South Side Stories
Walking Route

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Route is 1.2 miles
Community Events
Beloved events at South Park, founded in 1882, include the annual Easter Egg Hunt and the Mexican Fiesta. South Park is one of the largest parks in Billings.

“My oldest son’s birthday… always came around (the Mexican Fiesta)... I don’t know what the eggs are called, but they hollow them out and put confetti inside, then you’d break them over people’s heads… that was always a part of my son’s birthday.”
- Linda Deavila, resident

Gazebo
Included in the 1913 park re-development plans, the gazebo (or bandstand) has served as a focal point for picnics, concerts, and events. The original structure was replaced in 2012.

“People don’t realize the first task force started in Billings was on the South Side… They were the ones that rallied to get a brand new gazebo in South Park.”
- Mike Yakawich, resident & community leader

Friendly Neighbors
Multiple generations of South Side residents are proud of their community’s diversity and friendliness. They enjoy the proximity to downtown.

“I love being able to sit out on my front porch and hear the music from downtown.”
- Selinda Todd, resident

“People are frequently out on the sidewalk and out on their porches and chatting with neighbors and passerbys.”
- Sidney Ausen, resident

South Park Pool
First opened in July 1914, South Park pool was called the “largest city owned pool in the West.” Sadly, for several decades, people of color could only swim on Sundays.

“As a minority… we could only swim on Sundays. They wouldn’t let African-American or Mexican or minorities swim there because they let the white people swim Monday through Saturday. Then they would let us in Sunday, and then Sunday night, they would drain it and put new water in.”
- Jim Ronquillo, resident

Recreation
Baseball has always been popular in Billings. In the winter, the city would flood the baseball fields and create an outdoor skating rink.

“In the winters… they used to flood the lower section of the park [with a firehose]… they had a huge ice skating rink and a warming shed. That was always fun in the winter to go down there and ice skate.”
- Tim Ennis, former resident

Sugar Beet Factory
The Great Western Sugar Company dominated the industry for decades in Billings. Processing sugar beets into fine white sugar, the factory depended largely on immigrant labor. The stacks of this working factory can be seen to the south.

“The Mexican families always had their kids [in the beet fields]. So I topped beets when I was a kid… it was so hot and your back was breaking… saying, ‘I’ll be glad when I grow up. I’m going to get a good job.’”
- Chan Romero, former resident

Gardening
From private family gardens to larger plots tended by Chinese residents, homegrown vegetables were vital to the South Side community. Gardens may even include an abundance of flowers.

“There are an incredible amount of gardens on the South Side. It just never ceases to surprise me.”
- Sidney Ausen, resident

Churches
Our Lady of Guadalupe Church hosted both Catholic mass and community events. The congregation even sponsored concerts that included local musicians, like Chan Romero who later wrote The Hippy Hippy Shake.

“The band I had, the Beltones, we played music for the first fiesta… it used to be right behind Guadalupe… that was the very first Mexican dance time.”
- Chan Romero, former resident

South Park
As you walk back towards South Park, take a moment to appreciate the sense of connection and community the park continues to contribute to the South Side.

“South Park was a magical place. It had everything… ice skating in the winter, swimming in the summer. They had a large play area for kids with giant swing sets that would go 20 feet up in the air… Probably my favorite area.”
- Tim Ennis, former resident

The South Side Stories Walking Routes are part of the Healthy Neighborhood Project, in partnership with Western Heritage Center.
To find out more, visit the project website: www.healthybydesignyellowstone.org/healthy-neighborhood-project