

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Howard School

other name/site number:

2. Location

street & number: Old Highway 10

not for publication: n/a

city/town: Forsyth

vicinity: X

state: Montana

code: MT

county: Rosebud

code: 087

zip code: 59327

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally.

Mark F. Baumber / SHPO
Signature of certifying official/Title

Nov 8, 2004
Date

Montana State Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal agency or bureau

(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
see continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register
see continuation sheet
- determined not eligible for the National Register
see continuation sheet
- removed from the National Register
see continuation sheet
- other (explain):

Edison H. Beall
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

12/23/04

5. Classification

| | | | |
|--|----------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Ownership of Property: | Private | Number of Resources within Property | |
| Category of Property: | Building | Contributing | Noncontributing |
| Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: | n/a | <u>4</u> | <u>0</u> buildings |
| Name of related multiple property listing: | n/a | <u>1</u> | <u>0</u> sites |
| | | <u>0</u> | <u>0</u> structures |
| | | <u>1</u> | <u>0</u> object |
| | | <u>6</u> | <u>0</u> Total |

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions: EDUCATION/school

Current Functions: SOCIAL/civic

7. Description

Architectural Classification:
NO STYLE

Materials:
foundation: CONCRETE
walls: WOOD
roof: ASPHALT
other: METAL

Narrative Description

The Howard School is located in the Howard Valley, on the south side of the Yellowstone River, approximately eleven miles east of Forsyth, Montana. The two-story, white clapboard building is visible for miles, as it rises above the gently rolling hayfields of farms and ranches along Montana Road 311 and Howard School Road. Road 311 and Howard School Road parallel each other closely, and the Burlington Northern Railroad tracks run between. The close associations between the agricultural lands, the transportation lines, and the small Howard area community are clear on the landscape.

The Howard School building was constructed in 1905 to serve the growing community, as the original log cabin school could no longer serve the needs of a larger population. The substantial building is a testament to the optimism of the settlers and the importance they placed on education. The area population rose considerably through the 1910s, and an addition, extending the first and second stories from the north side, was completed in 1916. The complex includes the school, a well house, two outhouses, and a playground.

Building Descriptions:

School (one contributing building)

The school is a large, rectangular, wood-framed building. It rests on a poured concrete wall foundation and is topped with hipped wood shingle roof. The roof's boxed cornice overhangs slightly, and a brick chimney pierces the north slope. Clapboard siding, painted white, covers the exterior walls. Windows throughout the building are original, tall and narrow, wood-framed double-hung style. The front (south) elevation features a one story open porch covered with a hipped roof. The porch consists of a raised concrete pad. Four squared columns, slightly wider at the bottom than the top, support the porch roof, which features a boxed cornice. Two concrete steps, centered at the front of the porch and formed into the concrete pad, lead from the sidewalk up to the porch floor level. The concrete pad, steps, and sidewalk are recent improvements (1989), replacing deteriorated material that was original to the building. Originally the porch featured a wooded deck and steps. A pair of centered, multi-paneled [but not matching] wooden doors provide entry the building, and are flanked by single, two-over-two light windows. The door to the west side is original, and the five-paneled wood door to the east side matches those found on the non-primary elevations of the building. At the second story level, single, two-over-two light windows flank a centered pair of smaller two-over-two light windows. A rectangular wooden placard centered beneath the paired windows reads: HOWARD SCHOOL" in large black letters. Protruding from the south slope of the hipped roof is a large gabled dormer that served as the bell tower. The dormer extends slightly beyond the plane of the south elevation, and wooden brackets support its weight just below the eave line. The dormer features gable end returns. One-light windows were installed on the south, west, and east elevations of the dormer in 1985. A tall lightning rod extends from the dormer ridge. (see continuation sheet)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: A
Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): n/a
Significant Person(s): n/a
Cultural Affiliation: n/a

Areas of Significance: SETTLEMENT AND
EXPLORATION; EDUCATION
Period(s) of Significance: 1905-1947
Significant Dates: 1905, 1916, 1932, 1947
Architect/Builder: Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

The Howard School was constructed in 1905, at time when the eastern Montana plains witnessed a great influx of non-Indian settlers. These settlers were enticed by the promises of bountiful homesteads, prosperous farms, and the wealth offered by cattle ranching. The Northern Pacific Railroad crossed through the area in 1882, and brought with it optimistic people from the mid west and eastern United States and Europe. The steady stream of people continued to fill the state through the 1910s. The small community of Howard, just south of the Yellowstone River between the villages of Forsyth and Hysham, began as a railroad stop and served as a crossroads for agricultural commerce and community gatherings. The community solidified, however, around its school. From its earliest settlement in the mid 1880s through the 1950s, the Howard area residents placed an enormous amount of faith and energy in the education of its youth. In 1905, the community's confidence and investment in its future was made apparent with the construction of the Howard School, a substantial, two-story building. For forty-two years, through the boom and bust cycles of the agricultural economy, the school served as a hallmark for the importance of education. Students were instructed in academics, but also immersed themselves in social, athletic and civic events. Though school consolidation resulted in the closures of the high school in 1932 and the elementary school in 1947, the school continues to serve as the hub of the community. For these reasons, the property is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A.

Indians, Railroad, and Land Settlement

Archaeological evidence indicates that early peoples have occupied the southeastern region of present-day Montana for over 11,500 years. Throughout prehistory, the inhabitants of this region subsisted as semi-nomadic hunters and gatherers whose exploitation of plants and animals and methods used varied over time. During the last 4,000 years and up to historic time, dependence on bison dominated their lifeways.¹

The Northern Cheyenne and the Crow Tribes profess a cultural and spiritual tie to the lands and drainages south and east of the Yellowstone River. Intertribal conflict and expanding white settlement pushed the tribes westward from the plains. Both tribes migrated into the region from homelands further east, the Crows arriving first from the Upper Missouri and later bands of Cheyenne and Sioux from the Black Hills region.²

The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 designated southeastern Montana as Crow Territory, encompassing all lands south of the Musselshell River between the Yellowstone River to the west, the Powder River to the east and as far south as the Wind River Mountains in Wyoming.³ After the discovery of gold by non-Indians in southwestern Montana Territory in the early 1860s, hostilities between the Sioux and Cheyenne and whites moved to the Northwestern Plains, as gold seekers and emigrants crossed traditional buffalo hunting grounds. Eventually these conflicts necessitated the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 that closed the Bozeman Trail, the major transportation route across Wyoming and southeastern Montana and the military forts built to protect the corridor.⁴
(see continuation sheet)

¹ Bill Tallbull and Sherri Deaver, "Potential Cultural Effects to the Northern Cheyenne from the Proposed Tongue River Railroad Extension," Interstate Commerce Commission, June 1991; Ethnoscience, "Inventory and Evaluation Report for Cultural Resources Within the Proposed Are of Effect of the Tongue River Dam Construction Project and Potential Irrigation Developments on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation," Mt. Dept of National Resources and Conservation, December 1992; Kate Hampton and Chere Juisto, "A Place Apart: Cultural Landscape of the Tongue River Valley," Presentation at Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT, October 2001.

² Ibid.

³ Crow and Northern Cheyenne Treaties and agreements are available in Charles J. Kappler, compiled and edited, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties* 2 vols. (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office (GPO), 1904.

⁴ For a general history of nineteenth century Montana, see Merrill G. Burlingame, *The Montana Frontier*, (Helena, MT: State Publishing Company, 1942); the authority on the Bozeman Trail is Susan Badger Doyle, *Journeys to the Land of Gold*, 2 vols, (Helena, MT, Reporter Printing & Supply, 1964).

Howard School
Name of Property

Rosebud County, MT
County and State

9. Major Bibliographic References

(see continuation sheet)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify Repository: **Howard Community Club**

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: 1.366 acres

| | | | |
|------------------------|-------------|----------------|-----------------|
| UTM References: | Zone | Easting | Northing |
| | 13 | 353631 | 5125574 |

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): NE ¼ SW ¼ SW ¼ of section 18, T6N, R39E

Verbal Boundary Description

From a point on the north side of the right of way of the Northern Pacific Railroad (now Burlington Northern) 20 chains East and 11-96/100 north of the corner to sections 13, 18, 19, and 24, township numbered six (6) north between ranges numbered thirty-eight (38) and thirty-nine (39) east of Montana principal meridian, thence north 73° 30' west along the line of said right of way 2,38/100 chains, thence due north 2,50/100 chains, thence south 73°30' east 2,38/100 chains, thence due south 2,50/100 chains being part of lot numbered four (4), section eighteen (18) township six (6) north of range thirty-nine (39) east, and comprising 1,366/1000 acres.

Boundary Justification

The boundary defines the property sold from Jessie and Samuel Newnes to the Trustees of School District No. 13 on December 6, 1898 for the purposes of a school. The property as defined has been associated with the school since its construction.

11. Form Prepared By

| | | | |
|------------------|----------------------------|------------|---------------|
| name/title: | Jean Spannagel | date: | April 2004 |
| organization: | Howard Community Club | telephone: | (406)356-2373 |
| street & number: | 265 Reservation Creek Road | zip code: | 59327 |
| city or town: | Forsyth | state: | MT |

Property Owner

| | | | | | |
|------------------|--|------------|---------------|-----------|-------|
| name/title: | Howard Community Club c/o Jean Spannagel | | | | |
| street & number: | 265 Reservation Creek Road | telephone: | (406)356-2373 | | |
| city or town: | Forsyth | state: | MT | zip code: | 59327 |

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7

Howard School
Rosebud County, MT

Page 1

Description of Resources (con't)

The first story of the west (side) elevation features four window openings evenly spaced across the southern two-thirds of the building. The southernmost opening is in-filled with cedar clapboards. The other three windows are tall and narrow, two-over-two style, identical to those on the south elevation. Another pair of windows, one-over-one light, are centered in the northern third of the building. Originally, the same fenestration pattern was present at the second story level, but the window openings were covered with cedar lap in 1986. The outlines of the openings are still visible, and the frames are present beneath the siding. The east elevation mirrors the west, though the southernmost opening retains its window and there is a paneled wood pedestrian door at the north end, instead of a pair of windows. Originally a wooden exterior staircase provided access to a second story pedestrian door at the north end, but that has long since been removed. The first story of the north (rear) elevation contains tripled one-over-one double-hungs across the west side, and a single one-over-one on the west side of the east half of the elevation. Again, the same fenestration pattern was present at the second story, but the openings were in-filled with cedar lap in 1986.

The interior of the school remains largely intact, as floorplans and finishes dating from the period of significance are present throughout the building. The first floor is divided into a vestibule, kitchen, main classroom and the 1916 addition classroom across the north end. Stairs lead from the vestibule to the second story, which houses a laboratory, additional classroom spaces, and the teacherage. There are hardwood floors throughout. Wainscoting is present in all the rooms, are the original milled trims. In 1987, paneling was installed on all the interior walls above the wainscoting. The original plaster is beneath. The chalkboards and rows of coat hooks are still in place.

Well House (one contributing building)

The one-story, front gabled, wood framed well house rests on a concrete foundation located just east of the school. The unadorned, one-room well house was also constructed in 1905, and displays the same clapboard siding and wood shingle roofing material as the school. Entry to the building is gained through a simple, five-paneled wooden pedestrian door on the east side of the south elevation. Fenestration on the rest of the building is limited to the west elevation, where another, identical pedestrian door is located on the north side. A single, boarded over window opening is located on the south side of the west elevation.

Outhouses (two contributing buildings)

There are two outhouses on the property. The exact date of construction is unknown, but the clapboard siding material and wood frame construction methods reveal that they are contemporary with the school. Both outhouses display shed roofs that slope from the façade to the rear. The outhouse immediately north of the well house and northeast of the school measures nine and one-half feet north to south by five and one-half feet east to west. A single opening provides access through the east elevation. The other outhouse is located just north and west of the schoolhouse. The nine by five foot building is oriented to the northeast. Its entry opening is located on the northwest side of the northeast elevation.

Playground (one contributing site)

The playground is a contributing site located immediately south and west of the school building. The area is flat and grassy, with patches of dirt and river rocks. Metal play equipment, including a swing set, slide, and merry-go-round, are

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7

Page 2

Howard School
Rosebud County, MT

still used by local residents, though they do not date from the period of significance. The play area is well defined, however, and contributes considerably to the setting and feeling of the place.

Sidewalks (one noncontributing structure)

In 1989, the Howard Community Club installed poured concrete sidewalks within the complex. These sidewalks connect the school with the road, and continue between the school and the well house and the outhouses. The sidewalks do not contribute to the significance of the property.

Fencepost/obelisks (one contributing object)

There are two concrete obelisks, one on each side of the sidewalk where it meets the road. The obelisks served as posts for a chain fence across the front of the schoolyard during the period of significance. Though the other fence materials are no longer extant, these substantial objects, each measuring approximately three feet tall and twelve inches in diameter at the base, together still serve to define the boundary and entrance to the schoolyard. For the purpose of this nomination, they are considered as collectively as one contributing object.

Integrity

Despite a few changes to both the interior and exterior of the school, the building retains a high degree of integrity. The most substantial changes include the boarding over of the non-primary elevation second story windows in 1986, and the replacement of the wooden porch floor with a raised concrete pad in 1989. The outlines of the original window openings remain clearly visible, and the overall form and symmetry of the fenestration is apparent. The modern concrete floor of the porch, while not compatible in materials, retains the dimensions of the original floor, and is not overly intrusive. Other restoration and stabilization projects over the years have included re-shingling the roofs of the school and well house with wood, as they were constructed originally. Local residents installed windows in the bell tower in 1985. These windows served to close original openings to weatherize the structure.

On the interior, the floorplan, finishes, trimwork, doors, and built-in equipment, such as chalkboards, remain in place. Paneling was installed above the wainscoting in 1986, but does not diminish the overall integrity of the interior space.

The well house and outhouses retain a high degree of integrity as well, and are virtually unchanged since the period of significance. The complex exhibits integrity of materials, workmanship, and design. The location of the buildings, together with setting and feeling of the place remain intact, and its associations with the history of education in the small agricultural community remain clear.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Page 1

Howard School
Rosebud County, MT

Invasion of the Black Hills by gold seekers intensified Indian-white conflicts and led to the Sioux Wars of 1876-1877. Southeastern Montana witnessed numerous battles and skirmishes through those years as the U.S. Army, lead by infamous soldiers such as George Custer and Nelson A. Miles, sought to remove the Sioux and Northern Cheyenne from the area. Adding to the tensions between the various Indian groups and non-Indians, the Pacific Railroad Act of 1864 granted the Northern Pacific Railroad approximately 40 million acres of land across the country, from Lake Superior to the Puget Sound.⁵ The question of Indian title to those lands is explained in Dee Brown's *Hear the Lonesome Whistle Blow*:

[Northern Pacific financier Jay Cooke's] feelings for Indians certainly were not transferable to their lands that lay in the path of the Northern Pacific Railroad. He assumed, as did everyone else engaged in the building of railroads across the West, that the Interior Department's General Land Office would extinguish and Indian claims to the land along the route of the Northern Pacific, whether it be unceded hunting areas or legally created reservations."⁶

Though the Supreme Court in 1875 specifically stated that the railroad land grants did not include treaty-bound Indian lands, the land offices, and eventually Congress relented to the railroad. In the end, the Crow Indians were forced to cede the two hundred mile right of way through their reservation in exchange for \$25,000.⁷ This enormous swath of land included the Yellowstone River Valley through eastern Montana. In addition to the 400 foot right of way, the land grant provided to the railroad alternate sections of land for twenty miles on either side of the proposed route. These sections could be sold to provide capital for railroad construction, and included the rights to the natural resources on the surface and below ground. Financial setbacks delayed railroad's arrival into the area until the early 1880s. Once established, however, the railroad brought a huge number of settlers to Montana, all eager to realize their fortunes.

General James Brisbin in his 1881 book entitled *The Beef Bonanza; or How to Get Rich on the Plains* declared that "Montana has undoubtedly the best grazing grounds in America . . . The Yellowstone, Big Horn, Tongue River and Powder River regions contain the maximum advantages to the cattle-grower."⁸ These glowing reports, combined with the ease of transportation and access to markets provided by the railroad, stimulated the range cattle industry in southeastern Montana. The open range boom in Montana was an era of unrestrained growth in the livestock industry augmented by a lucrative market and excessive foreign investments. All the land was public domain, "free land" and each ranch would lay claim to an "accustomed range" which other cattlemen would recognize and respect. By the fall of 1886, the ranges were overstocked and overgrazed and grass scarce due to a dry summer. The following winter, known as the "Hard Winter of 1886-1887," devastated the range cattle industry.⁹ The "Hard Winter" ended "large scale production and enormous profits were gone forever. In the future ranching was to be carried on in a more sane and conservative fashion."¹⁰

Despite the Hard Winter, settlers continued to be lured by cheap land and the promise of bounty. Indeed, Montana's population continued to increase substantially, rising from 142,924 in 1890 to 243,329 in 1900. Generally, the population concentrated along the railroad lines, and communities at diversion points such as Miles City, Forsyth, and Billings,

⁵ 13 Stat. 356.

⁶ Dee Brown, *Hear that Lonesome Whistle Blow: Railroads in the West* (New York: Bantam Books, 1978), pp. 208-9.

⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 209-210.

⁸ James S. Brisbin, *The Beef Bonanza; or How to Get Rich on the Plains*, (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippencott & Co., 1881), 90.

⁹ Robert S. Fletcher, "The End of the Open Range in Eastern Montana," in *The Montana Past An Anthology*, ed., Michael P. Malone and Richard B. Roeder (Missoula, MT: University of Montana Press, 1969), 138-157.

¹⁰ Everett Dale, *The Range Cattle Industry*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960):114.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Page 2

Howard School
Rosebud County, MT

flourished. Malone Roeder and Lang explain: "Geographer John C. Hudson likened homestead towns to 'beads on a string,' laced about every ten miles along railroad lines by the roads and local promoters."¹¹ The small community of Howard, eleven miles west of Forsyth and thirteen miles east of Hysham, followed this pattern, and transformed from a remote area frequented only by river travelers, trappers, and Indian groups passing through to an agricultural community crossroads with access to national markets.

History of the Howard School

Among the first families to settle in the area were the French and Newnes families. Charles G. French proved up his homestead in Section 18 of Township 6 North, Range 39 East on January 12, 1889, however he and his family had resided on the land as early as 1880. At that time, the area was unpopulated, unplowed land covered with grass and sage. Indian tepees were often seen in camps along the river. Game was plentiful and the railroad had not yet been built. The Samuel Newnes family arrived and settled at Howard on May 2, 1882, directly west and very near to what was to become the Howard School grounds. Newnes came to work as a Superintendent of Construction on the Northern Pacific railroad. The French family home was just northeast of the Howard schoolhouse, later, where the Fred (Nipple) or Nile family lived for years.

From early records that are available, it is believed that school was held on the premises in 1882 in a log schoolhouse for the children of the Newness and French families. In a letter from Elizabeth Newnes June, she writes, "My father told me that school was in a log cabin on the grounds now used; that Harry, Marie, Will, and John went to school there." Also she said three of the French girls attended the school at that time. There may have been other children also. Mrs. Mayme French later became Superintendent of Schools in the County.

Records also show that the Howard School was at first a part of School District #4; that Louisa Cooley, Custer County Superintendent of Schools, visited District #4, Howard School on April 18, 1888. In August 1889, the Board of County Commissioners, separating it from School District #4, organized School District #13 and the corrected boundary was recorded.

On September 6, 1898, Jessie and Sam Newnes sold the land for the school grounds of School District #13 for \$1.00 to the Trustees and their successors "forever". Charles French served as District Clerk in 1889-1900. Mrs. George Mace took over the clerk duties later in 1900. Mrs. Laura M. Zook, then Superintendent of Schools, visited the school on February 27, 1901, when Tom Reynolds was the teacher. After Rosebud County was formed on March 4, 1901, Jesse Newnes and Samuel Newnes, her husband, had a new indenture drawn up, selling the land to School District #13, for the sum of \$50.00. By 1902, 21 children were enrolled through the year at Howard School. The need for a new, larger school buildings was clear, as the small log building, valued at only \$160, could no longer accommodate the growing population.

School opened in the larger, south room of the Howard School in 1905. The following year, Howard School ranked third among the schools in Rosebud County, behind Forsyth and Rosebud Schools, not only in the number of students attending and but also in the value of the school house. In all, 24 students enrolled in the school in 1906, and the building was valued at \$2,075. Elizabeth Newnes June has contributed the following information: Those attending school at Howard in 1905-1906 were myself and my brothers, Jess, Charles, Jim, Joe, and George. I was in the first grade. My first teacher was Mr. Peterson, and I remember green shutters on all of the windows. I continued to attend school there from 1905

¹¹ Malone, Roeder, and Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, p. 249.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Page 3

Howard School
Rosebud County, MT

through 1915. Other students attending school there during those years were: Hannah, Bertha, and Alfred Mace; Gladine, Gladys, Mary, Alice, and Helen Lewis; Stella, Viola, Harry, and some other Armstrong children; several children of the Dunham family; three boys from the Parsons family, Weslen, Leonard, and Ollie; Mabel Larsen, and several Noe children.” (Editor’s note: It is thought that Dorcas, William H. (Bill) and Ralph Armstrong probably also attended school there during those years. Stewart Armstrong attended later.)

In 1909, the Enlarged Homestead Act passed Congress, and even more settlers flocked to Montana. As the community grew, the school building was enlarged, and the smaller north rooms were added in 1916. The first four grades were taught in the larger room and the fifth through eighth grades occupied the north room.

High school was conducted in the upstairs rooms, the north part being mainly a study room and for a few classes. Classes were conducted in the west half of the partitioned large upstairs. The east half was the teacherage. At the head of the inside stairway in the entry hall was a small cloak room. A science and chemistry laboratory was in operation in the long, rather narrow room across the front of the building upstairs. Above that hung the large bell and rope that called the children to begin their studies in the morning, again at noon, and from play at recess.

In addition to the inside stairway, during the years high school was being held, a long stairway on the outside of the east wall was used by the high school students to enter their classroom in the north room. Upon entering the upstairs from the outside stairway, shelves upon shelves of reference and library books were available for students to use. The stairway was also used by teachers to enter the teacherage from the outside. The teachers could also use the inside stairway and go through the laboratory room to reach their “back” door.

Included in the course of studies at Howard High School were four years of English, two years of Latin, Spanish I and II, Algebra I and II, Plain and Solid Geometry, Trigonometry, Music Appreciation, Ancient History, Medieval History, American History, Botany, Advanced Math, Business Arithmetic, Agriculture, General Science, and Industrial History.

Pharmacists, civil engineers, aircraft draftsmen, teachers, an FBI agent, accountants, railway and airmail postal clerks, a sheriff, mine supervisors, editors, farmers, business executives, bank presidents, housewives, store owners and managers, and many other occupations have proven to be successful for the graduates and others who attended the Howard School. Strict but justified discipline was a part of the every day teaching as well. Good manners were also taught and it was a relaxed, but tightly held school that was conducted by the numerous teachers that came to teach at Howard throughout the years.

The school itself served not only as a place of learning, but as the athletic and social center of the community. During the early years, to the east of the school and north of the well house was a basketball court. The boys played against nearby towns and even the girls team played at Hysham. Hysham was a real rival team. Basketball games in bad weather were played in the old store building located on the west back of Reservation Creek on the Bud Thompson place. In later years a basketball hoop was put up on the northwest corner of the schoolyard. Many remember the track meets and play days at Howard, even those students who did not attend school there enjoyed those “field days”. Students came from several schools in the county to compete for blue, red, or white ribbons, both in athletic and scholastic competition. Winners at Howard went on to compete in the Rosebud County Track Meets held at the Fairgrounds at Forsyth.

Next to the eastern end of the front yard fence was a barn for about eight saddle horses. The main source of transportation for anyone living less than a mile or two away was to walk, but those living further than that rode horseback. Then came

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Page 4

Howard School
Rosebud County, MT

the cars in later years, but the parents usually drove them! During the years 1919-1920 and 1920-1921, Fred Tait at age 16 drove a three-seated horse drawn Studebaker spring wagon buggy as a school bus to take students to the Howard High School from the Tait homestead seven miles up Reservation Creek. Fred's brother, Jack, the older Nipple children, and the Lewis girls rode this bus. Side curtains were attached in cold or inclement weather. Large rocks were heated in the oven and on top of the Tait family's cast iron cook stove and then were wrapped in gunny sacks to provide warmth for the children's long ride to school in cold weather. It is assumed that the rocks were heated on stoves at the school for the trip home after school. Later, Fred's younger brother, Howard, drove a Ford car to pick up the Lewis boys, Herbert and Hugh, to take them to school at Howard. Dorothy Tait also rode in the car with her brother when she was in the 6th and 7th grades at Howard.

The economic boom of the early and mid 1910s ended abruptly when years of severe drought descended on Montana, the Dakotas, and Wyoming beginning in 1917. In 1919 eastern Montana homesteaders faced humidity that averaged four percent, massive grasshopper infestations, and prairie fires. The effect was devastating. Homesteaders enticed by boosterism about the fertile lands of eastern Montana saw their investments literally blown away by the dry wind. The Howard area witnessed the effects of drought and economic depression, but despite these setbacks, the Howard School remained open, and served a number of students through the 1920s. Though the overall population numbers for Rosebud County decreased from 8,002 to 7,347 between 1920 and 1930, enrollment at the school remained relatively steady.

Another steady attribute of the Howard School through the 1920s and 1930s were its teachers. Elfie Tadsen Oldsen and Emma Stoetzel served the school together for twenty years, and shared the upstairs teacherage. Miss Tadsen, as she was known by her students, was born in the Howard Valley in 1893. She taught the "upper grades", while Emma Stoetzel taught the younger elementary students. Together, these ladies witnessed generations of students and graduates flourish, due in part to their dedication.

By 1932, economic conditions in Montana, like the rest of the country, continued to worsen. Adding to the tough time, the droughts of the 1920s continued through the 1930s. Rosebud County continued to lose population through that decade, and this, combined improved roads and transportation, resulted in the high school being closed in 1932 in favor of the Forsyth High School.

As an elementary school, however, the Howard School and its students continued to thrive. The community pulled out of the depression, and followed a familiar pattern of reinvigoration during the post-war boom in agricultural economy after World War II. The track meets were discontinued during World War II, to conserve gasoline. They were resumed in 1946, with the last track meet being held in May of 1947, with Hammond Valley School from the north side of the Yellowstone River coming to compete. Mrs. Emile Shotwell was the teacher at Hammond Valley that year. Mrs. Shotwell had taught years before at the UM School on Reservation Creek.

Following a national trend toward consolidation, the grade school was closed in 1947 and the children were bussed into Forsyth. District #13 at Howard was consolidated with School District #4 at Forsyth on July 1, 1955. The School Board of School District #4, at one time wanted to sell the Howard School, which had been and still was a community meeting hall. It seems appropriate to include a copy of the letters of protest to that proposal. Obviously the building was spared from destruction and many events and good times have been enjoyed by the members of the community since that time. The Howard Homemakers Club attempted to maintain the building for the community affairs, including dances, meetings, elections, pot-luck dinners and card parties. However, the project became too burdensome and too expensive for the women to keep up and the Howard Community Club was formed with more people helping with the upkeep. It has been

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Page 5

Howard School
Rosebud County, MT

with great effort and much donated work by members of the community that the building has remained in shape to serve for community gatherings.

The community can be proud of the heritage of this school for its past and express admiration and pride for the younger generations who keep the Howard School "spirit" alive. The Howard School building may be the only pioneer building in Rosebud County that is still being actively used for State, County, and National elections, 4-H meetings, baby showers, going away parties for someone leaving the community, for wedding showers, dances, the Howard Homemaker's Club meetings, community discussion group meetings, birthday parties and even exercise classes. During World War II, emergency treatment classes and home nursing training were taught there. The Howard 4-H Agriculture Club began in 1922. Both are still using the school building as a meeting place.

Summary

The Howard School building remains an important meeting place for the Howard Community. It also represents a collective heritage shared by the current local residents and alumni. Its tidy clapboard exterior stands tall in the agricultural community as a reminder of the optimism of the early non-Indian settlers during the homesteading boom and railroad days in the early 1900s, and the commitment to quality education and community through the first half of the twentieth century. For these reasons, it is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9

Page 1

Howard School
Rosebud County, MT

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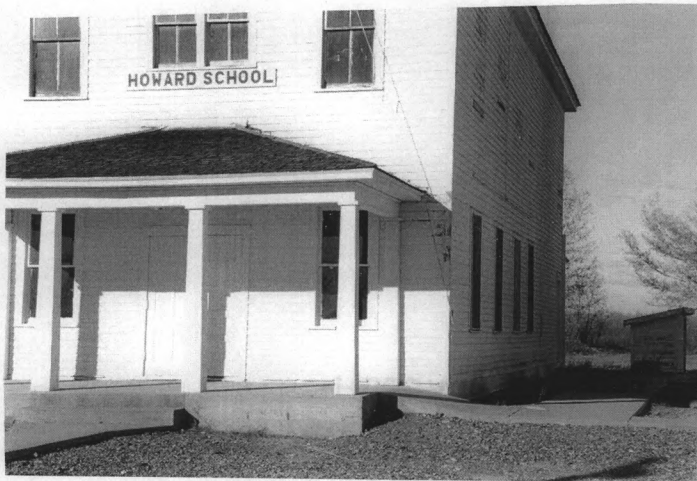
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Photographs

Howard School
Rosebud County, MT

Page 1



Front porch detail and west elevation of the Howard School. Photograph by Judy Cole, October 2004.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Sketch Map

Page 1

Howard School
Rosebud County, MT

