into its planning processes. After the 1972 flood, the community undertook an enormous preservation project that took two forms. First, by restricting construction in the flood zone, officials sought to preserve human lives by minimizing the chances of repeating that devastating tragedy. Second, the city chose not to replace the buildings that were lost. Instead, it designed a long, narrow greenway filled with parks, golf courses, bike paths, and outdoor recreational facilities. The greenway follows the creek from Cleghorn Springs in the west through the heart of Rapid City and towards the eastern prairie.[79]

A half century later, Rapid City continues to grow. The U.S. Air Force recently announced the addition of a new squadron of B-21 stealth bombers in the mid-2020s. Meanwhile, the Black Hills saw an influx of new residents during the COVID-19 pandemic. If such growth continues, the community will undoubtably need to expand its infrastructure, raising difficult decisions about open spaces and natural resources, how best to pursue an equitable pattern of growth, and how to integrate new residents into local life and culture.

In each of these arenas, historic preservation can serve as a resource to aid planning and preparation. It is a dynamic process that is as much about capturing and communicating community memory and values as it is about protecting aged structures. "Cities are dynamic organisms," as one UNESCO pamphlet reads. "There is not a single 'historic' city in the world that has retained its 'original' character." Instead, "the concept is a moving target, destined to change with society itself."[80] The work of historic preservation is to plan for these changes carefully, intentionally, and with a view towards what is lost and gained through the process of keeping.

78. Visit Rapid City, "Hanson-Larsen Memorial Park," accessed 20 Jan. 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BvGlNe9-Mm8. "Cowboy Hill on the Auction Block," *Rapid City Journal,* 23 Aug. 2006; "Fat Tire Festival Rolls into Hills," *Rapid City Journal,* 22 June 2014.

79. Strain, *Black Hills Haycamp*, p. 210–12.

80. UNESCO, "New Life for Historic Cities," p. 24.

This article began on the asphalt trail that snakes along Rapid City's southern ridgeline. The opposite ridge, Cowboy Hill, is filled with recreational hiking and biking paths. Rapid Creek is a riverine trail that has connected the central Black Hills to the outside world for millennia. Trails are a popular and important way to connect with a place, and in so doing, become immersed in the landscape and its memory. The author Robert Moor recently observed that "pathways act as an essential guiding force on this planet. . . . Without trails, we would be lost."[81] The same is true of history.

81. Robert Moor, *On Trails: An Exploration* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016), p. 2.

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On the cover: Several climbers scale a rock face on Cowboy Hill in Rapid City. The area has become a world-class rock climbing destination.

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