

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: HOW TOURISM HAS SHAPED THE PRESERVATION OF THREE HISTORIC MINING TOWNS: VIRGINIA CITY, NEVADA, BLACK HAWK, COLORADO AND BRECKENRIDGE, COLORADO

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Degree and Year: Master of Arts in Historic Preservation, 2003

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This thesis examines the effect of three different types of tourism on the preservation of the built environment of three mining towns - Virginia City, Nevada, Black Hawk, Colorado, and Breckenridge, Colorado. The hypothesis of the thesis is that gambling tourism in Black Hawk and skiing tourism in Breckenridge have a deleterious effect on historic preservation, whereas heritage tourism in Virginia City is more compatible with preservation.

The research indicates that the hypothesis is an oversimplification. Yet, it cannot be said that gambling tourism or skiing tourism is *per se* incompatible with historic preservation. A variety of factors influence preservation in the three towns. These factors include 1) the town's image of itself, 2) the ability of the town to "control the message" of tourism and the direction the tourism industry takes, 3) the administration of the town's design guidelines, and zoning and use restrictions, and 4) the extent of

infrastructure and support businesses required, especially if the tourism is new to the community's economy. A preservation attitude, the will to preserve, and knowledge of preservation methods are imperative if tourism is not to overtake a town's character.

Virginia City most closely resembles its historic past, and this is in large part due to the fact that "Old West" heritage tourism does not require a great deal of new construction. On the other hand, Virginia City has struggled, almost since the town's inception, with the effects of mythmaking. Thus, Virginia City's preservation issue is more an issue of how to deal with tourists' expectations of an "Old West" historic town, than how to encourage and manage new construction.

In the case of Black Hawk, the town's historic buildings, with their narrow widths and high ceilings were not amenable to large-scale gaming operations, so new and massive casinos were built to take advantage of the maximum space allowable under state law for gaming devices. The interiors of the historic structures that are used for casinos have been gutted to maximize the amount of space available for gaming.

Breckenridge is one of the most popular ski and summer resorts in Colorado and the influx of tourists creates the need for new construction for lodging and retail businesses. Much of the new construction fails to reflect the town's mining heritage, and as in Black Hawk, is out of scale with the much smaller historic architecture.

There is a wide spectrum of tourists and each type of tourism has a legitimate need for new facilities. This is a challenge for both preservationists and tourism officials. They should be sensitive to the possible effects of tourism development on an historic town's character and community. This thesis examines the adverse effects on an historic town of the failure of preservationists and tourism officials to work together. The thesis concludes with suggestions on how these past mistakes can be avoided.