

The Silver Bow Club of Butte: Architectural Gem in the Mining Metropolis

Patty Dean

On New Year's Eve 1907, when the Silver Bow Club, a private men's club on Butte's West Side, opened in its new quarters, its debut capped an extraordinary two years of record-breaking new construction for the Mining City. The erection of such multi-story commercial buildings as the State Savings Bank (designed by Cass Gilbert, perhaps America's best-known architect of the period), Phoenix/Symons Dry Goods Co. building, Hennessy's department store annex, cosmopolitan Napton and Leonard apartment buildings, and civic improvements had totaled three million dollars in 1906 alone. Vestiges of the city's rough-and-tumble mining-camp origins were fast disappearing. On December 12, 1906, the *Butte Miner* noted, "unsightly wooden houses in the business districts are rapidly being supplanted by modern blocks. Before many more months have passed it will be almost a matter of impossibility to find a wooden building in the principal commercial centers of Butte."

The completion of the Silver Bow Club manifested the city's ambitious expectations: "Any city," bragged the *Miner*, "that can boast of a club building such as is being erected . . . can well claim rank with the foremost in the country. . . . it [will be] worthy of classification with any metropolitan club." Founded by



Silver Bow Club, Butte, August 24, 2005. Photograph by Patty Dean.

mining and capitalist pioneers in 1882 (copper king and future U.S. senator W. A. Clark was its first president), the Silver Bow Club Building Association incorporated in May 1905 to engage in real estate activities "for the purpose of erecting, constructing and maintaining thereon a building or buildings suitable for club house and business purposes." The club members capitalized the corporation for \$50,000.

The club's two-lot site on West Granite and Alaska Streets was occupied by one of the "few remaining landmarks of the days of Butte as a mining

camp,” a one-story frame house with bay window, tucked between the two-story brick veneer storefront Albion Hotel and the cupola-roofed Silver Bow County Courthouse. In about 1876, “pioneer placer miner” Joel Ransom paid \$10 for each of the two lots and lived in the small home until leaving for California to become a farmer and vineyard owner. Ransom’s friend, copper baron Marcus Daly—and W. A. Clark rival—eventually purchased the property and transferred it to his Anaconda Copper Co. which, in turn, sold it to the Silver Bow Club. In the meantime, reported the *Miner*, the Robinsons, a vaudeville costumer and her popular dancing master husband, vacated the premises to make room for the forthcoming “ornament . . . a gem of architectural beauty.”

Plans for the club’s new quarters, prepared by Spokane architects Kirtland Cutter and Karl Gunnar Malmgren, arrived in the spring 1905 with a presentation drawing featured in the *Anaconda Standard*. The illustration depicted a boxy brick and stone Jacobean Revival building of five stories with Flemish gables nearly identical to their 1902–1904 Rainier Club in Seattle. (The firm also designed the Davenport Hotel in Spokane, Washington, and later, the Lewis Hotel or Lake McDonald Lodge in Glacier National Park among other landmarks.)

The Cutter-Malmgren design was not carried out, however, and Link and Haire, a new Montana



“Site of Silver Bow Club Building.” *Anaconda Standard*, April 22, 1906. Courtesy Butte Silver Bow Public Archives, Butte.

partnership that was to be the Spokane firm’s local associate, evidently came up with their own design. The forty-nine-year-old Charles S. Haire had trained as an architect in his native Ohio before moving West to Pocatello, Idaho, to work first as a Union Pacific draftsman and then, a year later, in the same position for the Great Northern Railway in Butte. Haire settled in Helena in 1889, serving first as draftsman and later an architect for the prolific real estate and construction company Wallace and Thornburgh before opening his own architectural office in about 1900. The thirty-six-year-old John G. Link had attended the Royal Academy in Lindau, Bavaria, became a naturalized U.S.



"New Home of the Silver Bow Club." Anaconda Standard, May 22, 1906. Courtesy Montana Historical Society, Helena.

citizen in Buffalo, New York, in 1887, and dedicated himself to further architectural study in Denver and St. Louis. Link was a new Billings resident in 1906 when Haire and he established their office in that city.

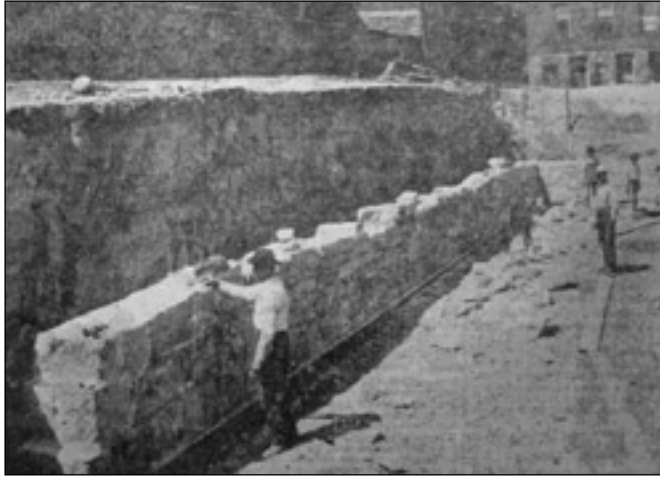
The firm already had other Butte projects underway from their Silver Bow Block office, working with Cass Gilbert associate George Carsley of Helena on copper king F. Augustus Heinze's State Savings Bank on Park and Main Streets and the four-story Ansonia apartment building on West Park Street.

With the frame house razed, the Albion Hotel was to be moved downhill nine blocks south to the

corner of Montana and Aluminum Streets. The *Anaconda Standard* reported, "The brick work on the outside has been removed carefully, and when the frame inclosure [sic] shall reach its new location, the brick will be replaced. . . . All the furniture and fixtures will be left as they are when the moving is done. If the occupants care to do so, they can go to sleep at Granite and Alaska Streets and wake up at Montana and Aluminum. The moving of buildings has been brought down to such a fine art that it will not be necessary to chain anything down in the big building."

Unrelenting rains during much of June delayed new construction throughout the Copper Capital, postponing the move of the final two-story section of the Albion Hotel from the club site. But the excavation contractor was able to commence. The *Standard* noted, "Every team that possibly could be utilized in the space was started to work dragging away the surface dirt. . . . the contractor for moving . . . has not yet started on the work, but that is not interfering with the digging. . . . When this part [rear section] of the building is moved, the work of excavating for the foundation will be pushed along rapidly."

In the meantime, the Silver Bow Club Building Association had resolved to double its capital to \$100,000, perhaps recognizing that Link and Haire's design of a five-story building with, in the words of the *Butte Miner*, "beautiful hardwood finishings, splendid



“The Foundations of the new Silver Bow Club.” Anaconda Standard, July 29, 1906. Courtesy Butte Silver Bow Public Archives, Butte.

interior decorations and excellent arrangement of clubrooms, reception rooms, dining halls, kitchen, ballroom and the like” would require more than the original \$50,000 in capital. The *Miner* put the construction cost at \$125,000. One of the Mining City’s most long-lived contractors, Charles C. Goddard, was selected as the project’s contractor. Goddard, a Wisconsin native, worked as a mason in Butte in the late 1890s but within a few years had started a contractor company, constructing the Thornton Hotel (1900) and Hirbour Block (1901), a proto-skyscraper.



Silver Bow Club presentation drawing, Link & Haire, Architects. Anaconda Standard, September 2, 1906. Courtesy Montana Historical Society, Helena.

One of Link and Haire’s first buildings, the Silver Bow Club demonstrated their facility with a variety of architectural styles and elements. The building’s exterior of pinkish-red pressed brick, possibly purchased from the Menomonie Hydraulic Pressed Brick Co. in Minneapolis, and buff sandstone quarried in Columbus, Montana, conveyed a solid yet pleasant appearance. Ornamenting the two-story main entrance were an iron and glass canopy trimmed with tabs of art glass suspended by chains linked from lions’ mouths and a graceful grilled panel. The third story’s recessed balcony



“The Miners Union Local #1 was built at 125 West Granite in 1906 to house the Silver Bow Club, an exclusive Butte businessmen’s club,” ca. 1980. Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HAER MONT,47-BUT,1-70). Photograph by Jet Lowe.

with wrought iron railings was accented by two canted columns topped by stylized pegged capitals and, at each corner, quoins of alternating light and dark masonry that lightened mass without compromising density. The balcony’s sandstone cornice with raised chevron elements featured three cartouches, the center with an entwined “SBC” and the flanking ones depicting a bow and club, a visual pun on the club’s name and Butte’s resident county. The top story’s fenestration and



Silver Bow Club, Butte, August 24, 2005. Photograph by Patty Dean.

decorative elements were of a more conventional nature in the Renaissance Revival style with bracketed eaves and a cornice topped by anthemions (now removed).

Accounts of the building's interior configuration indicate that the Link and Haire scheme did not differ substantially from those of Cutter and Malmgren and replicated the spatial and social hierarchies implicit in gentlemen's clubs since their origins in early eighteenth century London. A male "domesticity" had evolved from the leisurely conversation, gambling, and dining that had occurred in informal coffeehouse gatherings in the late 1600s, finding form in a townhouse design. The interior plan of the men's club presented strict physical, hierarchical, and social separations between men and women, "stranger" and member, and staff and member.

Such segregation began literally on the sidewalk outside the building, as there were restrictions as to who could use a particular entrance. The double-door main entrance facing West Granite Street was reached by climbing several sandstone stairs into a high-ceilinged vestibule and ascending more stairs to the elevated first floor where one could either continue his way through the reception hall to the club rooms if a member or, if not, be directed by club staff to, in the words of the *Anaconda Standard*, an "exquisite little room done in greens and browns," the stranger's room. The entryway to offices intended to be leased to the Butte Water Co. was a single door on the ground (basement) floor to the

east of the main entrance. Finally, on the building's east side facing Alaska Street a double-door entrance, with a Ludovici-tiled overhang with its access to the Otis elevator, "affords privacy," the *Standard* reported, "to those who may wish to go to the club quarters on the second floor when the first floor is in use."

By the spring of 1907, the St. Paul firm of William A. French and Co. had been retained to provide the Club's interior decorations and furnishings. A native of Plainfield, New Jersey, William A. French had come to Minnesota at the age of twenty-three in 1887 and in 1900 opened a shop specializing in "decorations, draperies and special furniture" in downtown St. Paul. A 1903 advertisement noted: "Much of our furniture is made in our own shops and is faithfully copied from the best models of their respective periods..." French's clientele included railroad, mining, and timber magnates from Milwaukee to Seattle (including Charles Benton Power of Helena), and it is likely a number of Silver Bow Club members were familiar with his firm. In addition, Haire himself must have had a long-standing relationship with French as a letter he sent to French opened with the salutation, "My Dear French."

At the Silver Bow Club Building Association's September meeting, its trustees voted to pay French the \$7,500 owed him for the decoration and furnishings of the club. Although very few photographs exist of



Advertisement for William A. French & Company, St. Paul showroom. The Western Architect, August 1905. Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul.

the building's interior, extant features and historic textual descriptions convey the variety and artistry of its décor. Certain sections and levels of the building, however, were of a more utilitarian use and for specific persons. The basement housed resident servants' rooms, storerooms for wine and liquor, foodstuffs, and the vacuum heating plant. The club could not sustain itself on members' dues and expenditures alone and entered into a long-term lease with the Butte Water Company for a five-room office at the southeast corner of the building. The water company's superintendent, Eugene Carroll, a Silver Bow Club member, disclosed that "the beauty of it [his office's location in the Club building]

is that it connects by a private hall which leads to the dumb waiter and when his friends drop in to see him, there'll be no long waiting between drinks." The Water Co. remained in this location until it purchased the Montana Independent Telephone building directly across the street in 1918.

The second or main floor (that is, one floor above the basement level) contained the requisite kitchen and butler's pantry, main and private dining rooms, and a reception hall for lounging. The latter room retains much of its original ambiance with beamed ceiling and a massive mottled green-enamel-tiled fireplace dominating the north wall, flanked by doorways that once led to the large dining room. The fireplace surround featured at its center a large ceramic plaque finished identically to the surrounding tile and depicting a bow with arrow and club, once again alluding to the club's name, in bas-relief. Above the fireplace, the artistry of the French Co.'s decorators was evident with painted "frescoes" depicting a medieval English hunt scene. The room was furnished with Craftsman-style rockers, settees, and center tables, likely manufactured at French's new factory in St. Paul.

Similar paintings were installed above the double-swinging doors on either side of the fireplace that led into the main dining room about which the *Butte Miner* exclaimed: "no more beautiful room is contained in the building than this. Its [Oregon pine]



*Silver Bow Club reception hall, Butte, February 22, 2006.
Photograph by Patty Dean.*



Silver Bow Club reception hall fireplace detail, Butte, February 22, 2006. Photograph by Patty Dean.

woodwork is green, showing the grain of the wood and is inlaid with broad red lines [of wood]. A wainscoting 7 ½ feet high extends around the [12-foot high] room. Above the wainscoting is a splendid hand-painted frieze, depicting mountain and pastoral scenery.” Above the wainscoting, a plate rail ran all the way around the room with china closets enclosing two columns, likely steel posts, at the center of the room. Hanging light fixtures made of substantial Craftsman-style statuary bronze (a durable satin finish) and spherical glass shades reinforced the masculine aspect of both rooms.

Other major rooms on the second floor included

the private dining room (which could be used by ladies and was adjacent to an ivory gold reception area for their use) to the left of the main dining room. The dining room's wall covering of metallic Japanese leather and painted frieze depicted foliage and apples beneath a coved and beamed ceiling. One of two reading rooms or libraries—requisite in a gentlemen's club—occupied the southeast corner just off the reception hall and was decorated in an imitation oak with ivory plaster frieze and walls tinted a soft green.

The club's upper floors were accessible via a quarter-sawn oak staircase with curving banister or by birdcage Otis elevator in an area off to the right of the reception room. With such an arrangement, it was possible for members to enter the club through the Alaska Street east entrance and completely bypass the main floor, which, the *Anaconda Standard* reported, "when such festivities are in progress will give the bashful members a chance to slip in and slip out without anyone being the wiser." Another commodious lounging room contained a large tiled fireplace with a copper-studded hood, green-tinted woodwork, and wall coverings of a faux red Spanish leather and handpainted border. Venetian windows with art glass opened onto the balcony that overlooked West Granite Street below. Arched doorways at right and left opened into the second reading room/library with buff-colored walls with custom bookcases. A card room, with eight-foot

high wainscoting comprised of Spanish leather panels below a deep, hand-painted floral frieze, was at the other side of the lounging room as was a private card room with its frieze depicting a forest.

The bar room adjoining the card room presents some of the most intact elements found at the club today. The room's hand-painted frieze above deep paneled wainscoting depicts "all the grains and fruits which go to make up the festive cocktail. Luscious grapes clamber over lattice supports in the pictured scenes. . . . Directly overhead . . . the grape and fruit design of the frieze is reproduced in a ceiling panel in colored art glass, which shines resplendent and is reflected by numerous mirrors." A huge quarter-sawn oak panel on the back-bar inscribed with a Henry Aldrich rhyme reads: "If this be true as I do think/There are five reasons we should drink/Good friends, good wine and being dry/Or lest we shall be bye and bye/or any other reason why." (This same quote was featured in the 1915 log dining room and bar building at Kootenai Lodge "camp" on Swan Lake, owned jointly by Silver Bow Club members L. O. Evans and Cornelius Kelly. The original plans for this building document Spokane's Kirtland Cutter as its architect.)

To the east of the bar was the billiard room which was outfitted with six billiard tables (each illuminated with its own light), eleven-foot-high copper paneled wainscoting, and an Art Nouveau design frieze. The



Above: *Silver Bow Club bar room, Butte, February 22, 2006.*
Photograph by Patty Dean.

Right: *Silver Bow Club bar room frieze detail, Butte, February 22, 2006.*
Photograph by Patty Dean.

south end of the room still features an inglenook with two high-backed settles of faux pegged construction facing each other and a tiled fireplace with hammered copper hood and brick hearth.

The building's top story was configured for approximately twenty rooms for members with hot





Silver Bow Club billiard hall inglenook, Butte, February 22, 2006. Photograph by Patty Dean.

and cold water and adjacent bathrooms, and well-lit hallways. The club planned to lease most of the rooms to resident members, perhaps in recognition of Butte's housing shortage, while reserving a very few for out-of-town members.

Unfortunately, the New Year's wish the *Anaconda Standard* expressed in 1908 for Silver Bow Club members—"many years of delightful association in their new home"—was not to be. Although membership rolls numbered over 600 in 1912, the years following World War I with Prohibition, severely eroding copper prices, regressive economic conditions,

and fewer new club members to take the place of those who had died or moved away caused the remaining members to consider drastic action. Complicating any efforts was the discovery by the Building Association's officers that they had inexplicably failed to renew their corporate charter. The directors of the corporation became its trustees.

A year later, the trustees contracted with restaurateur Joseph Reau to "operate café, buffet and dormitory," paying him \$7,500 annually for those services. They also leased the former Water Co. offices to the North Butte Mining Co. and took out a \$50,000 six percent mortgage note held by the Monidah Trust Co. In October 1932, a proposed merger between the Butte Country Club and the Silver Bow Club failed, and the directors immediately ordered that the water and heating systems in the building be drained and shut off and the windows on the building's north and west sides be boarded up. The tenancy of the North Butte Mining Co. remained rent-free in exchange for protecting the property.

The Monidah Trust's agent and attorney, James E. Murray, began foreclosure proceedings while letters were mailed to members near and far owing money to the club and some furniture was sold to the Anaconda Copper Mining Co. By December 1932, the Monidah Trust Co. was granted a sheriff's deed for the property and the Silver Bow Club was formally discontinued.

Approximately twenty years later, the Silver Bow Club, that had once hosted and housed the wealthy and famous, became the Miners Union Club, a destination for the working man and his family. The Silver Bow Club embodied the Mining City's twentieth-century fortunes and misfortunes yet succeeded in its initial role by securing Butte's position as the metropolis of the Northern Rockies.

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