

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

24
89
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Neihart School

other name/site number: Former District 35/Neihart-Monarch Senior Center

2. Location

street & number: 200 South Main Street

not for publication: n/a

city/town: Neihart

vicinity: n/a

state: Montana

code: MT

county: Cascade

code: 013

zip code: 59465

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.

Michael F. Fennell / State Historic Preservation Officer 1/21/2003
Signature of certifying official/Title 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): _____

Edson H. Beall 3/7/03
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: A, C

Areas of Significance: EDUCATION; ; ARCHITECTURE

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): n/a

Period(s) of Significance: 1940-1952

Significant Person(s): n/a

Significant Dates: 1940, 1943, 1945, 1950

Cultural Affiliation: n/a

Architect/Builder: George Shanley, Architect
Charles S. Seek, James Granger, foremen; Lars Anderson and
Henry Paynter, carpenters; Frank B. Farmer, Victor L.
Douglas, and Steve Dzivi, carpenter helpers; Jim Cooper and
Jack Bykaari, laborers

Narrative Statement of Significance

The Neihart School is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, for its association with the historical development of the town of Neihart, the significance of the mining activities there during World War II, and the utilization of the Works Progress Administration in the construction of public buildings. The property is a local representation of national trends in school design during the middle twentieth-century. The school gains additional significance under Criterion C, as an example of prominent Great Falls architect George Shanley's work and its representation of the Rustic style of architecture popular with New Deal projects.

Like many mining communities throughout the state of Montana, and indeed the West, the history of Neihart follows the familiar of pattern of boom-and-bust economies driven by the richness of the mines, the determination and ingenuity of the local businessmen, and national experience. Large-scale placer mining began in Montana with the discovery of free gold in the gravels of Grasshopper Creek during the summer of 1862. Bannack, the first territorial capital, grew up at the diggings virtually overnight. By the summer of 1863 Bannack was already being eclipsed by discoveries of rich deposits of placer gold in Alder Gulch some fifty-five miles east. Virginia City, Montana's second territorial capital grew to be the most important of several mining camps in the gulch. Working from Bannack and Virginia City, prospectors spread throughout the surrounding mountains to locate other strikes. The era of placer mining in southwestern Montana lasted at a much-reduced level for many years, but by the late 1860s and early 1870s the best placer deposits were largely depleted and emphasis shifted to lode mining.

In 1879, a discovery of silver-bearing lead carbonates at Barker and of gold in the alluvial deposits of Yogo Gulch caused a rush to the Little Belts region of central Montana. On June 28, 1881, John C. O'Brien, Richard Harley, and James LeRoy Neihart, who had been prospecting at Barker, came to the headwaters of Belt Creek, and within five days had made the first silver discovery in the locality, "Queen of the Hills." Folks began settling the unnamed town and dotting the hillsides with mining claims. On April 7, 1882 at the first town meeting, the people decided, after rejecting the name of Farragut, to name the town after James L. Neihart. O'Brien Creek on the east and Harley Creek on the west defined the city limits.¹ Throughout 1882 small amounts of rich ore were packed on horseback to the Barker smelter. It is important to note that unlike copper mining, silver mining could be successful and attractive to small operators:

Especially during the later 1870s and early 1880s, dozens of small outfits, some with fewer than ten employees, survived in the business. Although outside capital was involved with Montana quartz mining from the beginning, local residents, most of them men with limited means, clearly controlled the industry.²

By 1883, however, the success of the Neihart area mines was noticed by outside financiers, and the Galt and Mt. Chief mines were bonded by their capital. Within a year, the Queen, Galt, Ball, and Mt. Chief mines were actively developed and ore was shipped to the Omaha smelter. These shipments averaged a net profit of \$200 per ton, after deducting \$100 per ton for freight and treatment. Hudson Mining Company purchased the Mt. Chief mine for \$18,000. That group also purchased the surrounding six claims in Neihart, and developed the diggings. The ore uncovered by these operations was so promising that Hudson Mining Company expanded operations to include a concentrator and smelter in 1885-86. Typical of the fate of mining towns, however, the prosperity was short lived. In all, about 1,000 tons of concentrates and \$50-60,000 worth of bullion were extracted and processed before the

(see continuation sheet)

¹ *The Cascade County Album – Our History in Images* (Great Falls, MT: Cascade County Historical Society, 1999), p. 9.

² Michael P. Malone, Richard B. Roeder, and William L. Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), p. 191.

Neihart School
Name of Property

Cascade County, Montana
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: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: approximately 2 acres

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
	12	520487	5197114

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): E ½ NW ¼ SE ¼ of section 32, T14N, R8E, Montana Prime Meridian

Verbal Boundary Description

The property includes Lots 1-39 of Block 8 and Lots 1-14 of Block 10, Red Bird Addition, Neihart, MT.

Boundary Justification

The property boundary is drawn to include all the real property associated with the Neihart School since its construction.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: John Dimke	date: May, 2002
organization:	telephone: (406) 236-5580
street & number: P.O. Box 42	city code: 59465
city or town: Neihart state: MT	

name/title: Kate Hampton	date: May, 2002
organization: MT SHPO	telephone: (406) 444-3647
street & number: 1410 8 th Ave	city code: 59620-1202
city or town: Helena state: MT	

Property Owner

name/title: Town of Neihart	telephone:
street & number: P.O. Box 36	zip code: 59465
city or town: Neihart state: MT	

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7

Page 1

Neihart School
Cascade County, Montana

contains two evenly spaced pairs of windows. The tall, narrow windows are six-over-six style. A rectangular, wooden louvered vent is located low in the gable end. Two rectangular wooden signs, both painted white with black lettering, adorn the bay. One is centered below the vent, and reads, in faded letters: NEIHART SCHOOL DISTRICT 35. The second, modern sign is located north and above the northernmost window. It reads: MONARCH-NEIHART SENIOR CENTER.

The north elevation of the school building consists of three bays: the central gable end of the classroom wing, and the exposed portions of the north side of the gymnasium. The east side of the north gymnasium elevation contains a pair of tall, narrow six-over-six light windows. Fenestration on the west side of the gym's north wall is limited to a single door opening, filled with plywood, at the wing intersection. The central bay of the north elevation, formed by the gable end of the classroom wing, was recently rebuilt. The frame wall is covered with horizontal half-log siding. A single, wooden, paneled pedestrian door features one-light sidelights. A large white sign directly above the door reads, in black lettering: MONARCH-NEIHART SENIOR CENTER. A single light fixture with two floodlights illuminates the door and parking areas. A concrete ramp surrounded with a wood railing, leads up to the door from the east.

The south elevation contains five window openings, and a set of double doors. The westernmost opening is smaller than the others and filled with plywood sheets. The other four openings each contain a pair of tall, narrow six-over-six windows. A wide two-step concrete stoop leads to plywood double doors located off-center to the east. A small, plywood storage shed is located between the easternmost windows. Used for storing tools, the short, shed-roofed structure has plywood walls and a small plywood door on its south side. A dirt and gravel two-track drive leads from Highway 89 across the south side of the building and curves around to the west end of the gymnasium.

The west elevation of the school consists of two bays, the southern bay is formed by the gable-end of the gym, and the long side gable wall is the classroom wing of the building. The west elevation of the gym contains four windows: two high at the main story level, and two boarded-over at the basement level. The main story windows are short and wide, and are six-over-six light style. Centered low in the gable end is a single wooden louvered vent.

Across the north wing are eight window openings and two entrances. Of the seven openings that once contained tripled four-over-four light windows, six have been in-filled. Only the northernmost set appears as it did originally. From north to south, the other openings appear as follows: Two sets filled with plywood milled to appear as horizontal planks; a set with the same in-fill in the northern two spaces and an original four-over-four window in place to the south; a set with an original four-over-four window (painted brown and untrimmed) to the north with the southern two openings filled; a set with two (north and center) upper sashes filled with plywood and an original four-light upper sash to the south, and the lower north and south sashes filled with plywood while the center sash retains its four-light design; and, the northernmost window opening, with all three windows covered with plywood sheets. A small, original gabled entrance protrudes from the south side of the classroom wing. Original, paneled, wooden double doors provide entrance from the west side. Reinforced concrete platforms are located on either side of the extension, and rise to half the extension's height. Wood-frame hatches are situated on top of the platforms: one on the north side and two on the south. Historically, the hatches were used as coal chutes. There is single window opening, covered with plywood, on the west elevation of the classroom wing, immediately north of its juncture with the entrance extension. A single, covered, pedestrian entrance is located at the extreme south end of the classroom bay.

Interior: Though not used as a school building since 1981, the Neihart School retains many architectural features and finishes from the historic period. These include original fiberboard walls and ceilings, wood wainscoting, built-in wood cabinets, chalkboards, and the coal-fired boiler. The gymnasium still sports the original hardwood floor, painted with basketball court boundaries, and raised stage at the west end. The floorplan, with its classroom wing and large gymnasium/auditorium, is essentially unchanged. The classroom wing of the building features a long central hallway. The science lab, principal's office, two classrooms, and library are located on the east half of the building, while the restrooms (including showers), manual training room, boiler, and three classrooms fill the west side. After the school closed in 1981, the library was converted to a kitchen, and the northernmost classroom on the east

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7

Page 2

Neihart School
Cascade County, Montana

side was converted to a dining hall. Two handicapped restrooms were installed on the west side middle classroom in 1999. (See continuation sheet for floorplan.)

Building #2 (one contributing building)

A large studs-out storage building, constructed c. 1943, is located immediately west of the main school building. The shed roof slopes gently to the west, and is covered with rolled roofing over composite shingles. The fenestration is limited to a single plywood door at the south side of the east elevation. An opening above the door, divided by the framing members, is filled with green translucent fiberglass. The studs-out construction belies its function as a storage area for coal.

Skating Ponds (two non-contributing structures)

Two wide, shallow, nearly circular ponds occupy the southwest portion of the property. The ponds, constructed c. 1981, are fed by springs and flow into Belt Creek that forms the western boundary of the property.

Integrity:

Since its construction in 1940, the Neihart School building has undergone few architectural changes. The addition of the covered entryway took place during the period of significance (1945), as did the installation of the asphalt shingle roofing (1950). While several window and door openings at the rear elevation have been in-filled, their locations are clearly visible and the window frames are present beneath. The extension of the roofline to shelter the modern ramp to the north entrance is not intrusive, and modern metal roofing is limited to the rear slope and minor roof extension. The interior finishes have been modified only slightly to accommodate the building's re-use as a senior center, and include only minor changes to the library (conversion to a kitchen area) and the installation of handicapped restrooms. The setting of the property remains largely intact, and the non-historic skating ponds are a logical use of the marshy area surrounding the school building, and are not overtly intrusive. The parking areas, and the studs-out shed are reflective of the period of significance. Overall, the property retains a high degree of integrity.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

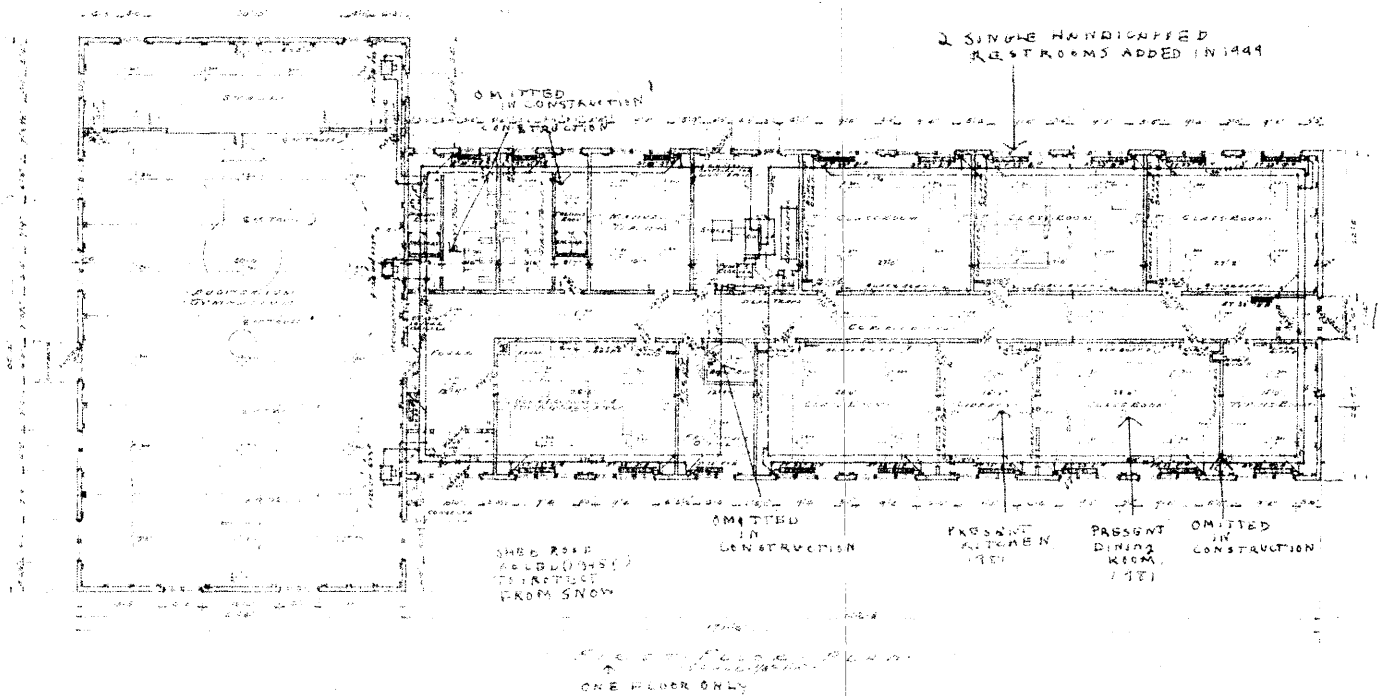
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7

Page 3

Neihart School
Cascade County, Montana

Floorplan:



REVISIONS
DATE
BY

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Page 4

Neihart School
Cascade County, Montana

works closed in 1887. In that short amount of time, the rich surface ores had been exhausted, and the ores located at a slight depth carried only 15-40 ounces of silver.³

Hudson Mining Company was not the only business to venture into Neihart in the late 1880s. In 1885, Colonel C.A. Broadwater consolidated a group of claims immediately east of town to form the Broadwater Mine. His endeavor, however, only lasted a few months before work was suspended. Between 1887 and 1891, the mining camp of Neihart was nearly deserted. The depletion of rich surface ores, combined with the high cost of transportation led most of the inhabitants to move on to other locales. New life breathed into the community in 1891 in the form of a railroad line. In November of that year, a branch of the Montana Central Railroad (later a part of the Great Northern system) was completed to Neihart and Barker. The railroad provided cheap transportation to the smelter at Great Falls, and mining activity revived. Silver mining had been given an additional boost at the national level when the Congress passed the Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890. The Act not only required the U.S. government to purchase nearly twice as much silver as before, but also added substantially to the amount of money already in circulation. The Sherman Silver Purchase Act (supported by John Sherman only as a compromise with the advocates of free silver) threatened, when put into operation, to undermine the U.S. Treasury's gold reserves.⁴ As a result of the Act, President Benjamin Harrison agreed to purchase \$4.5 million ounces of silver a month, and the price of silver shot up from 84 cents to \$1.21 per ounce in September 1890.⁵

By 1892, the Queen of the Hills Mining Company and the Moulton Mine, owned by the Diamond Ore Mining Company were prosperous. Properties were developed that promised steady production, and the population of the town once again began to rise. The need for a school was apparent, and that project was completed in 1892. The impressive two-story, hip-roofed, frame school building featured a belfry, narrow clapboard siding, double-hung windows, arched entry, and Neoclassical detailing. The interior included four large rooms, two per story. Grades one through four were taught in one room, and grades five through eight in another. High school students met in a third room, and the fourth was used as a gymnasium and assembly space. Though not plumbed, the building did have heat: a single, large coal and wood burning stove.⁶ Situated on the hillside south of town, and visible from a great distance, the school building's imposing presence was indicative of the optimism of the community at that time, and the importance residents placed on education.

Again, the town of Neihart quickly fell into economic depression, as did nearly all mining communities in 1893. Although the Sherman Act had temporarily invigorated the silver mining business, at the same time, it created fear among eastern republican businessmen and foreign investors that the gold dollar would be replaced by a less valuable silver dollar. Stores and banks began to go out of business and gold became a commodity to be hoarded. This economic unrest culminated in the Panic of 1893 and spelled the end of an era of silver by the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act that year. Almost immediately mines and smelters began to shut down throughout the West. Silver prices dropped from 83 cents to 62 cents an ounce in one 4-day period. Banks closed their doors and real estate values plummeted. Across the nation in 1893, nearly 15,000 companies failed, 500 banks went into receivership, and nearly 30 percent of the country's rail system was financially insolvent. For the next three years, the United States went into deep depression. Strikes intensified throughout the country and personal suffering increased.⁷

The town of Neihart felt the economic blow. The price of silver continued to drop, and caused a general suspension of activity. The Broadwater Mine, however, continued to work large bodies of galena ore, and the Florence, Benton, and Big Seven mining properties remained profitable with their rich silver ores. Between 1895 and 1915, the low price of silver made it profitable to operate only the exceptionally high-grade mines. Of these, the Florence, Galt, Broadwater, Big Seven, Ripple, Silver Belt, Hartley, Benton, Queen of

³ Paul A. Schafer, "Geology and Ore Deposits of the Neihart Mining District," Montana School of Mines, 1935, p. 3.

⁴ "Sherman Silver Purchase Act," *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, Sixth Edition, 2001, <http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/history/A0844879.html>.

⁵ For an excellent discussion of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act and its impact on the Montana economy, see Malone, et. al., pp. 188-192.

⁶ Cascade County Album, p. 142.

⁷ "Sherman Silver Purchase Act"; Malone, pp. 191-192.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Page 5

Neihart School
Cascade County, Montana

the Hills, and Moulton were the most important. The Neihart area boasted six miles of mining tunnels, with shafts on thirty claims, and the eight leading mines shipped thirty to fifty cars of ore per month. The Broadwater mines (St. Julian, Minnehaha, Maud S, Montana Belle, and Dickens) also produced well, averaging a carload of ore daily for two years and yielding a million ounces of silver.⁸ Wages of \$3.50 per day created a total payroll of \$250,000 in two years.⁹ By the late 1890s, many of these mines had played out, and the three area mills, the Morning Star, I.X.L.-Eureka, and the Broadwater, operated only sporadically. The I.X.L.-Eureka was a ten-stamp cyanidation plant, and the Broadwater was a concentrator equipped with crushers and tables. Despite these local facilities, most of the ore produced in the district was shipped direct to distant smelters. Though the mines themselves were scattered throughout the district, Neihart continued to survive by providing services to the workers in the area. In 1896, the population still hovered between 4,000 and 5,000 people, but those numbers steadily decreased over the turn of the century. By 1905, Neihart school had 122 students, but the number quickly dropped to 80 three years later.¹⁰

Keeping with the familiar pattern of the boom-and-bust economy, the silver industry, and therefore the prosperity of Neihart once again began to flourish. The steady improvement of the price of silver stimulated largely by the outbreak of World War I and rising to as high as \$1.10 an ounce by 1919, enabled many of the mines to reopen. The Moulton and Broadwater properties were combined and renamed the Cascade Silver Mines and Mills Company. Their concentrating plant, located in Neihart, was remodeled and improved to handle 150 tons of ore a day. The ore was sorted, and the "shipping ore" separated from the "milling ore." The Broadwater tunnel was cleaned out for 2,000 feet. Other important producers at this time included the Benton, Galt, Blackbird, Silver Belt, Ripple, Alice and Hartley, Big Seven, Cornucopia, Fairplay, Florence, London and Tom Hendricks. Most of these shipped their rich silver ore direct to smelters. Until the opening of the Silver Dyke Mine, the Moulton was the largest producer during this period. Nearly all the other mines operated on a lease basis. The Neihart Consolidated Silver Mining Company, which operated the Hartley mine, was an important producer, shipping in 1922 an average of 800 tons per month.¹¹

It was the Silver Dyke Mine, however, that provided that largest boost to the Neihart community after World War I. The American Zinc, Lead, and Smelting Company purchased the property in 1922, and immediately made preparations for a large-scale mining operation. A reserve of about 1 million tons of milling ore, containing copper, lead, and silver, was blocked out, and a 500-ton floatation plant was completed in 1923. Development work totaling more than 4,000 feet was completed in 1925. The following year, the mill capacity was enlarged to 950 tons, and the mine became the largest producer in the Montana outside of Silver Bow County. Once again, the rich lodes began to be depleted, and by 1928, production at the Silver Dyke slowed down and was eventually closed in 1929. That year, the price of silver plummeted to less than 40 cents an ounce, and nearly all the mines in the area forced to close. By 1930 all the mines were idle, except for a few lessees at the Silver Dyke. The population of Neihart dropped dramatically, until there were only 58 students enrolled at the school. The economic slump in the mining district continued until 1933, when the promises of new strikes in nearby Carpenter Creek were explored. There, a small mill was constructed at the Morning Star mine.¹²

The World War II era ushered in the last mining boom to the Neihart community. The need for "strategic" metals such as lead and zinc for the burgeoning war effort revitalized the industry. In an effort to shift all available miners to the production of these metals, the War Production Board issued Limitation Order L-208, which closed all "non-essential" mining operations. To stimulate production, the Reconstruction Finance Corporation liberalized its mining loan policies, and the federal government organized the Metal Reserve Company to stockpile strategic minerals, encouraging their production by providing both a guaranteed market and a stable price. From 1940 to 1952, Carroll Bennett operated the Dacotah mine, and the population of Neihart again swelled. As early as 1939, the burgeoning population anticipated the need for a new school building.

⁸ Schafer, p. 4.

⁹ *Cascade County Album*, p. 146.

¹⁰ School Census Records, 1905-1972, Cascade County Superintendent of Schools, Great Falls, MT.

¹¹ Schafer, p. 4.

¹² *Ibid.*

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Page 6

Neihart School
Cascade County, Montana

On March 13 of that year, the school board of District 35 at Neihart paid for two of its members, Mr. Heath and Mr. Olson, to go to St. Regis "in regard to a new school building." Two weeks later, the same group authorized bonds to be "issued and sold in the amount of \$10,000 for the purpose of building a new school and securing a site."¹³ By the end of May, the board settled on 42 lots in Block 8 of the Red Bird Addition of Neihart for either the school site or an athletic field. Bonds were sold, and the project progressed through the summer of 1939. On September 1, they contracted with George Shanley of Great Falls to "sketch plans [and] contact WPA."¹⁴

Shanley first submitted plans for a two-story brick building, but the size and expense were prohibitive. The board finally settled on his design of a T-shaped log building. Again, the original log building design called for two stories, but the cost was too high, so by December 1939, the plans had been reduced to the rustic style, one-story classroom wing and gymnasium. The estimated cost was \$12,300. On December 7, 1939, the *Belt Valley Times* reported:

Plans have been made for the new schoolhouse. Engineers have started work and the corner stakes are driven...The grade school portion will consist of three classrooms. The high school portion will have two classrooms, a commercial room, library, and office for the principal. Also a heating plant, home economics room and chemistry laboratory combined, and shower rooms for both the boys and the girls. Adjoining the main building will be a gymnasium and auditorium. The stage will be used as a manual training room part of the time.¹⁵

The additional space in the new building not only accommodated more students than the town's original four-room school, but also provided specialized areas for expanded curriculums. A laboratory and library space allowed students to conduct research, while the separate office for administration indicates the raised status of principals. Using designs championed by nationally significant architects but such as John J. Donovan, Dwight Perkins, and William Ittner, "town" schools constructed during the 1920s and 1930s often displayed a "U", "I" or "T" floorplan, with a gymnasium and/or auditorium space anchoring classroom wings. Shanley's Neihart School design is typical of the period:

The design and layout of all the schools was similar. In a small school, there were more combined-use rooms, particularly the auditorium and gymnasium, when there were 'not sufficient numbers to insure a reasonably continuous use of both...as distinct quarters.' In this situation, the gymnasium was constructed...with concrete or wood floors for basketball, with permanent or movable bleachers on one long wall...and a stage...usually set several feet above the gym floor.¹⁶

The Neihart school board also endeavored to keep costs down by taking advantage of the Works Progress Administration program to hire construction workers. Nine men, paid through WPA funds, were hired to complete the job. The workers arrived from throughout the county in the early winter of 1939, and at first stayed with Mrs. Rosetti in Neihart. When Mrs. Rosetti complained that she was not being paid enough to provide them with room and board, the school board authorized Mrs. A.C. Taylor to put them up and paid her \$1.00 per day for each.

By December 19th, it was decided that the logs for the building would be obtained from Kings Hill. The logs were cut and processed to be of uniform size and shape, approximately seven inches in diameter. Promises were made that the "construction would be pushed as rapidly as possible."¹⁷ The work continued, but it was soon apparent the \$10,000 earmarked for the project would not cover the costs. The board debated the use of wood shingles for the roof, windows, and even the purchase of fire extinguishers. By May 1940,

¹³ "Minutes of the Board Meetings," District 35, Cascade Superintendent of Schools, Great Falls, MT, March 13 and 27, 1939.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, April 26-September 1, 1939.

¹⁵ "Work Started on New School," *Belt Valley Times*, December 7, 1939.

¹⁶ Camilla Deiber and Peggy Beedle, "Town Schools for Iowa," (Des Moines, Iowa: State Historical Society of Iowa, September 2002), p. 12.

¹⁷ *Belt Valley Times*, December 21, 1939.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Page 7

Neihart School
Cascade County, Montana

frustration regarding the construction progress was evident when the board voted to "send letter of protest to various officials, WPA, etc."¹⁸ Later that month an additional 10 mill levy to cover the costs was voted down.

Meanwhile, the town population continued to grow, up to 600 people in 1940, as did the commercial opportunities. The WPA workers and their families lived and worked amid the newcomers: "Evidence of this rise in population is noted by the many new businesses. Two new beauty parlors are open, one being operated by...Mrs. James Granger, who has recently moved here from Harlem. Mrs. Granger is the wife of the WPA foreman in charge of the new school building."

As the summer waned on, preparations were made for the first school term at the new school. By August 1, the town anticipated 125 students enrolled and hired six teachers. It was clear, however, that the new building would not be ready for occupancy until December.¹⁹ The school board did their best to raise funds, holding bingo parties and dances to pay for furnishings in the school. On August 28, 1940, the board "resolved, that an emergency does exist in District 35," regarding the building finances. Classes began in September in the overcrowded old school. Despite a chickenpox epidemic that kept enrollment down at first, the number of students peaked at 252.²⁰ The board, facing a desperate situation, asked for, and received another bond election in October for \$2650.00. Another 15 mill levy was sought in the Spring of 1941. In the end, the building cost nearly twice the estimate: \$20,000.

Still the amenities in the school - running water, a reliable heating system, science laboratories, larger classrooms, and gymnasium space - better served a student population that continued to grow through the war years. In 1941, when 224 students were enrolled in the District, the local newspaper reported on the optimism in the area:

Now there is a boom in Neihart. The price of silver is good. Several mines are taking out ore and almost as many mills are concentrating values which were unattractive a few years ago. Hundreds of miners have come in, many with families. Old business ventures have shown marked improvement while new business ventures have opened at every available site.

Like so many times before, however, the prosperity in Neihart came to a halt. While other communities continued to grow and succeed in the favorable post-war economy, the town of Neihart was dealt a lethal blow. In 1945, the Great Northern Railway abandoned its Little Belts line, leaving the mines and concentrators without practical transportation for the ore. The population plummeted. Only 28 students were enrolled at the school in 1963, when the school board voted to close the high school. Elementary education continued at Neihart School until 1981, when the fewer than 19 students were transferred to the school in Belt. Doubtful that Neihart would see another renaissance, the school board deeded the property to the town. Since 1981, the building has been put to good use as the Neihart-Monarch Senior Center. Though a few alterations have been necessary, it is nearly identical to the design George Shanley drew in the fall of 1939.

The significance of the Neihart School is its representation of the most recent phase of economic prosperity and optimism in the small mining community. It speaks to the need for civic improvements when the population tripled over the course of just a few months, and the emphasis the community placed on education. The school building gains significance as an unusual example of log design by prominent Great Falls architect George Shanley, and its association with the Works Progress Administration.

¹⁸ "Meetings of Board Minutes," May 5, 1940.

¹⁹ *Belt Valley Times*, "Neihart News Notes," August 1, 1940.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, September 12, 1940.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Page 8

Neihart School
Cascade County, Montana

Architectural Significance

George Shanley was born in Burlington, Vermont, in 1875 and received his education at the University of Vermont. After graduation, he worked for various architects in Duluth, Minnesota and went on to Fargo, North Dakota, to help his contractor father build St. Mary's Cathedral. Shanley moved to Kalispell, Montana in 1898 and became a partner in the firm of Gibson and Shanley, and the firm designed many buildings in Kalispell. Indeed, A.J. Gibson was the most significant architect in western Montana at the time, and was well versed in public building design. In 1900, Shanley moved to Butte where he became associated with State Capitol Architect John Kent, and together they designed the Graves Hotel in Harlowton (NR listed 8/6/1980). In 1907, Shanley opened an office in Great Falls, where he worked with various architects and eventually started his own firm. Until his death in 1960, Shanley designed public and private buildings throughout Montana and Wyoming. He designed the first reinforced concrete, brick-faced building in Great Falls, the original telephone company building that became the Intermountain Bus Depot. That building has been recently remodeled and continues its use as a depot today. The list of buildings designed by Shanley is impressive, and includes, schools, jails, hotels, hospitals, churches, and even the remarkable 10th Street Bridge across the Missouri River in Great Falls.

The vast majority of these properties are imposing, masonry buildings with a high level of ornamentation and grandiose design. It is unusual, then to see a Rustic style school building designed by this prominent architect. Originally, Shanley designed the Neihart School as a two-story brick building, typical of those he designed in Great Falls (Central Catholic High School). The plans were modified, however, to be in keeping with the modest budget and skill level of the WPA workers assigned to the task. The result is a modest but beautiful log building reminiscent of the Rustic style common to public works projects throughout Montana. The log construction, rough-milled trim, and T-shaped footprint recall the buildings constructed by the CCC and WPA in the national parks and other government agencies.

Established by executive order in May 1935, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) was a federal agency created to provide paying jobs for unemployed workers through various make-works projects. Laborers used for these projects had lost their jobs during the Great Depression, a worldwide economic slump that began in 1929. The WPA was part of the New Deal For America, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's program of economic recovery during the depression. Renamed the Work Projects Administration in 1939, its projects involved mostly construction projects, such as highways, bridges, parks, airport runways, public swimming pools, and county fairgrounds, schools, museums, stadiums and National Guard armories.²¹

The infusion of cash into WPA projects across the country made an economic impact on hundreds of communities, who competed for the funds. To qualify for a WPA project, cities had to meet three criteria: 1) projects had to meet a well-defined community need; 2) projects had to be sponsored by a public body, which had to provide 10 – 25 percent of the cost in cash and/or materials; and 3) 90 percent of the laborers had to be unemployed employable workers who were on the relief rolls. Compensation, \$24 a month, was based on 130 work hours per month. Before the WPA was disbanded in 1943, it had provided employment for about 8.5 million people on 1.4 million individual projects, expending more than \$11 billion.²²

Because the Neihart School is a rare example of a Shanley log design and WPA workers were employed to construct the building, the property is extremely significant at the local level, for its association with such a prominent architect and an important social program.

²¹ 1 William W. Bremer, "Works Progress Administration," Discovery Channel School, original content provided by World Book Online, <http://www.discoveryschool.com/homeworkhelp/worldbook/atozhistory/w/610140.html>, 12/20/2000; Diana Everett, "Historic National Guard Armories: A Brief, Illustrated Review of the Past Two Centuries," U.S. Department of Defense, National Guard Bureau, Historical services Division, n.d., p. 33.

²² Bremer.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Page 9

Neihart School
Cascade County, Montana

It is indicative of Shanley's willingness to not only take on small projects, but to abandon his typical design style and work with the community. The school also is representative of the type of project the WPA was designed to accomplish: to provide gainful employment for workers and improve the infrastructure of communities.

Clearly, the Neihart School is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C. Its significance at the local level is expressed in its Rustic design elements, its association with George Shanley and the Works Progress Administration, the town's commitment to education, and its representation of the development of the community during World War II.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9

Neihart School
Cascade County, Montana

Page 10

Bibliography

Belt Valley Times.

Bremer, William W., "Works Progress Administration," Discovery Channel School, original content provided by World Book Online, <http://www.discoveryschool.com/homeworkhelp/worldbook/atozhistory/w/610140.html>, 12/20/2000

Cascade County Album – Our History in Images, Great Falls, MT: Cascade County Historical Society, 1999.

Deiber, Camilla and Peggy Beedle, "Town Schools for Iowa," Des Moines, Iowa: State Historical Society of Iowa, September 2002.

Great Falls Tribune.

Malone, Michael P., Richard B. Roeder, and William L. Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, revised edition, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991.

"Minutes of the Board Meetings," District 35, Cascade Superintendent of Schools, Great Falls, MT.

Schafer, Paul A., "Geology and Ore Deposits of the Neihart Mining District," Butte, MT: Montana School of Mines, 1935.

School Census Records, 1905-1972, Cascade County Superintendent of Schools, Great Falls, MT.

"Sherman Silver Purchase Act," *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, Sixth Edition, 2001, www.infoplease.com/ce6/history/A0844879.html.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

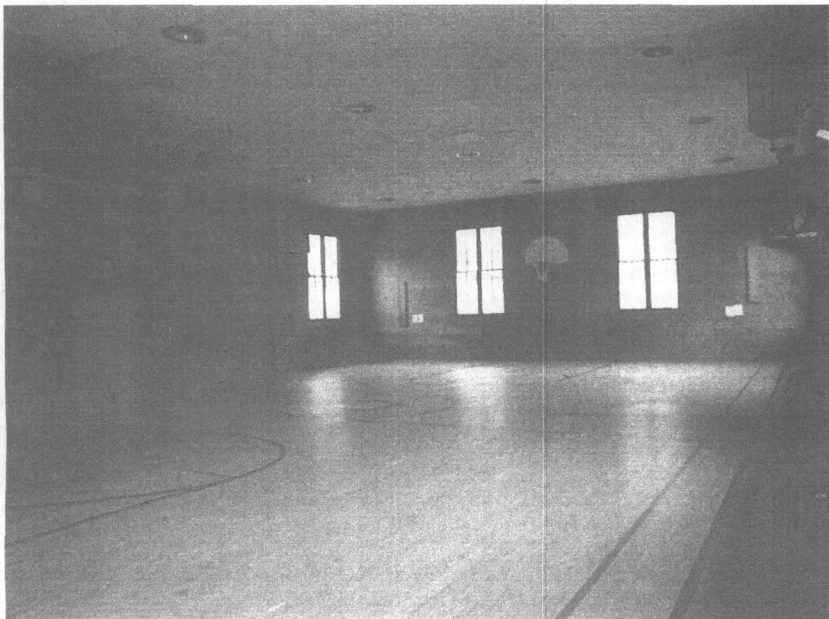
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Photographs

Neihart School
Cascade County, Montana

Page 11

Photographs



Gymnasium Interior, 2002

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Photographs

Neihart School
Cascade County, Montana

Page 12



Interior Hall, 2002

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Photographs

Neihart School
Cascade County, Montana

Page 13



Historic Neihart, undated