

W. C. Child Ranch
1 mile south of East Helena on Highway 279
Helena Vicinity
Lewis and Clark County
Montana

HABS No. MT-30

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

W. C. CHILD RANCH

HABS No. MT-30

"White Face Farm"

ADDRESS: 1 mile south of East Helena on Montana
highway 279, Helena Vicinity, Lewis and Clark County, Montana.

OWNER: Paul Kleffner

OCCUPANT: Paul Kleffner

USE: Residence

HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

This 740 acre ranch was once part of a spread of nearly 3,000 acres acquired by W. C. Child, an early Montana prospector. He invested his mining fortune here, building a huge stone and wood barn, an "L" shaped 230' x 70' stone shed, and an octagonal stone house which apparently was used chiefly for parties. He called the place "White Face Farm", and stocked it with Hereford cattle.

The financial panic of 1893 caught Mr. Child, and he was forced to assign the farm to Wilbur F. Sanders. Within a month Child was dead, and the place was ordered sold to satisfy his creditors.

The present owner, Paul Kleffner, acquired the place in 1943. He has restored the house and barn and outbuildings, and they are in excellent condition. They are of unique design and construction, and are a good example of an early-day stock farm that is still operative today.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

William C. Child came to Helena in the early placer mining days, and accumulated a modest fortune in mining. He was one of the organizers of the Helena Reduction Works in 1871, and in 1872 was appointed Register of the Land Office.

In 1886, Child purchased this farm from Biddle Reeves, an early-day stockman-farmer, then added other nearby parcels of land to accumulate a ranch of almost 3,000 acres. He stocked it with pure-bred Hereford cattle (the first Herefords had been introduced into Montana in 1880 by Conrad Kohrs (see MT-32), so this was one of the early herds in the state) and named it "White Face Farm."

Both the Northern Pacific and the Helena and Jefferson County railroads crossed Child's property, and on June 16, 1887, the Helena Weekly Herald observed, "A very pretty spectacle on W. C. Child's broad-acred ranch seen from the windows of the Helena and Jefferson County Railroad, is a band of Hereford cattle pastured in a luxuriantly grassed field near the track." The newspaper also reported that Child was building on his farm the largest stable in Montana.

The Helena City Directory for 1888, lists the residence of Mr. Child as 303 N. Ewing Street, but on the page facing the listing there is an advertisement for the White Face Farm showing a view of the ranch. In the picture are shown the barn, the long shed, the employees' quarters, and a conventional-type ranch house. This house was apparently on the farm when Child purchased it, but burned later. The picture does not show the octagonal house which now serves as living quarters, but since the octagonal house is built with similar bricks, it was presumably built soon afterwards. The Montana Historical Society Library in Helena has a picture of a "Group of Pioneers" gathered on the porch of the octagonal stone house dated 1890.

The house was apparently not used as a residence by Child; he maintained his home in Helena on Ewing Street. However, the Northern Pacific had a spur that ran nearby, and groups of Helena people would come out to the farm by train, dance and party well into the night, then return to Helena by train. In September, 1891, the annual banquet of the Society of Montana Pioneers was held at the W. C. Child ranch, with 150 people taking the train out to the ranch for the celebration.

Most of the early buildings remaining are built of masonry, rubble stone with brick used for the corners. Reportedly the masons were Italians brought in for the work.

Mr. Child had over-extended himself with the elaborate buildings and the expensive stock, and in 1893 was bankrupt. A month after making a financial assignment to Wilbur F. Sanders, Child was found dead in the house at White Face Farm. It was sold to satisfy his creditors and passed through various hands until 1943, when Paul Kleffner, the present owner purchased it from the Federal Land Bank. It was in dilapidated condition, with windows out, chimney down, etc., but Kleffner has restored it so that the buildings are in as good condition now as when they were built.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL AND REFERENCES

- Campbell, William C., From the Quarries of Last Chance Gulch, Montana Record Publishing Co., Helena, 1951, vol. 1, p. 200.
- Helena City Directory, Helena, Montana, 1888.
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- Lancaster, Clay, Architectural Follies in America, Charles E. Tuttle Co., Rutland, Vermont, 1960.
- Leeson, M. A., History of Montana 1739-1885, Warner, Beers & Co., Chicago, 1885.
- Martin, George, "Much Area History Revealed in East Helena Ranch", The Independent Record (newspaper), Helena, Montana, July 8, 1962.

ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The octagonal building form was introduced into America in the 18th century and had as its proponents such architects as Thomas Jefferson and Robert Mills. By the middle of the 19th century, the building of octagonal domiciles was one of the top architectural fads. Much of its success can be traced to the efforts of one man, Orson Squire Fowler. Fowler was a writer, publisher, philosopher of sorts, lecturer, and built and lived in an eight-sided four-storied house in

Fiskhill, New York.

The octagonal stone building erected by W. C. Child is unique. Not only is the form uncommon in this area, but it was apparently not built as a domicile, but rather as a personal recreational structure on a large cattle ranch. The entire second floor was devoted to ballroom space. Another unusual feature is that the interior walls do not begin at the angles of the building, and in order for them to intersect other walls perpendicularly, some are "bent" as much as 18". This gives rise to a theory that the building may have been built externally from a picture, and the builder had difficulty fitting the interior to it.

EXTERIOR

Overall Dimensions - eight-sided, 20'-0" \pm 1" per side, and within a 50' diameter; two story stone and brick building.

Foundation - stone.

Wall Construction - stone bearing wall construction with brick cut to the proper angles to form the intersection of the building planes.

Porch - A seven foot wide one story porch surrounds the building. The present owner put in a concrete floor. Originally the porch had a wood floor, wooden posts and a canvas cover that could be dropped in case of rain. Here on the porch, food was served to large crowds of people -- upwards to 150.

Openings - Entrance: wooden door, 12 lights; side door, single panel, single light; kitchen door, single panel, 3 horizontal lights.

Windows: D.H. 2/2 wood sash, cut stone sills. Second floor windows are partial dormer units - half the window in the wall area and half in the roof in a dormer cap.

Roof - mansard roof, metal sheeted.

Chimney - brick central chimney, five flues - one each for the four fireplaces and one for the furnace in the partial basement.

INTERIOR

Floor Plan - There are four large rooms located about the central core which originally contained four fireplaces. They form a modified Greek cross. In the angles left are smaller rooms. The four major rooms today are living room, with a family room opposite, kitchen and a bedroom opposite. Each had a fireplace, but today they are all blocked except the one in the living room. Among the smaller first floor rooms is a den or office to the left of the living room and opening off it, a utility room to the right with an outside entrance and connecting to the kitchen, and a bathroom to the right of the family room with a staircase to the second floor between it and the kitchen.

The entire second floor was a ballroom with the eight-sided chimney stack in the center. The ceiling line of this room follows the roof line. The present owner has installed a bath and bedrooms in part of this second floor space.

Stairway - enclosed stairway to the second floor.

Floors - oak T & G.

Wall and Ceiling Finish - plaster.

Doors - four panel, wood.

Trim - decorative moulded pine, painted.

Hardware - brass and cast iron.

Lighting - electric; ranch originally had its own power plant.

Heating - oil-burning furnace.

OTHERS

General Setting - The ranch is located in the Prickly Pear Valley one mile south of East Helena.

Enclosure - There is a metal fence about the house enclosing an octagonal yard which follows the form of the house.

Outbuildings - There is a large barn with a central section of wood three stories high with a simple gable roof, and is 55' x 100'. The upper floor is lofty enough that basketball has been played here. The central section is flanked on either side by two story masonry shed wings, 24' x 100' each, built in a similar fashion as the main house -- rubble stone with brick corners. One can sight down along the walls and not see one stone protruding farther than the rest. Openings have brick arched headers.

North of the barn is a dwelling and storage building which is bisected by the county line. It is one and a half story, stone and brick, shingle roof.

The hog shed is a one story stone structure built in an "L" shape with wooden end walls. It is 15' x 230' and 15' x 70'.

Other outbuildings include a stone and brick bunkhouse -- now converted to storage, smokehouse and garage (19'-0" x 57'-1 $\frac{1}{2}$ "), and a shop added by the present owner.

Prepared by: John DeHaas

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Reviewed by: Eleni Silverman, HABS

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