



Portrait of a city
by Raymond W Campeau

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF APPLIED ARTS
Montana State University
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Abstract:

My interest in the city of Butte and my desire to create an image of the city via the medium of watercolor were the main reasons for the development of this thesis. I have used thirteen paintings to illustrate this thesis, listed the materials, and explained the techniques used.

The title, "Portrait of a City," makes the analogy that painting a city and painting a portrait have similarities. In order to paint more than a superficial likeness of a person an artist must become familiar with the characteristics and habits of his model. In this thesis Butte is my model. I studied those facets of her background that have left the most visible changes in her features. Some of these facets have been: religion, as witnessed in the church buildings—wealth, in the mansions--prestige, in the monuments—occupation, in the gallows frames and open pit (symbols of mining).

Throughout the thesis I have tried to make it evident that mining, the very thing that breathes life into all these features, has been also the prime factor in their destruction.

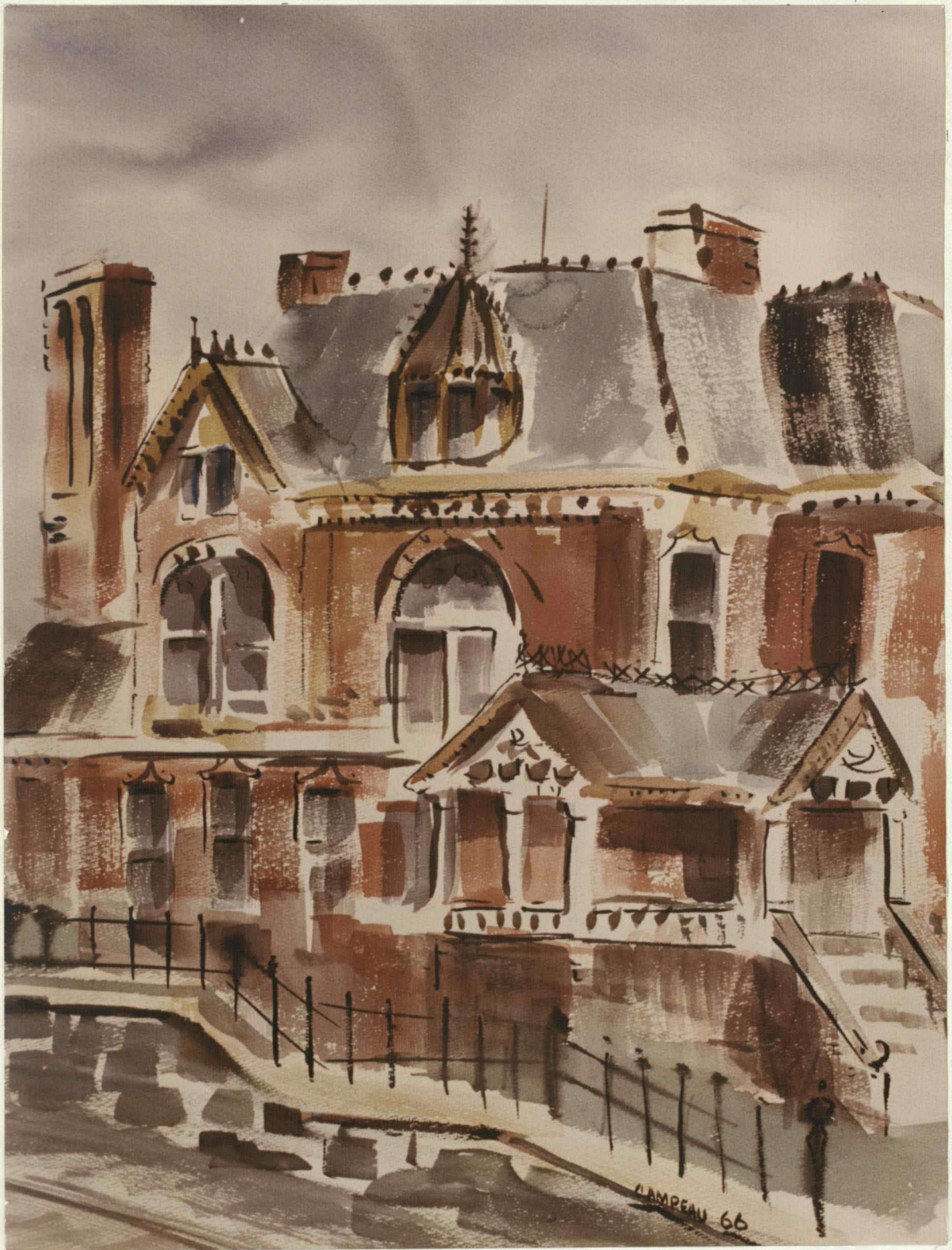


FIGURE 1 "Relic"

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TITLE PAGE	i
VITA	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
LIST OF FIGURES	v
ABSTRACT	vi
INTRODUCTION	vii
THE TECHNIQUE	1
THE SETTING	4
THE CHURCHES	7
FRATERNAL HALL	11
THE MANSION	15
THE MONUMENT	17
THE GALLOWES	19
THE PIT	22
CONCLUSION	25
LITERATURE CONSULTED	26

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. "Relic"	Frontispiece
2. Palette and Brushes	2
3. "Harding Way"	5
4. "Butte"	6
5. "Sacred Heart Church"	8
6. "St. Lawrence Church"	10
7. "Holy Trinity"	12
8. "Peace and Harmony Hall"	14
9. "Clark's Place"	16
10. "Clark's Castle"	18
11. "Columbia Gardens"	20
12. "Orphan Girl"	21
13. "Anselmo"	23
14. "The Pit"	24

ABSTRACT

My interest in the city of Butte and my desire to create an image of the city via the medium of watercolor were the main reasons for the development of this thesis. I have used thirteen paintings to illustrate this thesis, listed the materials, and explained the techniques used.

The title, "Portrait of a City," makes the analogy that painting a city and painting a portrait have similarities. In order to paint more than a superficial likeness of a person an artist must become familiar with the characteristics and habits of his model. In this thesis Butte is my model. I studied those facets of her background that have left the most visible changes in her features. Some of these facets have been: religion, as witnessed in the church buildings--wealth, in the mansions--prestige, in the monuments--occupation, in the gallows frames and open pit (symbols of mining).

Throughout the thesis I have tried to make it evident that mining, the very thing that breathes life into all these features, has been also the prime factor in their destruction.

INTRODUCTION

As a youth in the city of Butte I was neither aware of nor interested in the turbulent history of the city or its legacy of architectural and engineering projects that displayed evidence of the way of life and type of men who modeled its profile. Now this profile is being ravaged by new mining methods, a new social structure and by nature itself. Entire regions of the city have been absorbed by the open pit mining operation. Buildings, once landmarks and centers of community life, are being abandoned and destroyed. The churches have been caught up in this change. As the congregation is relocated by the advancing mining operation the churches follow, therefore, many of the old familiar churches are no longer to be seen and many others have been marked for razing. "The Greeks, Turks, Austrians and those of many other nationalities have clubs and in these meeting-places the native tongue is spoken, and they have literature from the Fatherland." ^{1/} These unique meeting-halls of the many ethnic groups described above are being deserted and are falling into disrepair. The heirs of the founders have inter-married, speak English, and no longer need the type of security offered by these halls. Many mansions of the Butte industrial giants have been abandoned due to tax structures and the high cost of domestic help.

^{1/} George Wesley Davis, Sketches of Butte from Vigilante Days to Prohibition, p. 65.

Even the gallows frames that punctured the Butte skyline are open prey to the pit.

John Marin once said, "If you have an intense love and feeling toward these things, you'll try your damndest (sic) to put on paper or canvas, that thing. You can transpose, you can play with and on your material, but when you are finished that's got to have the roots of that thing in it and no other thing." 2/ My interest in Butte has grown in the past years as I have been made aware of its proper stature through reading and studying its history. I decided, therefore, to capture if possible the flavor of this vanishing image, and to interpret it in a medium that is as spontaneous as the mining activity that constantly changes the face of Butte. Watercolor was my choice.

"Watercolor lends the same distinction to painting that poetry brings to literature. Each, by the nature of its directness and warmth of expression, develops an intimacy between the artist and audience that is subtly defined in sensitive, economical language." 3/ No limitations to the material used were given as this might hamper the effect desired in a given painting. An architectural rendering technique was used in the first few paintings and this proved to be unsatisfactory because of the lifelessness this technique imparted. Accurate detailed rendering

2/ William Carlos Williams, Duncan Phillips, Dorothy Norman, MacKinley Helm, Frederick S. White, John Marin, p. 34.

3/ George Dibble, Watercolor Materials and Techniques, p. 8.

can sometimes stifle the effect desired. In order that I might better respond to the subjects I began to research their historical background. As Marin said of his paintings of the buildings in New York, "You cannot create a work of art unless the things you behold respond to something within you. Therefore, if those buildings move me they must have life."

4/ For me, the historical background of the subjects gives them that life. "Eventually, however, it should be realized that understatement and effective design are often more important than achieving verisimilitude and that the artist meets his challenge when he is concerned with vitally significant statements about visual experience--whether he renders them realistically or abstractly." 5/ In painting "Portrait of a City" I did not express myself in the terms dictated by any ism. Picasso once said, "Whenever I have had something to say I have said it in the manner in which I felt it ought to be said. Different motives inevitably require different methods of expression." 6/

I made many trips to Butte during the summers of 1966 and 1967 to paint buildings and mining projects that had come to my attention as being significant Butte landmarks. The painting of these landmarks became such an absorbing occupation I finally had to stop to make a

4/ William Carlos Williams, Duncan Phillips, Dorothy Norman, Mackinley Helm, Frederick S. White, John Marin, p. 41.

5/ George Dibble, Watercolor Materials and Techniques, p. 27.

6/ Robert Goldwater and Marco Treves, Artists on Art, p. 418.

statement about the paintings. A project of this nature could go on as long as there is a Butte and mining is its major industry.

THE TECHNIQUE

The materials used in the series of paintings for "Portrait of a City" were those common to watercolor painting. The palette, palette knife, and brushes used are shown in figure 2. The three most used tools were the one inch aquarelle, the Japanese wash and the number one round brush. The other brushes were used because they were available but the paintings could have been painted with the three cited above.

Good watercolor paper is probably the most important material in the painting of watercolor. One hundred and forty pound, J. Perrigot, Arches Special M B M, rough, was used for all the paintings in this series. It is strong enough to allow for the scraping process with palette knife or the blade of the aquarelle handle without breaking down. It is available in block of twenty-five sheets. These sheets are prestretched on a heavy base, resist buckling when wet, and are always clean because they are protected by the sheet above.

The Japanese wash brush was used to lay in the first large wet washes. These washes were adjusted in value, hue, and shape to set a base for the rest of the painting. While these washes were still wet, the knife edge on the handle of the aquarelle was used to further develop the subject matter by moving the wet paint as though spreading butter. Wet pigment is scraped from the paper by the blade and is deposited at the edges and end of the stroke. A good example of this technique is shown in the handling of the fence and buildings in "The Pit," figure 14. After the use of the knife the painting was further developed



FIGURE 2 Palette and Brushes

with the brush end of the aquarelle by strengthening the existing shapes that overlap the large original washes. Finally, on most of the paintings, the number one round was used to introduce line and texture into the composition.

This process was not followed in the painting "Orphan Girl Mine," figure 12. For the most part this painting was a brush drawing or an architectural rendering and had an unpleasant stiffness.

Another deviation is shown in "Harding Way," figure 3. This painting developed through all of the steps mentioned. After it was completely dry, a mixture of $\frac{1}{2}$ water and $\frac{1}{2}$ Elmer's glue was spread with the Japanese wash brush over the entire surface of the painting and let dry. Over this glaze of glue, transparent washes of water-proof Flo-master inks were applied. This gave the painting a surface quality of a colored photo. These transparent washes of ink can be removed with lighter fluid without affecting the original watercolor because of the protective glaze of the Elmer's glue. When used, this step often led to an overworked painting.

Almost all of the paintings were executed at the site of the subject. This put the artist into the same environment as the subject of his painting and helped set the mood for the painting.

THE SETTING

In "Portrait of a City" the author found it necessary to become more familiar with the setting of Butte before going on to its specific facets. Harry Freeman in 1900 described Butte as being "...situated in an almost inaccessible valley shut in by an abrupt curve of the Rocky Mountains and off-running spurs and foothills." ^{7/} A beautiful view of Butte and its surroundings can be seen from Harding Way, a pass to the south of Butte that crosses the continental divide. From this position the large butte to the northwest of the city, after which the city was named, can be clearly distinguished. It was this view that inspired the painting of "Harding Way," figure 3. This part of the Butte portrait is passing away; a new four lane highway that approaches Butte from the west has replaced Harding Way.

Another familiar view of Butte is one from the Montana College of Mineral Science and Technology, formerly the School of Mines, located at the northwest extreme of the city at the foot of Big Butte, across the city to the East Ridge, a spur of the Rockies. The painting "Butte," figure 4, was painted from this spot. The rock on which the college is built seems to be the one unchanging contour of the city. Using it as a frame of reference the ever-changing contour of Butte could be recorded. The mine dumps that covered the small prospectors' cabins in the 1870's became the footings for the homes of the hardrock miners of the 1880's which are now giving way to the maw of the open

^{7/} Harry C. Freeman, Butte Above and Below Ground, p. 4.

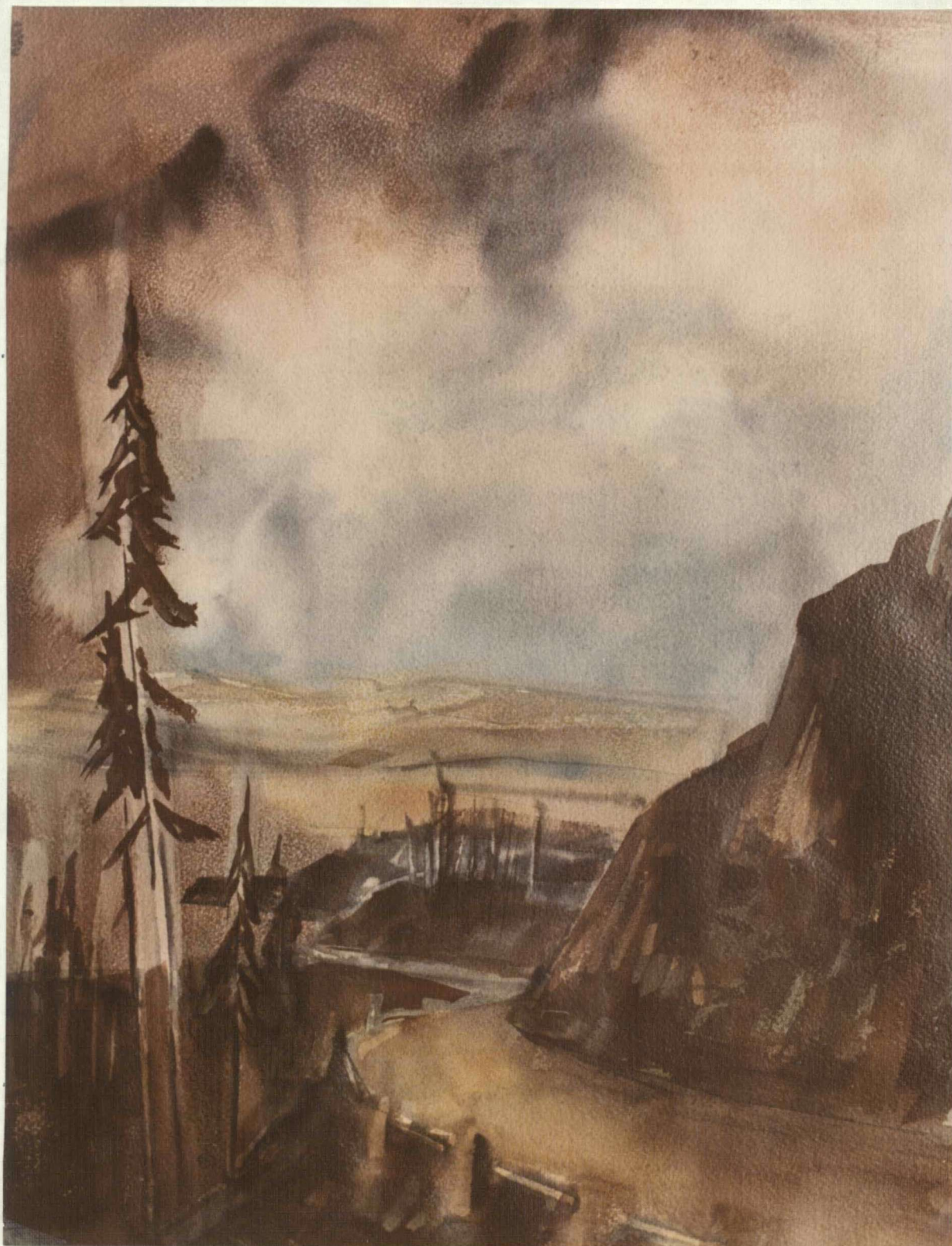


FIGURE 3 "Harding Way"

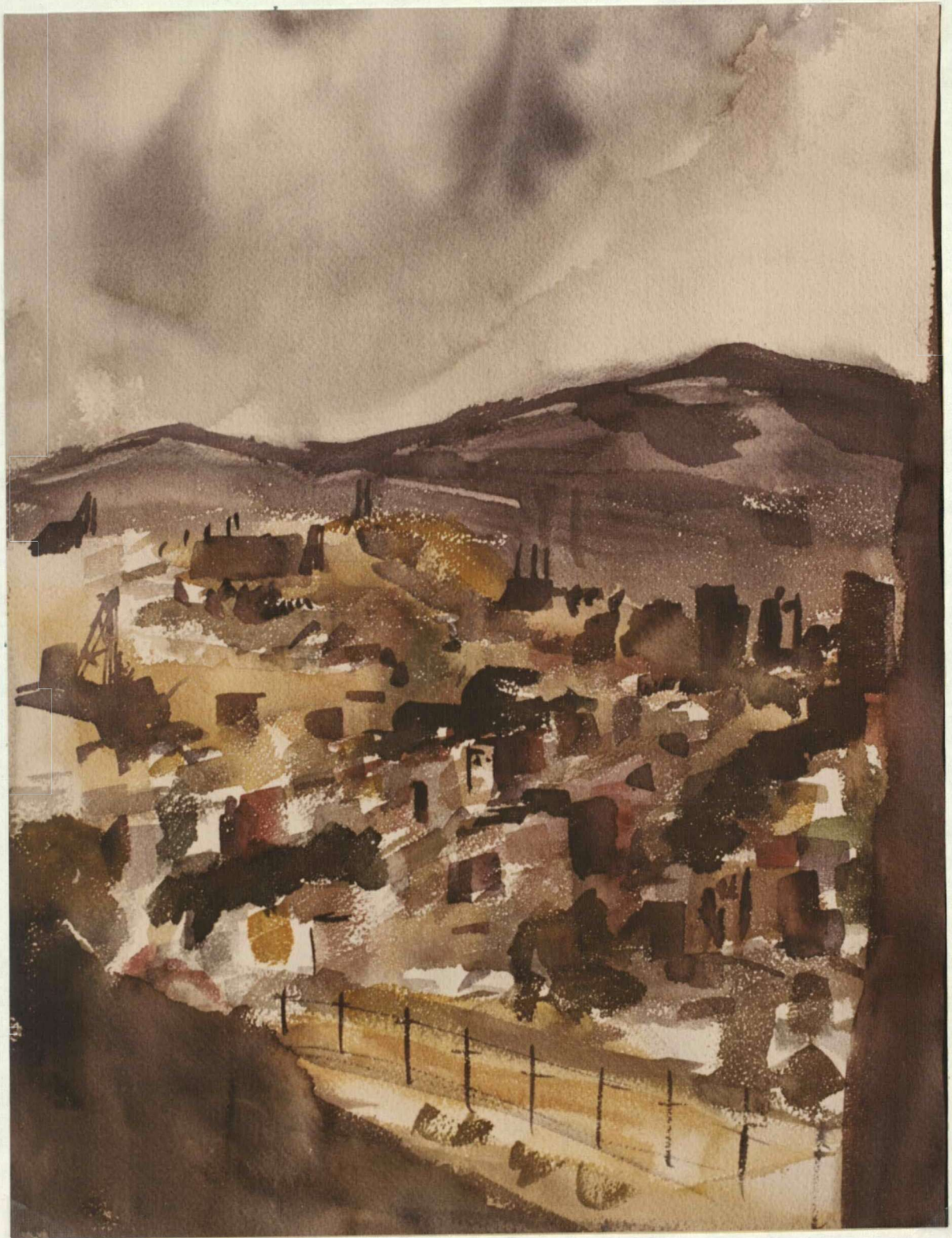


FIGURE 4 "Butte"

pit operation. As the Berkeley Pit absorbs the east side of the city it drives the residents to the flats south of Butte, the new residential district of the city.

THE CHURCHES

Church buildings are the best-preserved landmarks of any community. This is evident in Butte. A congregation experiences strong spiritual ties with its church. These ties usually cause it to oppose change. An example of this was the pressure brought on the Anaconda Company to preserve St. Helena's Church in Meaderville (a suburb of Butte) when this church was about to be razed to facilitate operation of the Berkeley Pit. This action by the congregation was successful and the church of St. Helena's was moved across town to the Mining Museum where it is now preserved by the company.

The churches picked for this study were not chosen for their denomination but for their unique architecture and their age.

After a fire gutted the original Sacred Heart Church in 1912, a new building was erected under the direction of Father James Venus. This new building was located at 351 East Park Street in Butte. The new Sacred Heart Catholic Church was opened in 1913 and has been in continuous service since. The new church was styled after the Spanish Mission type of architecture. The majority of its parishioners was made up of Irish and Italian miners. There is no record of the architect. The company that constructed the building was the O'Connell Construction Company. Under the guidance of Father Edmond Taylor the



FIGURE 5 "Sacred Heart Church"

church has been kept in excellent repair and is a bright relief among the ruins of a decaying business district that is being abandoned for sites on West Park Street. The shell of the old church was later refitted as the Sacred Heart School. Now both of these buildings have been marked to be razed in the near future to make way for the Berkeley Pit. Because the church was marked for destruction it was chosen for the subject of the painting, "Sacred Heart Church," figure 5.

The second oldest Catholic church in the Butte area is St. Lawrence Church in Walkerville (an independent community on top of the mining hill). The first Catholic church in the area was St. Patrick's but it has been remodeled so many times it no longer bears resemblance to the original building. St. Lawrence was built under the guidance of Father Batens in 1899. It is a wood frame building Gothic in style. The church still retains its original lines with the exception of the buttresses that were added 20 years after its erection. St. Lawrence Church is a beautiful, stark white building that sits on the very top of the Butte Hill, 1306 North Main Street. From this location the entire city can be seen. The tailing dumps, gallows frames, and rough fences and buildings associated with mining surround the church as shown in the painting, "St. Lawrence Church," figure 6. The school, rectory, and other associated buildings have also been painted white and are in keeping with the church.

Located at 341 South Idaho was a small brick church that stood



FIGURE 6 "St. Lawrence Church"

proudly for its Eastern European heritage. It was the Holy Trinity Serbian Eastern Orthodox Church. Its style of architecture was essentially Byzantine. The bright yellow brick structure was built in 1905 for the many Serbian miners who had migrated to Butte from the Balkans. The Butte parish is the only Serbian Orthodox church in the entire Northwest United States. The first pastor was Father Jacob Odzich. ^{8/} This beautiful church was located in an area of the town where the underground mining operations were causing the surface of the ground to shift and crack. Many of the buildings in the area had been condemned and leveled. Only two weeks after the painting "Holy Trinity," figure 7, was completed, this little church was bulldozed to the ground. The parishioners under the guidance of Father Dositej Obradovich have built a larger church on Continental Drive.

FRATERNAL HALL

The population of the mining community was made up of many groups of foreign extraction: English, Italian, Scandinavian, Serbian, Irish, etc. The closely knit members of each nationality group felt the need of a distinct edifice with which to identify. This would be a place where they would meet no language barrier and the social and cultural interests of the members would be those native to their homeland. This was realized by the building of fraternal halls such as The Sons of St. George's Peace and Harmony Hall and the Hibernia Hall. With the

^{8/} "The Holy Trinity Serbian Orthodox Church," Holy Trinity, July 25, 1965, p. 34.



FIGURE 7 "Holy Trinity"

exception of the Chinese Temple, none of the halls seemed to be influenced by the architecture of the native country represented. Most of them were built of cast iron, stone, and brick, popular building materials of the west in the 1880's and 1890's. ^{9/} As the population began to mingle and intermarry the need for a fraternal hall was lost and some of them were abandoned. Now time, nature, and children are slowly reducing them to ruins. The few remaining are used as just public dance halls.

The Sons of St. George's Peace and Harmony Hall, built in 1892, was used by the English miners. It is located high on the hill on the corner of Main and Center Streets. The grade of the hill is shown in the painting "Peace and Harmony Hall," figure 8. Down the street just half a block is the Hibernia Hall, meeting place of the Irish. This must have been an interesting corner on Saturday nights. When the Sons disbanded, the building was used for a bar and a store. The last owners, the North Side Community Club, used it as a meeting hall. The building is now owned by a second-hand dealer known as Tony the Trader, although he cannot prove his ownership because the title has been lost and the transaction was not recorded. The building has been boarded up for many years now and though it is structurally sound the children in the neighborhood have inflicted major damage on it.

^{9/} Willard B. Robinson, Northwest Architecture 1843-1893, p. 104.



FIGURE 8 "Peace and Harmony Hall"

THE MANSION

Whether the "king" gained his wealth from copper, lumber, finance or merchandising he needed the proper edifice in which to reside. The architecture of these mansions is borrowed from many European styles and can be called "the parvenue mansion." 10/ Most of these eclectic buildings are located on the west side of Butte. When they were built they could not be landscaped because of the deadly sulphurous fumes from the ore roasting dumps. 11/ Now most of them are beautifully landscaped and their visual impact has probably been softened because of this. The site of the W.A. Clark mansion is 219 West Granite. The paintings "Relic," figure 1, and "Clark's Place," figure 9, portray this mansion. Clark was one of the great copper kings and built this home in 1884 as his Butte residence at a cost of \$250,000. He had a much more pretentious mansion on Fifth Avenue in New York City. Bob and Ann Smith, the present owners, have tried to restore the Clark mansion to its original splendor.

Not many of the mansions are still lived in by one family because of the cost of upkeep and the lack of domestic help. The mansion is being replaced by more convenient and modern buildings. Those that survive do so because they are converted to other uses or because someone who loves the feeling of the past nurses them in their age and

10/ Willard B. Robinson, Northwest Architecture 1843-1893, p. 90.

11/ C.B. Glasscock, The War of the Copper Kings, p. 85

