

Diverse Rapid City

Most histories of race and difference in the Rapid City area focus on the experiences of and relationships between Native Americans and Euro-American settlers. Today, around 97 percent of Rapid City's residents are either white or Indigenous, a pattern that has held true over the course of the community's history.¹⁶²

In the early years after Rapid City's founding, many settlers came from other parts of the United States and traced their family histories to Western Europe, especially regions like Germany and Scandinavia. Many had settled in the Midwest before heading West River to pursue mining, work in support industries or retail, or prove up land made available by federal settlement programs. For this reason, early Rapid City was comprised of a largely homogenous, Euro-American community without ethnic enclaves or distinct cultural districts.¹⁶³ Native communities represented the exception to this pattern. After a brief hiatus caused by their confinement to reservations in the last quarter of the 1800s, Native families returned to Rapid City in several waves over the course of the 20th century. In the face of prejudice and discrimination, many lived in predominately Native neighborhoods along Rapid Creek, in the Sioux Addition/Lakota Homes area, and in the postwar housing development known as "Star Village."

While the diversity of the white community was less apparent in the city's pattern of settlement, it was evident in the growth of institutions—churches, fraternal organizations, and cultural societies—associated with the city's ethnic and cultural diversity. This essay focuses on three groups that experienced prejudice and discrimination, even as they sought to celebrate their shared values and identities within the city as a whole.

Roman Catholics

Many Euro-Americans who settled in Rapid City were Protestant Christians. As early as 1877, area Methodists were holding prayer meetings—the first Christian religious services recorded in the town's history. They were soon joined by Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, and Presbyterians.¹⁶⁴ Roman Catholics, meanwhile, started construction on the first church in Rapid City in 1881.¹⁶⁵

Throughout the history of the United States, Catholics have faced discrimination. Nativist objections to immigration in the nineteenth century often targeted groups from predominately Catholic countries like Ireland, Italy, and Southern Europe. In the 1920s, a resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan in the Midwest targeted Catholics in the Black Hills, as well as other racial and ethnic minorities. The Klan held large rallies and carried out acts of

¹⁶² Braunstein and Schantz, "Rapid City Police Department and the Native Community in Rapid City," 3–4.

¹⁶³ See Jeff Buechler, "[City of Rapid City Historic Context Planning Document](#)," May 1980.

¹⁶⁴ *One Hundred Years, Trinity Lutheran Church: 1914-2013* (Rapid City, SD: Trinity Lutheran Church, 2013), 5.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 4–5.

violence across the Black Hills. In Rapid City, the KKK marched through downtown and pressured the school board to fire teachers who were Catholic.¹⁶⁶

To counter prejudice and antipathy and to affirm their own religious values, Catholics throughout the United States established schools, hospitals, fraternal organizations, and other institutions. Concerned about the growing anti-Catholic sentiment in and around Sturgis, for example, a group of Benedictine nuns came to Rapid City in 1928 and opened the town's second major health clinic, St. John's McNamara Hospital. (The city's first hospital was Methodist Deaconess, located on South Street.) Originally operating out of three houses in the West Boulevard area, the nuns eventually raised funds to build a 75-bed facility on 11th Street. The hospital expanded to host a nursing program that has trained thousands of nurses over the course of nearly a century.¹⁶⁷

The Catholic community built several churches in Rapid City over the course of the twentieth century as the city grew. The Catholic fraternal order, the Knights of Columbus, traces its presence in the Black Hills to the Gold Rush. In 1910, the Rapid City council of the Knights of Columbus was formally launched with a high mass at St. Mary's Church.¹⁶⁸

Anti-Catholic sentiment abated over time. Today, Catholics attend a half dozen congregations across town, including in the prominent and ornate Immaculate Conception church on Fifth Street, the Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help on Cathedral Drive, and the Blessed Sacrament Church across from Canyon Lake. The Catholic Church, meanwhile, manages private schools (St. Elizabeth Seton and St. Thomas More), a monastery and large retreat center known as Terra Sancta, and several service organizations committed to education and community well-being continue to influence the life of the larger community. Catholic congregants, meanwhile, are active participants in local business and civic life.¹⁶⁹

The Jewish Community

Rapid City has also been home to a small but active Jewish community. Its members held the first Yom Kippur ceremony in Rapid City in September 1880.¹⁷⁰ Lead/Deadwood had the largest Jewish community in the Black Hills until about the 1930s. When the mining industry declined, many Jewish families left the area. The few that remained in Rapid City became the community's anchor in the region. While Jewish residents of Rapid City and the Black Hills experienced prejudice and discrimination, especially in the leadup to World War II, some became prominent in civic affairs and business.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁶ Charles Rambow, "The Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s: A Concentration on the Black Hills," *South Dakota History* 4, no. 1 (Winter 1973): 63–81.

¹⁶⁷ Zimmer, *Question is "Why?"*, 139. See also Kingsbury, *History of Dakota Territory*, 26; Almlie, "Places of Care and Science: Hospital Buildings in South Dakota."

¹⁶⁸ "Knights of Columbus Institute a Lodge," *Rapid City Journal*, May 29, 1910, 5.

¹⁶⁹ Rapid City Catholic School System, "[The History of the Diocese and Catholic Education in Western South Dakota](#)," accessed January 19, 2021.

¹⁷⁰ *One Hundred Years, Trinity Lutheran Church*, 5.

¹⁷¹ Shaff and Shaff, *Paving the Way: The Life of Morris E. Adelstein*, 150–55.

Military service brought a substantial number of Jewish families to the area. When Ellsworth Air Force Base expanded to support the Cold War effort in the 1950s and 1960s, the Rapid City area saw its highest number of Jewish residents. Around 1960, they formed the Synagogue of the Hills. For decades, it was a congregation without a facility. Membership ebbed and flowed depending on the number of Jewish families stationed on base. The Synagogue members, nonetheless, met for weddings, funerals, the High Holidays, and other important events. According to longtime Synagogue member Ann Haber Stanton, they held services “at the site of the present Faith Temple on Kansas City Street, occasionally in Canyon Lake Park, and eventually at the Chapel at Ellsworth Air Force Base.” Between the 1960s and the 1980s, the Synagogue met occasionally at the Sheraton-Johnson Hotel (Hotel Alex Johnson) or on the campus of South Dakota Mines for Passover Seder and similar gatherings. In 1995, the congregation moved into town, first meeting in an office building owned by the Hills Materials Company, and then in a house in the South Canyon neighborhood on Rapid City’s West Side.¹⁷²

In addition to these places, a reminder of Jewish history of Rapid City can be found on the corner of Sixth and Main Streets, in the large building that now houses the Prairie Edge Trading Co. The building was built by two Jewish merchants, Louis and Julian Morris. Meanwhile, members of several Jewish families are buried at the Mountain View Cemetery.¹⁷³

Today, the Synagogue has a handful of members, some of whom travel hours for Shabbat services or holiday celebrations. The resilience of their community was captured by longtime Synagogue president and former state legislator, Stan Adelstein. In 1978, he reflected on the fact that people often asked how his family had “managed to stay Jewish for four generations in Rapid City.” Adelstein replied that “statistically we are a true microcosm of the world Jewry. We probably are to Western South Dakota what the world Jewry is to world population. If we cannot survive for four generations in freedom, what hope is there for [the] Jewry to survive in a hostile world?”¹⁷⁴

African Americans

A small number of African Americans have called the Black Hills home since the 1870s. The first arrived in the Black Hills in 1874 on a wagon train from Sioux City, Iowa. Over the next several years, several Black men and women came to the area. Many were former slaves who became miners, traders, and laborers in the local retail and service industries. Thomas Clark and Posey Ogelsby were two of the approximately 100 African Americans living in the Black Hills as of 1880. They were part of a group of Black and Irish prospectors who hit a large gold vein in the Northern Hills in 1876. Another Black man, Anderson Daniels, became

¹⁷² Ann Haber Stanton, “[A Destination in the Wilderness](#),” Synagogue of the Hills, accessed January 11, 2021; “Passover Seder,” *Rapid City Journal*, March 26, 1964.

¹⁷³ Stanton, “A Destination in the Wilderness.”

¹⁷⁴ Stan Adelstein quoted in Zimmer, *Question is “Why?”*, 188.

known as the “quartz king” of Lead and made a good living from the quartz vein that ran underneath his house.¹⁷⁵

Fitting the boom-and-bust pattern of the early mining economy, many Black workers stayed in the region only briefly. A contingent of some 180 “Buffalo Soldiers,” or African-American infantrymen, were stationed at Fort Meade in Sturgis from 1880 to 1888.¹⁷⁶ Due in part to the Black servicemen who stayed in the region following service at Ford Meade, by 1885, there was enough of a Black presence in Rapid City for a group to organize an emancipation celebration. Commemorations took place in August 1885 and August 1886, but local newspapers ran derogatory coverage of both events, and they did not continue.¹⁷⁷

Several African Americans became a longstanding part of the Rapid City community. The Graves Family Band, for example, performed in the area in the 1880s. The patriarch, a former slave from Missouri named Benjamin F. Graves, settled in Rapid City. Graves had eight children with his first wife, Caroline, who passed away in 1884. When Benjamin remarried, he and his second wife, Patsy, and their children stayed in town. One son, Frank Graves, was a track star at Rapid City High School. Three children were members of the hose brigade for the local volunteer fire department. Several members of the family remained in Rapid City for years, although others left after two of the brothers were killed in a violent altercation with another individual. William and Margaret “Auntie” Summers were another notable Black family who lived in early Rapid City. They came to town in 1885 after William completed military service at Fort Meade. The couple lived for years on Rapid Street and had eleven children of their own. Mary was a well-known midwife who delivered many babies in and around Rapid City before her death in 1905.¹⁷⁸

According to the historian Betty VanEpps-Taylor, African Americans “kept a low profile and blended into the general population.” In addition to Black members of the hose running team, there was a mostly African-American basketball team that played in a league at the Community Service Center, and Black residents were enmeshed in various aspects of community life. Yet “it was well known among the town’s minority populations,” Van Epps-Taylor continues, “that many otherwise public facilities in Rapid City were restricted to

¹⁷⁵ Betti VanEpps-Taylor, *Forgotten Lives: African Americans in South Dakota* (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2008), 71–73.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁷⁷ Lilah Morton Pengra, “Corporals, Cooks, and Cowboys: African Americans in the Black Hills,” bound volume available at Rapid City Public Library, June 2006, 23. Although President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1863, it did not take effect until January 1, 1864. In many African American communities, “Juneteenth” celebrations mark the occasion. That date references June 19, 1865, when news that the Civil War had ended, and that slavery was over, arrived at a Black community in Texas.

¹⁷⁸ VanEpps-Taylor, *Forgotten Lives*, 79–81. See also Pengra, “Corporals, Cooks, and Cowboys,” 134–41; Liz Almlie, “[Blackface Minstrel Performance in South Dakota](#),” History in South Dakota, accessed January 18, 2021.

whites only,” and that “jobs for American Indians and African Americans existed mainly at the bottom of the economic ladder.”¹⁷⁹

Instances of discrimination by whites against the African-American community increased dramatically after World War II. The expansion of Ellsworth Air Force Base in the 1950s and 1960s brought a wave of African-American servicemen and their families to Rapid City. Many of these families experienced discrimination in housing and at local hotels and restaurants. Discrimination gained the attention of the national media and led to several community surveys around race relations. Prejudice also sparked an equality campaign by the local chapter of the NAACP. In reaction, members of the white community formed a local “Citizens Council for Individual Rights,” which advocated against passing any laws to “impair their rights” by forcing business owners and landlords to serve or rent to Black patrons.¹⁸⁰

Bobby Seale, who would later co-found the Black Panther Party, was stationed at Ellsworth in the 1950s. In an oral history interview, Seale described the experience of African-American service members in Rapid City. “Of course, white GIs went to the white places in town. The black GIs went to the two black places.”¹⁸¹

Ultimately, the South Dakota Advisory Committee of the United States Commission on Civil Rights launched an investigation into race relations in Rapid City in the early 1960s, a period when racial tensions between African Americans and the white majority made headlines across the country. After conducting numerous interviews, holding community forums, and probing allegations of discrimination, the Commission found a high degree of housing discrimination. Often, African-American families tried and failed for months to find a place to live. Hotel and motel owners, meanwhile, denied service to many Black families. This forced Black airmen to leave their families in other cities during assignments at Ellsworth. As many as 86 percent “of bars and nightclubs practiced discrimination,” and Black residents also had a difficult time being served in salons and barber shops.¹⁸²

The Civil Rights Commission noted that although discrimination was a serious problem that needed resolution, racial animosity had been exacerbated by the post-war housing boom in Rapid City. The flood of people had stoked tensions by straining the housing and rental markets and overloaded the demand for utilities and municipal services. The Commission also pointed out that while Rapid City became the locus of the regional

¹⁷⁹ Vanepps-Taylor, *Forgotten Lives*, 177. See also Pengra, “Corporals, Cooks, and Cowboys,” 69; “Custer Indeed to Play in Tourney,” *Rapid City Journal*, January 26, 1957. The Rapid City Community Service Center was located at 804 East Chicago Street and was severely damaged by the 1972 flood and demolished a short time later. See Kay Taylor, “Community Service Center Trust Fund Receives Donation from VIC,” *Rapid City Journal*, November 26, 1984.

¹⁸⁰ Vanepps-Taylor, *Forgotten Lives*, 186. See also Pat McCarty, “Rapid City Sampling Shows High Degree of Tolerance Found Toward Negroes,” *Rapid City Journal*, February 5, 1961.

¹⁸¹ Stephen Shames and Bobby Seale, *Power to the People: The World of the Black Panthers* (New York, Abrams Books, 2016).

¹⁸² South Dakota Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights “Report on Rapid City” (March 1963): 45–47.

conversation around racial discrimination, the fact that Ellsworth was a prominent federal entity had brought increased scrutiny. Discrimination of this nature could have occurred in any rural Northern Plains community, the Commission said. In the end, it maintained that a relatively small segment of the white population had engaged in any form of discrimination. By the end of its study period, the Commission reported that instances of discrimination in hotels and restaurants had decreased while the community focused on the issue.¹⁸³

Shortly after the Commission completed its work, the state legislature passed a law prohibiting racial discrimination in public accommodations.¹⁸⁴ This law assuaged, but did not eliminate, racial tensions between the African-American and white populations in Rapid City. In 1967, a Black serviceman sent a letter to the editor of the *Rapid City Journal*. He described his experience trying to help another airman find a home. Despite the law, the colleague, who was also Black, “was told by several persons that because he was a Negro they couldn’t rent to him. He finally got a house but was charged an outrageous price by the landlord.”¹⁸⁵ The next year, the Rapid City Municipal Court had to review complaints that a local barkeeper was denying service to African Americans.¹⁸⁶

Black residents responded to these ongoing challenges by attempting to open their own businesses. In the spring of 1972, the Ebony Club opened on the 700 block of Main Street. The city denied its liquor license after several fights broke out and the business closed shortly thereafter. In response, members of the African American community organized a protest. They marched down Main Street carrying picket signs with phrases like “We Want Our Own Bar Now!” The event was staged to coincide with a presidential campaign event for Senator George McGovern at the Hotel Alex Johnson.¹⁸⁷ Two years later, four Black business partners opened Club 1410, which was located at 1410 Centre Street on the East Side of Rapid City. Called by one reporter “the first black-owned club to be granted a liquor license in South Dakota,” the 1410 lasted only about a year before its liquor license was transferred to the Eagles Club, which moved into the building shortly thereafter and still occupies the Centre Street location today.¹⁸⁸

The number of Black Rapid Citians has remained small since the 1970s. As recently as 2015, the Black population was 1.1 percent, or around 700 individuals, of the community’s population.¹⁸⁹ Several African-American residents have become important community leaders. In the 1980s, the Faith Temple Church of God in Christ bought the former Congregational Church at 715 Kansas City Street. The church was led for many years by Lady Evelyn Kelly and Bishop Lorenzo Kelly. Both were immersed in charitable work

¹⁸³ “Report on Rapid City,” 45–47.

¹⁸⁴ Vanepps-Taylor, *Forgotten Lives*, 186–188.

¹⁸⁵ Joseph T. Boone, “For Fair Housing,” *Rapid City Journal*, February 22, 1967.

¹⁸⁶ Ed Martley, “Hearing Continued on Public Accommodations Law Complaint,” *Rapid City Journal*, October 26, 1968.

¹⁸⁷ “Council Asked to Approve a Black Parade on Friday,” *Rapid City Journal*, April 4, 1972; “Bar Closing Protested,” *Rapid City Journal*, April 8, 1972.

¹⁸⁸ “City’s First Black-Owned Nightclub Opens,” *Rapid City Journal*, April 8, 1974.

¹⁸⁹ Braunstein and Schantz, “Rapid City Police Department and the Native Community in Rapid City,” 3–4.

and service until their respective deaths in 2014 and 2017. The Kelly's were succeeded by Bishop Troy Michael Carr and his wife, Twana Carr, who have continued the Kelly's legacy of leadership and service.¹⁹⁰ Meanwhile, in 2004, Malcom Chapman became the first African-American city alderman in Rapid City's history. He served several terms until 2010 and, after spending a decade in private consulting practice, Chapman became the city's first Human Relations Commission coordinator. This new position was created in 2020 to help improve race relations and cultural dialogue in Rapid City.¹⁹¹

Opportunities for Further Research

In addition to the various racial, ethnic, and religious groups noted above, members of other groups of difference, including Asian Americans (who comprised some 1.2 percent of the population in 2015), Latino/as, people of Middle Eastern descent, and LGBTQ residents have lived and worked in Rapid City.¹⁹² A survey of the available literature on Rapid City history and search of newspaper databases turned up only a handful of references to terms like "Latino," "Latina," "Hispanic," "Arab," "Muslim," "gay," "lesbian," "Asian," "Asian-American," and "LGBTQ." Additional, in-depth research would be required to uncover the stories of these and other groups and to situate them on the built and natural environments of Rapid City.

Documentation

Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help at 520 Cathedral Drive.



¹⁹⁰ See Faith Temple Church, "[About Faith Temple Church](#)," accessed January 19, 2021.

¹⁹¹ Siandhara Bonnet, "HRC Coordinator Salary Approved; Soo San Drive Name to Change to Sioux San," *Rapid City Journal*, December 8, 2020.

¹⁹² Braunstein and Schantz, "Rapid City Police Department and the Native Community in Rapid City," 3–4.

Immaculate Conception Church at 922 5th Street.



The office building at 916 5th Street formerly belonged to the Knights of Columbus.



Blessed Sacrament Church at 4500 Jackson Boulevard.



St. Therese the Little Flower Catholic Church at 532 Adams Street.





St. Thomas More High School at 300 Fairmont Boulevard.



St. Elizabeth Seton Elementary School at 2101 City Springs Road.



St. Isaac Jogues and the Mother Butler Centers at 221 Knollwood Drive.





Catholic Social Services is housed in an office building at 529 Kansas City Street.



The St. Martin's Monastery and Terra Sancta retreat center on City Springs Road.



The facilities of St. John's McNamara hospital and nursing school, 1014 11th Street.



The Freedom Chapel at Ellsworth Air Force Base.
Ellsworth.af.mil





The Synagogue of the Hills at 417 N. 40th Street



The Duhamel Building on the 500 block of 6th Street in downtown Rapid City is an example of a business and building once owned by a prominent Catholic family.



Surbeck Center, South Dakota Mines — 501 E. Union Street

The Synagogue of the Hills held High Holidays celebrations and Passover Seder events at the Surbeck Center on the campus of South Dakota Mines at 501 E. Union Street.



The Synagogue of the Hills held many weddings and outdoor celebrations at Canyon Lake Park.



Formerly home to the Congregational Church, the Faith Temple Church of God in Christ at 715 Kansas City Street has welcomed Jewish and African-American worshippers throughout its history.



The Synagogue of the Hills held many events at the Sheraton-Johnson Hotel (Hotel Alex Johnson) at 523 6th Street in Rapid City.



Now owned by Simon Construction, the “Quarry Building” of the Hills Materials Company, located at 3975 Sturgis Road, was a meeting place of the Synagogue of the Hills in the early 1990s.



According to one history, the building that now houses Prairie Edge at 606 Main Street was built by Jewish brothers Louis and Julian Morris.



The graves of several Jewish residents and African American “Buffalo Soldiers” are located at the Mountain View Cemetery at 1901 Mountain View Road.



An early member of Rapid City's African-American community, Hance Graves, helped build the Emmanuel Episcopal Church at 717 Quincy Street.



This mobile home park occupies the 800 block of Chicago Street. The Community Service Center had been located at 804 Chicago before it was damaged by the 1972 flood and demolished a short while later.



Before it became the Eagles Club in the 1970s, 1410 Centre Street was the location of Club 1410, a Black-owned bar.

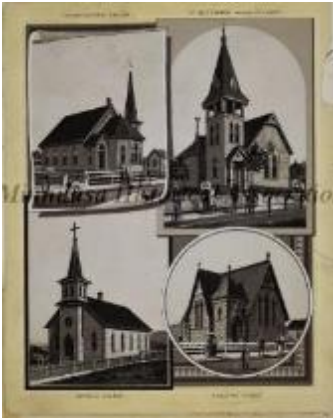


This parking lot on the 700 block of Main Street may have been home to the Ebony Club at 728 Main Street.



Historic Photographs

A pamphlet of churches in early Rapid City.
Minnilusa Historical Association



A view of Rapid City with the Immaculate Conception Church prominent in the foreground.
Minnilusa Historical Association



An early Catholic church in Rapid City.
Minnilusa Historical Association



“Catholic Convention” in Rapid City, early 20th century
Minnilusa Historical Association



Members of the Ku Klux Klan march in Rapid City in the 1920s.
South Dakota State Historical Society



Photo Spread of St. John's McNamara Buildings through time. In *St. John's McNamara/Rapid City Regional Hospital School of Nursing: History, 1927-1991*



Chapel and Grotto at St. John's McNamara. In *St. John's McNamara/Rapid City Regional Hospital School of Nursing: History, 1927-1991*



Members of the Synagogue of the Hills light a Hannukah menorah outside Stan Adelstein's home at 1999 West Boulevard in Rapid City.

Rapid City Journal, December 21, 1984



Stan Adelstein speaks to a group of Synagogue members during a Passover Seder in the Surbeck Center at South Dakota Mines in 1986.

Stan Adelstein personal collection



Menorah lighting ceremony at Stan Adelstein's home in Rapid City.

Rapid City Journal, December 18, 1985



Wedding chuppah, likely in Canyon Lake Park, 1990s

Synagogue of the Hills Library



The Synagogue of the Hills around the time of its move to a permanent home at 417 N. 40th Street in 1995.

Synagogue of the Hills Library



A Jewish mission group sponsored a series of day camps and events at the Rushmore Plaza Civic Center in 1989.

Stan Adelstein personal collection





Members of the African-American basketball team at the Community Service Center.

Rapid City Journal, 1952, reprinted in Pengra, “Corporals, Cooks, & Cowboys,” 69



A Black resident leading a parade float in Rapid City.

Minnilusa Historical Association, reprinted in Pengra, “Corporals, Cooks, & Cowboys,” 133



Hance Graves delivers material to the site of the new Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Rapid City.

Minnilusa Historical Association. Reprinted in Pengra, "Corporals, Cooks, & Cowboys," 140.



The Ebony Club operated briefly at 728 Main Street in Rapid City.
Rapid City Journal, April 1972.



Black residents protest the closure of the Ebony Club in 1972.
Rapid City Journal, April 1972.



Club 1410 may have been the first Black-owned club to receive a liquor license in South Dakota.

Rapid City Journal, April 26, 1974