

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 98000125

Date Listed: 2/19/98

Big Timber Town Hall
Property Name

Sweet Grass
County

MT
State

N/A
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.


Signature of the Keeper

2/19/98
Date of Action

Amended Items in Nomination:

State Certification:

The appropriate level of significance is: local.
[The original nomination did not note a level of significance.]

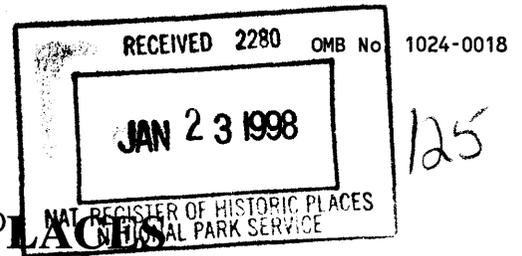
Significance:

Politics/Government is added as an area of significance replacing Settlement.
[This better reflects the historic use and significance of the resource and is in keeping with NPS precedent.]

This information was confirmed with Lon Johnson of the MT SHPO.

DISTRIBUTION:

National Register property file
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Big Timber Town Hall

other name/site number: Big Timber Fire Hall

2. Location

street & number: 225 McLeod Street

not for publication: N/A
vicinity: N/A

city/town: Big Timber

state: Montana code: MT county: Sweet Grass code: 097 zip code: 59011

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.

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

1-16-98

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
- see continuation sheet other (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

for
Sal B. Ferguson

2/19/98

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> 1 </u>	<u> </u> building(s)
Name of related multiple property listing: N/A	<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
	<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
	<u> </u>	<u> </u> objects
	<u> 1 </u>	<u> </u> TOTAL

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:	Current Functions:
GOVERNMENT: town hall/firehouse	VACANT

7. Description

Architectural Classification:	Materials:
Western Commercial	foundation: Stone/Concrete
	walls: Brick/Stone/Metal
	roof: Metal/Asphalt
	other: N/A

Narrative Description

The Big Timber Town Hall is located in the middle of a commercial block on McLeod Avenue, Big Timber's main street. From its construction in 1909 until 1966, the building served the governmental needs of the town. The town offices occupied the second floor and the fire department and jail the first floor. Despite its simple architectural design, the building represents the desires of the citizens to physically acknowledge the presence of town government in this stable, prosperous but small, agricultural community. Similar in design to other commercial buildings on the town's main street, its governmental functions are identified by the rooftop belfry originally topped with a flag pole.

The Big Timber Town Hall is designed in the Western Commercial style with modifications tailored to its public functions. The two-story rectangular building measures 30 by 60 feet. A one-story jail was added to the back of the building in 1913. This addition was demolished in 1955 to make way for a 30- by 55-foot fire hall addition. The front elevation is constructed of concrete brick (now painted) while the remaining walls are of locally-quarried, uncoursed sandstone. The original flat, built-up roof is now covered with metal.

The front facade of the building is framed by full-height brick piers with every sixth course recessed thus providing the appearance of quoins. A corbeled brick cornice spans between the piers. The cornice is broken near the piers and rises at the center to form a small gable reminiscent of a detail often found on woodframe false-fronted buildings. Rising just behind the gable is an open square belfry topped by a hipped roof with flared eaves. The roof is supported by built-up corner posts with recessed center panels. The original bell remains in the belfry.

The first floor of the McLeod Street facade is defined by a projecting sheet metal cornice. Brick piers, identical in design to those on the outside of the building, rise from the sidewalk to the cornice, dividing the elevation into four unequal bays. The largest and most prominent bay houses the fire hall doors. The original pair of wood swinging doors has been replaced with a metal overhead

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garage door. The four-light transom above the opening remains. Flanking the fire hall doors are narrow, one-over-one double hung windows with flattened arches and stone sills. The bays in which the windows are located are filled with brick; the brick is corbeled beneath the cornice. The last bay on the first floor is the entry to the second floor. A single, modern metal door is topped by a square transom. Four evenly spaced one-over-one double-hung windows on the second floor are placed between a continuous rusticated stone sill and lintel. The lintel is topped with a small sheet metal cornice held between the building's outside piers. During the 1950s, the original windows were replaced with shorter, one-over-one units and the space above them in-filled.

Only the second floor of the rear of the original building is visible. It has two pairs of windows placed towards the outside walls. The original windows have been replaced with much smaller wood sliding units, and the area above them in-filled. This side of the building is dominated by the 1955 one-story addition. The addition is constructed of steel posts and beams and has a shed roof covered with built-up asphalt roofing. Two overhead metal garage doors (similar to the one on the front) and a pedestrian door open onto the alley.

The interior of the first floor is one undivided room. It has a concrete floor, unfinished walls, and exposed ceiling joists. Four original two-over-two double hung windows are located in the back wall. As designed the second floor has three rooms -- a council chamber, a room for the use of the "fire laddies," and a room for a watchman. Much of the original woodwork remains on the second floor, including the five-panel doors with transoms, although some of it has been painted. The council chamber now has a suspended acoustical tile ceiling and carpeting on the floor. The woodwork surrounding the front windows was also modified at the time they were shortened.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: A and C

Areas of Significance: Settlement; Social History;
Architecture

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A

Period(s) of Significance: 1909

Significant Person(s): N/A

Significant Dates:

Cultural Affiliation: European-American

Architect/Builder: Frank Larson/Frank Larson

Narrative Statement of Significance

Statement of Significance

The Big Timber Town Hall is historically significant under National Register Criterion A for its association with the Progressive Era movement in Big Timber. The "Progressive Citizens' Party" which controlled the Town Council from Big Timber's incorporation in 1902 through at least 1912 strived to implement many of the policies of the national municipal reform movement. The Town Council, whose members were nominated without national party affiliation, perceived the proper activity of the council as improving the quality of civic life. The Big Timber Town Hall symbolizes the efforts of the Council to establish Big Timber among Montana's "progressive communities." The Big Timber Town Hall is also significant under National Register Criterion C as a thoughtfully, well-designed adaptation of the Western Commercial style to civic architecture. Although similar to the adjoining commercial buildings, the design clearly identified its public function.

The Progressive Movement in Big Timber

The Progressive Era of American politics is identified as the period between the turn of the century and World War I when a passion for reform swept across the country. A contemporary analysis of Progressivism described its three primary goals as: "corrupt special influence must be removed; the structure of government must be modified so as to allow a greater and more direct participation by the people in the conduct of public affairs; and, finally, the functions of government must be increased in an effort to meet industrial and social needs."¹ In Montana, the movement evidenced itself in several pieces of reform legislation on the state level. These included the creation of the State Bureau of Child and Animal Protection, an amendment to the state constitution providing for the initiative and referendum, woman's suffrage in 1914, and workmen's compensation. Attempts were also made to regulate corporations and public utilities, to outlaw gambling and prostitution, and to control saloons.

On the local level across the nation, from New York to Seattle, citizens began taking an active interest in local municipal reform. The mid-west, however, was seen as the "storm-center of municipal reform." In large cities and small towns, voters abandoned the two national parties, successfully forming coalitions to vote out of office the corrupt political machines and bosses. The National Municipal League strongly advocated this disregard for party lines maintaining that "national parties and national questions have no proper connection with the determination of local issues."²

Little has been written on the Progressive Movement at the local level in Montana. As late as 1970, two of Montana's pre-eminent historians debated the impact of Progressivism on Montana. In an article in *Montana, The Magazine of Western History*, Richard Roeder cited a list of legislative reforms, including those listed above, in support of his thesis that Montana was within the mainstream of the national Progressive Movement. K. Ross Toole rebutted that these reforms were inconsequential when the

¹ Benjamin Parke DeWitt, *The Progressive Movement* (New York, 1955), 189; quoted in Richard B. Roeder, "Montana Progressivism," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 20 (Autumn 1970): 19.

² William D. P. Bliss, ed., *The New Encyclopedia of Social Reform* (New York and London: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1908), 795-800.

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Anaconda Company thwarted them at their will.³ With the Progressive reforms enacted on the state level, whether tangible or symbolic, it can be assumed that Montanans carried their calls for reform to the county and city level.

The town of Big Timber's municipal politics, from at least 1902 until 1912, reflected the ideas of the state and national Progressive Movement, sometimes in both liberal and conservative forms. Upon incorporation in 1902, Big Timber chose non-partisan elections for its mayor and aldermen. Candidates for office were to be nominated in a mass meeting of the citizens "in order that every voter, no matter what might be his personal views, might have an opportunity of expressing himself and taking part in the selection of candidates" The consensus slate of officers would then be presented to the voters. By at least 1907, if not from the beginning, women were included among the ranks of eligible voters in Big Timber.

Interestingly, Big Timber's first election resulted in a split, and rather than one slate of officers, two Progressive parties vied for control of the Town Council. The disagreement arose over the granting of municipal franchises, a hotly debated issue throughout the country at the time. Municipal officials were often charged with receiving bribes from public corporations in turn for inexpensive and long-term contracts to provide monopolistic public utility services. The issue of municipal franchises in Big Timber had arisen in 1901 and resulted in the first attempt at the town's incorporation being defeated by a vote of 54 to 50. The two parties that emerged during the 1902 election were the Progressive Citizens' Party and the Citizens' Party. The Progressive Citizens' Party ran on a platform "pledged to the advancement, betterment and general welfare of our town along the lines of safe, conservative business principles, and to conduct its affairs conservatively and economically, in a manner which will in their judgement be to the interests of all taxpayers and citizens." The Citizen's Party, on the other hand, focused almost solely on the franchise issue. Its platform called for public ownership of all city utilities and the limitation of city contracts to the terms of those officers who entered into them. The issue was particularly timely since the city was without a water system, a sewerage system, electricity, or telephone service, all items potentially awardable by the council as franchises. The *Big Timber Pioneer* ran an editorial highly critical of the Citizen's Party, or the " 'anti' movement " as it termed the party, stating "If they oppose franchises and contracts, the only alternatives are municipal ownership or do without. And in our case it would more than likely be the latter." The Progressive Citizen's Party, headed by mayoral candidate John F. Asbury, swept the election.⁴

A lack of revenue between the 1902 and 1905 Big Timber municipal elections hampered the council's ability to implement civic improvements. Until 1904 when general tax revenues finally became available, the town operated solely on income from license fees and fines. Issues raised in the 1905 city election received no coverage in the local newspaper even though Asbury was again opposed by H.O. Kellog, the 1902 Citizen's Party candidate for mayor. The two Progressive Citizen's Party candidates for alderman, however, ran unopposed.⁵

The Civic League of Big Timber, a group of more liberal progressives than those in office, took up the popular progressive cause of social reform in the 1907 city election. Nationally, the movement sought legislation to cure "social ills" such as exploitation of women and children, alcohol abuse, and corruption. Perhaps not coincidentally, although that is how the local newspaper portrayed it, the Civic League called a meeting at the same time and location as the biennial citizen's mass meeting to nominate municipal officers. The Civic League, either through sheer numbers or a judicious political move on the part of the Citizen's Progressive Party, took control of the meeting and all present voted to unite into a general mass meeting. The League's chairman explained

³ Roeder, "Montana Progressivism;" K. Ross Toole, "Rebuttal: When is a Reform a Reform?" *Montana The Magazine of Western History* 20 (Autumn 1970): 27.

⁴ *Big Timber Pioneer*, November 27 and December 4, 1902.

⁵ *Big Timber Pioneer*, April 6, 1905; *Big Timber Town Council Proceedings*, May 5, 1913.

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“that the sole purpose of the League was to rid the town of houses of ill-fame . . .” and he immediately moved to require support for the cause from all nominees of the meeting. Before the motion could be voted on, however, supporters of the Progressive Citizen’s Party stepped in with a compromise motion. Advocating a position similar to its earlier stand on franchises, it argued against shackling candidates with specific legislative agendas. Instead, it proposed “the enforcement of the existing state laws, and the ordinances of the town, in a fair and impartial manner, and without fear or favor. . . and further that we require no pledges from any of the nominees of this mass convention.” The motion carried. John F. Asbury again received the meeting’s nomination for mayor. In a speech to those in attendance, he “proposed], if elected, to see that the laws were more rigidly enforced in the future. . .” The Civic League apparently left mollified, and Asbury was elected mayor without opposition. A letter to the editor of the newspaper just prior to the election evidences local support for other social reforms beyond prostitution. An anonymous writer called on the town council to establish a “high license and bonding system” on local saloons.⁶

A week after the election, the Civic League more broadly defined its purpose in the newspaper than it had done at the mass meeting. In typical progressive language, the organization’s constitution defined its purpose as “Promoting the social and civic betterment of Big Timber.” The article’s author admitted, however, that the issue surrounding the formation of the League, and the one it addressed at its organizational meeting, was the “restricted district.” Back pedaling on the League’s resolution to work towards elimination of the restricted district from the town and county, the author justified the vote as “its best judgement under the impulse of the highest motive on that occasion.” And, at the same time he acknowledged the vote as perhaps too radical “because it was premature or else because wiser and more conservative citizens were not present to exercise their moderating influences.”⁷ One must look towards a neighboring town newspaper article (see footnote 6) for some insight into the controversy that surrounded the issue in Big Timber. Clearly, even in the small town of Big Timber, progressive social reform could be taken only so far, and when it clashed with the economic well-being of otherwise progressive municipal-reform minded businessmen, it lost.

The 1907 city election also included a proposition seeking authority for the city to sell bonds to finance a city water works. The proposition passed by a vote of 75 to 5. The *Big Timber Pioneer* explicitly linked the passage of the water works bond issue and the town’s progressive movement. The paper proclaimed the large vote in favor of the water works as a clear inspiration to those citizens “striving for a bigger, better and more beautiful Big Timber . . .?” It showed that almost all taxpayers wanted “Big Timber [to] keep pace with the other progressive cities in the state . . .” Throughout this period, Big Timber’s town council carried out other progressive civic improvements with the support of the taxpayers and businessmen. Miles of concrete sidewalks were installed with only some churches defaulting in their payments. Streets were improved and streetlights installed. Trees were planted throughout the town, and at the call of Mayor Asbury, the businessmen closed one afternoon to clean rocks from the Northern Pacific Railway’s right-of-way with the promise of a park that would improve visitor’s first impression of the town. In 1909, the Council stepped lightly into the area of social reform and passed an ordinance prohibiting the sale of alcoholic beverages in houses of prostitution.⁸

⁶ *Big Timber Pioneer*, March 28 and April 4, 1907. It should be noted that the *Livingston Enterprise* of April 6, 1907 carries an entirely different account of the mass meeting: “Three months ago the Civic League petitioned the council to remove the sporting houses, and it was so ordered. When the mass convention met to nominate a candidate for mayor, the business men demanded the reopening of the houses on the ground that the closing of them had injured business and had virtually killed the town. It was finally mutually agreed that under the incoming administration all the white houses should open and colored houses and cribs should remain closed.”

⁷ *Big Timber Pioneer*, April 11, 1907.

⁸ *Big Timber Pioneer*, April 4, 1907 and April 1, 1909; *Big Timber Town Council Proceedings*, May 13, 1909 and May 5, 1913.

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On March 13, 1908, a spark from a passing Northern Pacific locomotive set fire to that company's stockyard. Driven by a high wind, flaming embers showered over the town starting fires in a number of places at once. Before it was finally extinguished one-half of the businesses and one-third of the residences went up in flames. Only a gently shower and aid from the Livingston fire department which arrived by special train saved the community from total destruction.⁹

Not surprisingly, in the aftermath of the 1908 fire, the mass meeting of the Citizen's Progressive Party held in March 1909 to nominate candidates for municipal office also included on its platform a call for the construction of a fire hall. Asbury again received the nomination to run as mayor, and in the election he and the other Citizen's Progressive Party candidates for alderman were all elected to office. The council awarded a construction contract for a combination town hall/fire hall six weeks after the election.

Town Hall History

The decision to build a town hall was actually made some months prior to the April 1909 election. A lot on McLeod Avenue near the south end of the commercial district was purchased in February. At the council meeting where the purchase was approved, the aldermen agreed to work with the fire department in planning the building. Frank Larson, a Billings contractor and builder, with other projects in Big Timber, supplied the plans and specifications for the new building. The two story building provided ground-floor space for the fire department. The second floor was divided into three rooms---a large council chamber and smaller rooms for the "fire laddies and a watchman." (A later newspaper article described the second floor functions as a "town hall, police court, clerk's office, etc.") After approval of the architectural plans for the building, the council delayed putting the project out to bid while it heard arguments for constructing the building of stone, concrete, or brick. The council decided on a facade of light colored brick and side and back walls of native stone. The *Big Timber Pioneer* assured its readers that the town would have a "metropolitan city hall." The council opened bids for construction of the town hall nine days after approving the plans. Frank Larson submitted the low bid of \$4,905 based on his own plans and specifications, and the council awarded him the contract. The building was ready for occupancy in October.¹⁰

John F. Asbury served as mayor of Big Timber from its incorporation until 1913 when he was succeeded by Jacob Kaiserman, the local manager of the Montana Power Company. In his final address to the Town Council, Asbury summarized the many civic improvements made during his term in office and charged his successor and the council with fulfilling two more Progressive era projects. First, he noted that the town had purchased a lot for a town library, but construction of a building required the passage of a one mill tax levy (to meet the requirements for Carnegie Foundation funding of the building). Second, he urged the council approve funding for a jail and police court. Both recommendations were later approved. The city jail was added to the back of the Big Timber Town Hall in 1913.¹¹

⁹ *Big Timber Pioneer*, March 19, 1908; The Pioneer Society of Sweet Grass County, Montana, comp., *Pioneer Memories* (Bozeman: Bozeman Business Service, 1960), 22-23.

¹⁰ Sweet Grass County Clerk and Recorder, Deed No. 2769; *Big Timber Council Proceedings*, February 16, 1909, May 3 and May 12, 1909; *Big Timber Pioneer*, April 15, August 26, and October 14, 1909.

¹¹ *Big Timber Council Proceedings*, May 5, 1913; R.L. Polk Directory, 1914-15.

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The 1913 jail was removed in 1955 when a single story, steel post and beam, fire hall addition was built onto the rear of the original Town Hall. The city offices moved from the building in 1966 and the fire department in 1995. The building is now in the ownership of a private corporation.¹²

Architectural Significance

The Big Timber Town Hall is a thoughtfully, well-designed adaptation of the Western Commercial style to a public building. It is a striking, yet functional building. The building blends well with the adjoining commercial buildings while at the same time includes features from municipal architecture of the period clearly defining its public function.

Montana has few city or town halls. Taxpayers did not often indulge in the expense of providing offices for municipal officers who served their communities unpaid while holding down other jobs. Regularly scheduled council meetings were most often held in the evenings in rented space. Those city and town halls that were built are most often combined with a firehall and/or jail. Montana's city and town halls listed in the National Register of Historic Places such as Anaconda, Belgrade, Butte, Conrad, Glendive, and Hamilton, all have a more imposing presence than Big Timber's Town Hall. Hamilton's City Hall (National Register, 1980), for example, displays more boldly those characteristics only hinted at in Big Timber. The free-standing two story building has a slightly projecting entrance pavilion topped by an open bell tower with a flared, steeple-like roof. The pavilion was flanked on the first floor by firehall doors. In the Big Timber Town Hall, the free-standing site is simulated by the distinctive light colored concrete brick which contrasted with the main street's more typical red brick and gray stone buildings; the color signified a function different from its neighbors and drew attention to it as if it were free standing. The projecting pavilion surmounted with a bell tower at Hamilton is subtly implied in Big Timber with the small cornice gable drawing attention to the roof-mounted bell tower.

The characteristic storefront of the Western Commercial style with its large plate glass windows, transoms, and bulkheads is in the Big Timber Town Hall replaced with a pair of firehouse doors. The doors are flanked by tall narrow windows set in brick panels defined by brick quoins. The second-floor fenestration, however, carries on the rhythm of Big Timber's other main street, two-story commercial buildings.

¹² Owen Moore (former member Big Timber Fire Department), interview by Ron Wiggins, June 9, 1997; Kenneth Thomposn (Sweet Grass County Sheriff, 1956-1978), interview by Ron Wiggins, March 7, 1996; Lois Stevens (Big Timber City Treasurer, 1976 to present), interview by Ron Wiggins, March 4, 1996.

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Livingston Enerprise. April 6, 1907.

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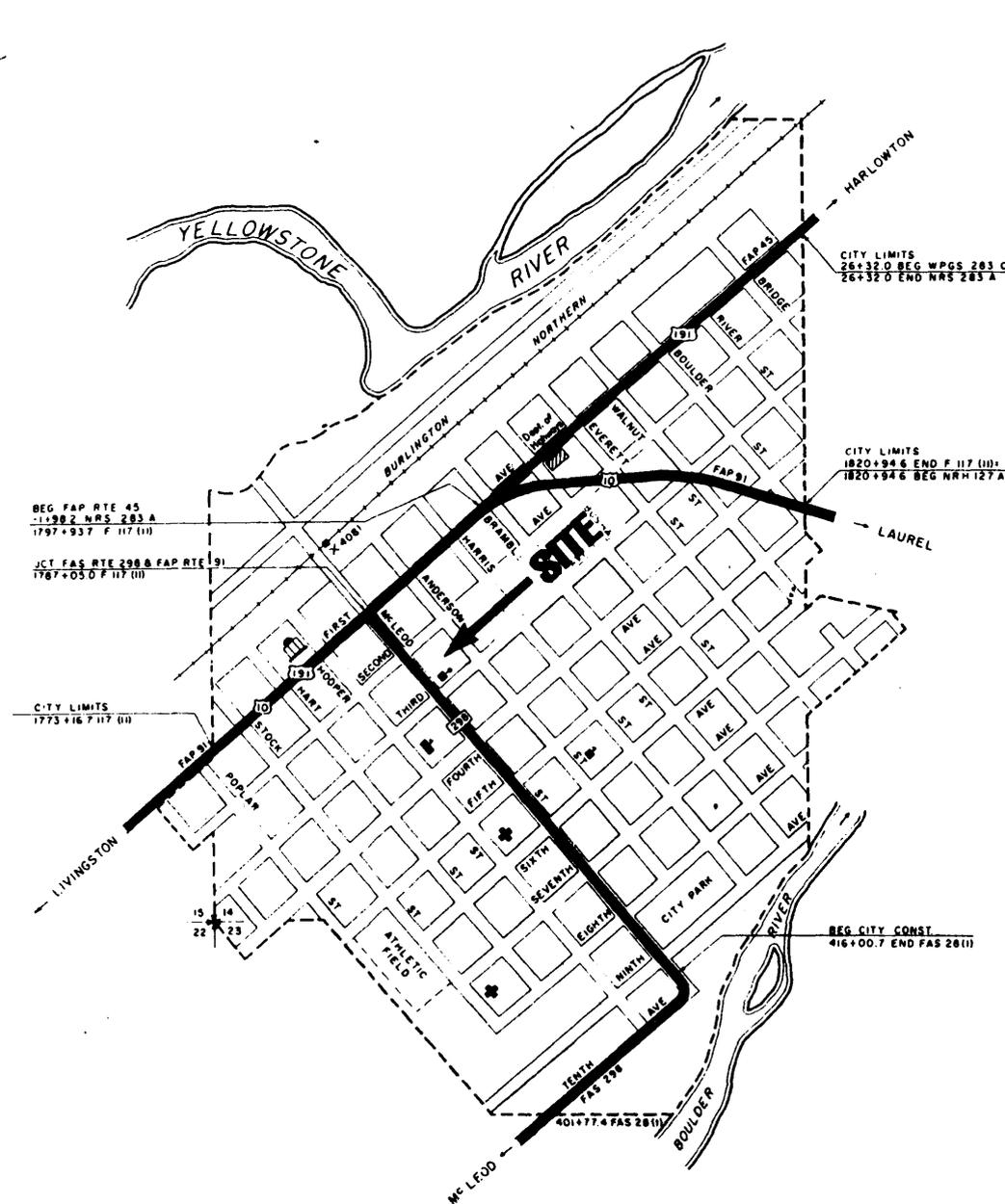
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Sweet Grass County Clerk and Recorder. Deed No. 2769.

Thompson, Kenneth (Sweet Grass County Sheriff, 1956-1978). Interview by Ron Wiggins, March 4, 1996.



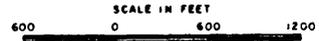
LEGEND

	PROPOSED ROAD
	GRADED AND DRAINED ROAD
	GRAVEL OR STONE ROAD
	LOW TYPE BITUMINOUS ROAD
	PAVED ROAD
	DIVIDED ROAD - TRAFFIC FLOW
	FEDERAL AID INTERSTATE SYSTEM
	FEDERAL AID PRIMARY SYSTEM
	FEDERAL AID SECONDARY SYSTEM
	INTERSTATE ROUTE MARKER
	U.S. NUMBERED ROUTE MARKER
	STATE ROUTE MARKER
	OTHER ROUTE MARKER
	CORPORATE BOUNDARY LINE
	NON-EXISTENT DEDICATED STREET
	CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT
	URBAN EXTENSION BOUNDARY
	RAILROAD AND STATION
	POST OFFICE
	COURT HOUSE
	ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
	HIGH SCHOOL
	HOSPITAL
	ELEVATION



CITY PLAT
BIG TIMBER
 SWEET GRASS COUNTY
 MONTANA

1970 CENSUS 1,592



BIG TIMBER TOWN HALL

Copies of this map are available for a nominal cost at the Montana Department of Highways—Helena, Montana 59601

REVISED DEC 31, 1976