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Courthouse Square has been the center of Lewis and Clark County justice since officials built the first courthouse on the platted green in 1867. When territorial government moved from Virginia City to Helena in 1875, the county courthouse became the territorial capitol building. Government officials and employees naturally settled nearby, but there was another reason for residential development around Courthouse Square. The location offered a safe haven from the fires that plagued the early commercial district. Residents sought higher ground along Ewing Street, Fifth Avenue, and upper Broadway.

By the end of the 1870s, some prominent citizens had settled in the neighborhood. Wilbur Fisk Sanders, William Child, Cornelius Hedges, territorial governor Benjamin Potts, and a number of respected Jewish businessmen, including Jacob Feldberg, Isaac Marks, and Herman Gans, were among early residents. Central School, the U.S. Assay Office, a substantial jail, a major livery, boardinghouses, a church, and Rodney Street businesses formed a microcosmic community.

In 1883, the Northern Pacific Railroad linked Helena to outside markets. Immigrants poured into the depot and housing was at a premium. Apartments with housekeeping units like Porter Flats were a manifestation of Helena's new urban identity. Fine homes began to fill in the neighborhood's empty spaces, and by the end of the 1880s, residential streets had assumed much of their present identities.

Mother Nature vied with the built environment when a series of earthquakes rocked the area in October 1935. The courthouse clock tower, many chimneys, and brick veneer fell victim in this part of town. Homeowners repaired the damage with determination. A prime example is the Hedges House, which now sports a siding much different from its original brick. Stucco was also a common remedy, and as a result, transformed the appearance of many houses.

1. U.S. Assay Office, 206 Broadway (1875)

U.S. Treasury architects designed the stately assay building, but Helenans thought it "old-fashioned" a decade later. It was Montana Territory's second federal building; the territorial prison at Deer Lodge (1871) was the first. Helena's assay was one of five U.S. assay offices where the melter transformed nuggets and dust into bars; the huge ovens are intact in the basement. By 1900, \$30 million worth of gold had passed through the building. It operated until 1934.

2. Lewis & Clark County Courthouse, 228 Broadway (1886–1887)

Still used as the county courthouse, the handsome building—which once served as territorial and later state capitol—features Bayfield brownstone trim, shipped by rail from Wisconsin. The St. Paul firm of Hodgson and Stem served as architects (LCG #24). Its magnificent clock tower, said to have never kept the correct time, was a victim of the 1935 earthquakes as was the top story. As the calamity occurred during the depression, there was neither inclination nor money to rebuild.

3. Lewis & Clark County Jail, 15 N. Ewing (1890)

This fortress-like Romanesque-style institution replaced an 1874 facility at this same location. During construction, the Presbyterian Church that once stood on the northwest corner of the courthouse parking lot housed the prisoners. In 1923, the wife of the sheriff suffered a fatal bullet wound when the gun he was cleaning accidentally discharged.

4. Cornelius Hedges Home, 320 Broadway (1878)

As four-term territorial superintendent of schools, Hedges founded Montana's public school system. He was a pioneer attorney and probate judge, a founder of the Montana Historical Society, and a member of the Washburn-Doane party that explored the Yellowstone in 1870. Hedges's Italianate-style brick home was once much more elaborate with a central tower rising out of the roof that offered spectacular views. The small front porch and window structure around the doorway are original.

5. Rodney Street Hotel, 100–102 N. Rodney (1879–1888)

As early as 1879, a hotel and saloon occupied this corner. By 1884, it was the Rodney Street Hotel. Records show that in 1890 there were more than forty boarders. Construction occurred in two stages, with the southeast portion first.

6. Allen Livery/Court Street Stables, 312–314 Breckenridge (c. 1885)

Many layers of painted “ghost” signs make this early building a Helena treasure. The best-preserved local example of an important industry, its simple construction illustrates the beauty of the earliest plain, utilitarian buildings. The upstairs accommodated tenants in livery-related employment.

7. Kenck & Company Saloon, 200 N. Rodney (c. 1884)

Italianate-style detailing reflects 1880s fashion while thirteen chimneys reveal the number of upstairs lodging rooms. The rooms temporarily accommodated many immigrants who came west with the railroad to settle in Helena.

8. Piercy Boarding House, 310–312 Fifth Avenue (c. 1888)

The stylish Courthouse Square neighborhood prospered in the 1880s as shown by this very fashionable boarding-house with its granite-trimmed sandstone façade, metal-faced Mansard roof, and colorful stained glass transom. Built by rancher W. C. Child (#13), and later run by Margaret Piercy, it is a splendid expression of Victorian-era architecture.

9. Joseph K. Toole Mansion, 203 N. Ewing (1903–1904)

Governor Toole lived here during his third term of office (1904–1908). As Mrs. Toole looked on from an upstairs window in August 1904, a gun battle between officials and an escaped prisoner from the jail ended with the prisoner’s suicide in the basement stairwell. This house is the architectural twin of #12.

10. Chessman Flats, 210–218 N. Ewing (1891)

An exceptional example of an urban Queen Anne–style row house, this multi-family residence was originally five three-story townhouses built by William Chessman (#11). Gables, bays, and a rounded turret-like corner illustrate the architectural exuberance of the period.

11. Original Governor’s Mansion, 302 N. Ewing (1888)

Built as the private residence of William Chessman, a developer of the city’s early water system, it was later the home of railroad mogul Peter Larson (#15). The Queen Anne–style home became the first state owned executive residence in 1913 and served until 1959. The Montana Historical Society now maintains the fully restored home as a museum.

12. Wesley Biggs Home, 303 N. Ewing (1906)

Eugene Wallace Fiske, architect of the Toole Mansion (#9), designed this home for County Commissioner Wesley Biggs. Compare the stone trim to the wood trim of the second- and third- floor Palladian windows.

13. William C. Child Residence, 305 N. Ewing (1872)

W. C. Child was appointed territorial land registrar under President Ulysses S. Grant. The Child family continued to live in Helena after 1885 when Child established the White Face Farm (now the Kleffner Ranch) east of Helena. This was one of the first homes on Ewing Street.

14. Child Carriage House, 318 E. Sixth Avenue (1873)

The stone barn, originally part of the W. C. Child property, is a rare remaining example of early local masonry. Charlie Russell temporarily bunked in the loft living quarters once used by the Childs’ groom. The stone outbuildings demonstrate the rural character of early Helena neighborhoods.

15. Wellington D. Rankin Home, 309 N. Ewing (c. 1906)

The residence of territorial governor Benjamin Potts was originally on this corner. Missoula architects Larson and Greenough designed the present residence for railroad contractor Peter Larson (#11). Larson gave it to his daughter Mabel and son-in-law C. B. Power. Influential attorney Wellington Rankin, whose famous sister Jeannette was the first female U.S. congresswoman, later owned the home.

16. Sanders House, 328 N. Ewing (1875)

Attorney Wilbur Fisk Sanders was one of the original members of the Montana vigilantes, a group of men who took the law into their own hands and hanged several dozen men in 1864. A representative of the territorial legislature, Sanders was also one of the new state’s first two senators (1890–1893). Remodeling circa 1890 transformed the Italianate-style residence into the present Queen Anne–style home.

17. Porter Flats, 335 N. Ewing (1884)

Pioneer realtor James Porter, developer of much of Helena’s West Side, built this three-story Italianate-style apartment building, one of the first in Helena. Six original units offered complete housekeeping facilities.

18. Morris Silverman House, 412 N. Rodney (1892)

Three fanciful porches stacked pagoda style, intricate ornamentation, and imaginative stained glass embellish this glorious Victorian-era home built by one of Helena's most prominent Jewish merchants. Morris Silverman crossed the plains with teams of oxen and goods to sell to the miners, settling in Helena in 1867. Silverman presided over the committee to establish the Jewish synagogue (#20).

19. Herman Gans House, 416 N. Ewing (c. late 1870s)

Herman Gans, a partner in the pioneer clothing firm of Gans & Klein, was congregation president of the Temple Emanu-El (#20). Fixtures for the Queen Anne-style home came up the river to Fort Benton and overland by ox team. Later, the house was the rectory of the priests attached to the Cathedral across the street. A tunnel reputedly once connected the house with the church giving the priests passage between the two during inclement weather.

20. Temple Emanu-El, 515 N. Ewing (1891)

Helena's substantial Jewish community played a significant role in the early economy. Jacob Feldberg, Morris Silverman, and Herman Gans were among the prominent residents of the neighborhood who helped build this "temple amidst the Rockies,"

the first Jewish synagogue in the Pacific Northwest. The Romanesque-style synagogue with its distinctive keyhole windows and rich stained glass had a sanctuary with a thirty-foot ceiling and blue star-studded onion domes on each corner tower. With the waning of the congregation, the State of Montana purchased the building for \$1.00 in the 1930s. The Catholic Diocese purchased the building in 1980 and now maintains it. Note the date on the stone at the northeast corner, 5651, the Hebrew year (1891) of its construction.

21. First Presbyterian Church, 535 N. Ewing (1891–1904)

Presbyterians formally organized in Helena in 1872 and built their first church at 5th and Ewing in 1876. Members laid the cornerstone for this church in 1891, and part of the building was completed in 1892. The sanctuary and beautiful stained glass windows were added in 1903–1904. The 1909 pipe organ is still in use.

22. Cathedral of St. Helena, 511 N. Warren (1908–1924)

Patterned after the Votive Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Vienna, this Helena centerpiece was designed by Austrian-born architect Albert O. Von Herbulis and built at a cost of \$645,590. The twin spires rise 230 feet from Warren Street and the stained glass windows, crafted in Munich by the famous firm of F. X. Zettler, include 11,696 square feet of art glass. Credit for the building project goes to John P. Carroll, Bishop of Helena from 1904 to 1925. Mining magnate Thomas Cruse (LWS #22) donated nearly one-third of the building cost. Peter Larson (#11 & #15) was among the generous contributors. The cornerstone was laid in 1908, the first mass celebrated in 1914, and the interior completed and the church consecrated in 1924. Von Herbulis also designed St. Charles Hall on the Carroll College Campus and St. Mary's Church (RR #2).

23. Central School, 348 N. Warren (1915–1921)

Officials chose this prominent hilltop for Montana Territory's first graded school, built here in 1875 on the site of the old mining camp cemetery (HC #1). By the 1890s, Helena High School and a handsome public library stood to either side. Neither survives. George Carsley designed the present "new" Central School.

24. First Baptist Church, 359 N. Warren (1883–1884)

A distinctive spire and octagonal stained glass windows make this place of worship unique. Territorial governor Preston Leslie was an early member. The tracker-action pipe organ, given in 1900 in memory of his daughter Emily, is still in use. Governor Sam Ford (1941–1949) attended church here, and in the 1960s, so did country singer Charlie Pride.

25. Kleinschmidt Block, 301–304 N. Warren (c. 1890)

The eye-catching corner oriel window of this business/apartment block is a Victorian-era gem. Helena's Stedman Foundry made the cast-iron columns.

26. Preuitt House, 201 N. Warren (1874)

Businessman William Preuitt built this brick home, which offered a wonderful view of the growing town. Liquor dealer Isaac Marks and clothing merchant Henry Klein (of Gans & Klein) were later owners. The home served as rectory for St. Peter's Episcopal Church (1906–1928), which stood across Warren Street.

27. Helena YWCA Independent, 220 Fifth Avenue (pre-1884)

A beautiful example of the French Second Empire style, this home was first a private residence, then a boarding-house serving the Courthouse Square area. From 1911 to 1914, the house served as Helena's first Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) headquarters. Members operated a popular cafeteria in the house and provided lodging rooms for women and girls from rural areas attending high school. The Helena YWCA chose not to affiliate with the national organization because some of the former's hard-working founders were Jewish.

29. Alden Block, 100–104 N. Ewing/220–214 Breckenridge (1880)

Isaac R. Alden, a Supreme Court clerk, constructed this territorial building with a residence on half the first floor. The other half was a law library, convenient to the courthouse a few steps away. The public library was on the second floor. The third floor and Spanish Eclectic–style details were added circa 1917.

30. Helena Classical School, 206–210 Breckenridge (c. 1880)

Well-to-do Helenans sent their children back east to school, but some who could not afford this luxury were unhappy with the public school curriculum. The Helena Classical School was a private institution that offered Latin, Greek, and other subjects the public schools did not. The school lasted only a couple of years. By 1888, the building served as apartments.

31. Taylor Undertaker, 107 N. Warren (c.1880)

A. B. Taylor was one of Helena’s early undertakers. His business located here in the early 1880s. After the advent of the railroad in 1883, in transporting remains the law required that they be confined in metal coffins. Taylor advertised his showroom as the “home of the indestructible metal coffin.”

32. Brown Block, 11–21 N. Warren (c. 1879)

Real estate salesman Wallace W. Brown built this grand example of early local masonry. Shops in 1884 included sewing machine and pattern sales, a print shop, and a millinery. Lodgings could be secured upstairs.