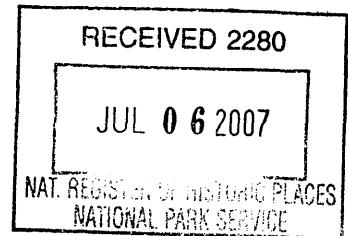


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM



1. Name of Property

historic name: Big Arm School

other name/site number:

2. Location

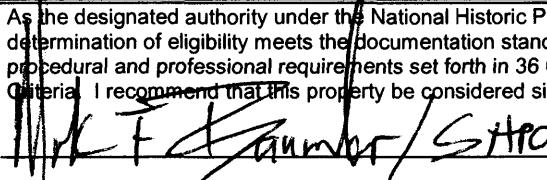
street & number: 7th and D Streets not for publication: n/a

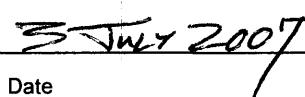
city/town: Big Arm vicinity: n/a

state: Montana code: MT county: Lake code: 047 zip code: 59910

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets _ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant _ nationally _ statewide _ locally.

 Signature of certifying official/Title

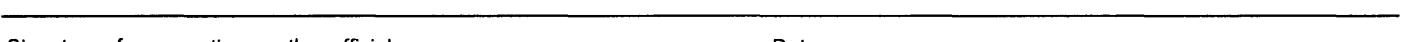
 Date

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

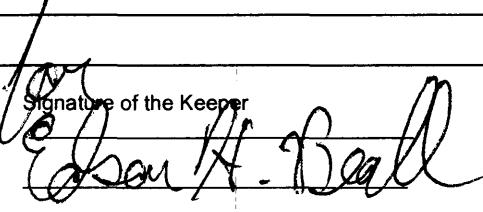
Date

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): _____

 Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

 8-16-07

Big Arm School
Name of Property

Lake County, Montana
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property:	Public - local	Number of Resources within Property		
Category of Property:	Building	Contributing Noncontributing		
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register:	n/a	3	0	Buildings
Name of related multiple property listing:	n/a	0	0	Sites
		0	0	Structures
		0	0	Objects
		3	0	Total

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:

Current Functions:

EDUCATION/school
SOCIAL/meeting hall

7. Description

Architectural Classification

Materials:

OTHER: One-room schoolhouse

foundation:	ROCK; CEMENT
walls:	WOOD; COMPOSITE
roof:	METAL
other:	BRICK (chimney)

Narrative Description

The small town of Big Arm, Montana is located in the shadow of the Mission Mountains, along the west side of Flathead Lake. Approximately ten miles north of the county seat of Polson, Montana, Big Arm is nestled on the south shore of the lake's "Big Arm" bay. Located within the Flathead Indian Reservation, the Big Arm School is owned by School District #23, and situated on a gentle hill south of Highway 93.

The one-story, wood-frame, 36' x 24' school faces east, and features a front gable roof covered with metal sheeting. Gable returns accentuate the wood-shingle gable ends. A wide frieze board further defines the roof-wall juncture. The original narrow clapboard siding is intact throughout the building. The east elevation features a modern (1975) enclosed front gabled porch, covered with wide clapboard. The original, even, fenestration pattern of the east elevation is present beneath the porch structure, and includes a centered entry with one single, two-over-two double-hung window on either side. The original steps to the entry are also present beneath the porch structure.

The north elevation features a ribbon of vertically-divided two-over-two double-hung windows: one pair of windows on either side of tripled windows. A modern wood door provides entry to the front (east) porch from its north elevation. Another 1970s-era pedestrian door is located on the south side of the west elevation. The south elevation has no openings.

The interior of the school retains the original floorplan. From the centered front entrance off the enclosed porch, there is a six-foot-by-seven-foot entry hall flanked by eight-and-a-half-foot-by-seven-foot cloak rooms. Though the cloak room doors and transoms have been removed, and the use of the space has changed, the room divisions remain intact. Both cloak rooms lead to the single classroom space that makes up the west three-quarters of the building. Though there have been some modifications to the interior, including a pass-through cut in the entry hall/classroom wall, much of the interior finishes remain, including the fir flooring, bead board wainscoting, door and window trim, the blackboard across the south wall, and several original interior doors and transoms. Electricity and a modern ceiling were installed during the 1940s.

(see continuation sheet)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria:	A, C	Areas of Significance:	EDUCATION COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ARCHITECTURE
Criteria Considerations (Exceptions):	n/a	Period(s) of Significance:	c. 1917 - 1952
Significant Person(s):	n/a	Significant Dates:	c.1917, 1935, 1952
Cultural Affiliation:	n/a	Architect/Builder:	n/a

Narrative Statement of Significance

The Big Arm School is significant and eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level for its important associations with the history of education in the Flathead Valley, and the community development of Big Arm. It gains additional significance as an important local example of standardized one-room schoolhouse design. For these reasons, the building is eligible for listing under Criteria A and C.

Historic Context

There are few buildings associated with the Euro American settlement of the American west more poignant than the one-room schoolhouse. Between 1870 and 1950, the establishment of a community schoolhouse spoke to the permanence of settlement, the importance placed in securing the future of the next generation, and the homogenization of multiple cultures. Indeed, the “process of Americanization took place in country schools.”¹ The history of country schools is nearly as old as non-Indian settlement of the New World, dating to 1647 colonial New England, when the first statute providing for the establishment of a school system was enacted in America. These formal institutions were called “petty schools” and provided the model for public grammar schools. Typical of New England culture at that time, the emphasis in these early schools was reading, religion, and law. By and large, however, colonial schooling took the form of “subscription schools,” which were funded by tuitions and home schooling. Formal education was reserved, for the most part, for children from white upper or middle class families.²

Thomas Jefferson was one of the most vocal advocates for public education in the United States, and understood that “the people are the safest depositories of government” and thought “free education imperative for a strong democracy.”³ His strong advocacy on the topic lead to the establishment of the “school section” within each township surveyed in the Northwest Territories, and eventually the American West. Though battles over funding, credentials, and control of public education’s future continued through the first half of the nineteenth century, by 1860, it was clear that the country school was vital to the economic and social fabric of the young country.⁴

In the wake of the Civil War, and with the increase in immigration and the settlement of Indian territories, the American population looked toward public schools to educate children not only in the basics of arithmetic and reading, but also in identification and recognition of American culture. Curriculums began to be standardized, and a new emphasis was placed on the English language and history of the United States. For many immigrant and Native American students, the result was disassociation from their own heritage in favor of a homogenous Americanized culture. Certainly this was the intent of many mission and Indian boarding schools established throughout the country at the end of the nineteenth century. The goal for many of these institutions was to indoctrinate students into “civilized” American society.

(see continuation sheet)

¹ Andrew Gulliford, “Country School Legacy,” *Utah Preservation/Restoration*, vol. II, 1981, p. 44.

² Andrew Gulliford, *America’s Country Schools* (Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1984), pp. 36-38.

³ *Ibid*, p. 38.

⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 38-40.

Big Arm School
Name of Property

Lake 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 2.75 acres

UTM References: **Zone** **Easting** **Northing**
 11 702588 5297039 (NAD 27)

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 33, T24N, R21W, MPM

Verbal Boundary Description

All of Block 17, Big Arm Original Townsite

Boundary Justification

The boundary is drawn, according to legally recorded lines, to include the property historically associated with the Big Arm School.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Kate Hampton
organization: MTSHPO date: May 2007
street & number: 1410 8th Ave. telephone: (406) 444-3647
city or town: Helena state: MT zip code: 59620-1202

Property Owner

name/title: School District #23
street & number: 111 4th Ave. E
city or town: Polson state: MT zip code: 59860

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Outhouses:

North of the school building are two outhouses. Both are wood-framed buildings sided with narrow clapboard and milled cornerboards. Wood shingles cover the steeply-pitched, side gable roofs. Fenestration is limited to vertical plank doors on the south(front) elevations and boarded-over small single openings in the gable ends. Free-standing vertical plank walls provide protection from the wind and privacy across the south elevations.

Integrity:

The Big Arm School's integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association remain intact. Sufficient integrity of workmanship and materials is intact to convey its significant historic associations. Though the building's integrity of design has been compromised by the modern front porch, the original architectural elements, fenestration patterns and floorplan are intact.

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Since its establishment in the mid-nineteenth century, the agents at the Flathead Indian Reservation in Western Montana placed a high priority on school programs for the Kootenai, Salish, and Pend'Orielle tribal members living there. At the center of the education program on the reservation was the St. Ignatius Mission. Established in 1854 by Jesuit missionaries it was the home of the first Jesuit theologate and industrial arts school in the Northwest, the first Catholic Sisters and Catholic school in Montana, and the first hospital, sawmill, flour mill, printing press, carpenter shop and blacksmith shop in the Mission Valley.⁵

At the mission school, "traditional religious and cultural practices were strongly discouraged while instruction in the Christian doctrines took place utilizing pictures, statues, hymns, prayers and storytelling."⁶ As was common on reservations, the mission school received federal support. In 1892, a report to the Supervisors of Education stated:

The only school upon this reservation is the Catholic contract school, St. Ignatius Mission. This is probably the best reservation boarding school in the service...The kindergarten is a great success. The children are healthy and happy. They learn English quickly and in some cases have forgotten their native tongue...The buildings are spacious, comfortable, and pleasant.⁷

Despite this endorsement, federal policy regarding subsidizing religious institutions was being challenged. In 1891, national debates regarding the separation of church and state culminated in a shift in policy voiced by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs:

The policy of aiding church schools is one that has grown up as a matter of administration, having only a semblance of legislative authority. But the rapid development of the public-school system has brought the Government schools into a position where it is entirely feasible for them at an early day to assume the whole charge of Indian education...it is...utterly repugnant to our American institutions and to our American history to take from public monies funds for the support of sectarian institutions.⁸

The Commissioner's first action was to cut off any new monies appropriated to the mission schools. At the same time, contracts to ecclesiastical schools were reduced repeatedly over the next few years. In 1895, the Appropriations Bill formally stated: "It is hereby declared to be settled policy of the Government to hereafter make no appropriation whatever to education in any sectarian school."⁹

On the Flathead Reservation, the impact of these decisions was sorely felt. The mission school reduced the number of students in their care, at the same time that the Indian population within the reservation boundary was rising. Chief Charlo's Band of Bitterroot Salish were forcibly removed to the reservation in 1891, compounding the need for more school space. Chief Charlo's traditional band opposed the policy of sending their children away to boarding school, and the agent requested the mission to set up a satellite school at the agency, closer to the band's new home at the southern end of the reservation. This agency school was run by the mission, but its facilities were much more modest. Agent

⁵ Today, there remains only the 1891 Mission church, and two small cabins, the original homes of the Jesuit Fathers and the Providence Sisters. Though the physical remains may be few, there is a lasting heritage which has continued and will continue through the years. St Ignatius Mission was placed in the National Register of Historic Places on June 19, 1973, NR reference number: 73001053, on file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT.

⁶ Carlyn Marr, "Assimilation Through Education: Indian Boarding Schools in the Pacific Northwest," *Modern American Poetry: An Online Journal and Multimedia Companion to Anthology of Modern American Poetry* edited by Cary Nelson, (Oxford University Press, 2000), http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/a_f/erdrich/boarding/marr.htm.

⁷ O.H. Parker, "Reports to the Supervisors of Education," Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Washington, D.C., 1892, p. 626.

⁸ *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1891, pp.68-69. For more information regarding the Church-State conflict see Frederic Mitchell, "Church-State Conflict: A Little-Known Part of Continuing Church-State Conflict Found in Early Indian Education," *Journal of American Indian Education*, vol.2, no. 3, (October 1962).

⁹ 29 Stat 345.

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Joseph T. Carter relayed the importance of the mission school to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1897, noting: "the completeness and good work of this industrial school is not perhaps appreciated by the Department, but certainly is by the agent and the Indians themselves." Three years later, Agent W.H. Smead reported: "The appropriation for maintaining the contract school at the St. Ignatius Mission having been discontinued leaves the reservation entirely without school facilities, with the exception of a small day school at the agency and a limited number of children which the Jesuit fathers still continue to provide care for. Considering the large number of children here of school age, the necessity for immediate provision by the Government is apparent, and I sincerely trust that action will soon be taken to this end." By 1904, Agent Samuel Bellew complained "the buildings [at the agency school] are rented from the Catholic fathers. They are entirely too small, inconvenient, out of repair and poorly located." Seeking an alternative to education programs offered by the agency, a number of Indian families choose to transfer their children to non-reservation schools.¹⁰

These changes to education practices on the reservation coincided with pressure to comply with the 1887 General Allotment Act, whereby tribal members were given fee-simple allotments and the "unallotted" land was opened for non-Indian settlement. The allotment process officially began on the Flathead Indian Reservation in 1910, though many had already moved there in anticipation of the opening, and homesteaders began to claim the land within the reservation boundary.

Non-Indian Settlement of the Flathead Lake Area

The Flathead Valley was one of the last areas in the trans-Mississippi West to be settled by whites, primarily because of its geographic isolation. Surrounded by rugged mountains and a large lake and characterized by long, hard winters, the valley remained difficult and hazardous to access for decades after the first whites came through the area in the early 1800s. The establishment of the Blackfeet and Flathead Indian Reservations in 1855 insulated the region further. In the 18th and 19th centuries, bands of Kootenai lived at the head of Flathead Lake and hunted and fished in the upper valley, but they did not have large, permanent settlements in the area. A few trappers and traders passed through the valley in the early 1800s, and around 1812 the Hudson's Bay Company established an outpost, Howse House, near the head of Flathead Lake. Following the Treaty of 1846, which designated land south of the 49th parallel as United States soil, various prospectors, trappers, settlers and adventurers passed through the Flathead Valley. None are known to have settled permanently, and the area remained virtually unknown to the outside world.

The Mission Valley south of Flathead Lake was similarly unsettled by non-Indians through most of the 19th century. David Thompson established a trading post, Saleesh House, further south and west, near present day Thompson Falls, by the 1810s, but the white presence in the Mission Valley was limited until the arrival of the Jesuits in 1854, who moved their St. Ignatius Mission there from present-day Cusik, Washington.

The situation changed because of developments in Canada. In 1862, prospectors discovered gold in the Kootenai District of British Columbia north of the Flathead Valley, and miners and freighters bringing supplies from Missoula passed through the Mission and Flathead Valleys on their way north. A minor gold rush on Libby Creek in 1867 again brought people through the area. The trail to the gold fields followed a rough wagon road along the west shore of Flathead Lake.

The first real influx of white settlers to the area arrived after the Northern Pacific Railroad (NPRR) was completed to Ravalli, north of Missoula. Some of the valley's early settlers were actually NPPR workers whose jobs had been discontinued and who decided to locate permanently in Montana. To accommodate the Flathead Lake traffic, a slow

¹⁰ By 1906, new administrators took over the mission school at St. Ignatius, which began to rebuild its Indian education program without federal aid. Two new reservation day schools were constructed to the north at Ronan and Polson, easing some of the pressures at the Jocko agency school, though the need for improved facilities was still apparent. Jesse E. Tyler, Superintendent, "Report of the Superintendent of Flathead School," *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, 1906, pp. 257-8.

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sailboat was converted in 1883 to steam. Steamboat service was established on Flathead Lake in 1885 to carry settlers and supplies to the upper valley.¹¹

In 1891, the Great Northern Railroad began to cross the upper Flathead Valley. To support the construction crews, trains hauled goods to Ravalli, where wagons picked them up and freighted them more than 30 miles to the foot of Flathead Lake. Steamboats then carried the goods to the head of navigation at Demersville, 20 miles north of the head of Flathead Lake. Construction of the Great Northern Railway was not the only railroad work that kept Flathead Valley residents employed, however. The Canadian Pacific Railroad was also being constructed across Canada in the 1890s. Supplies for railroad workers at Fort Steele were brought to Demersville by boat and then hauled north by freighters.¹²

Because it was, and is located within the Flathead Indian Reservation boundary, the area that would become Big Arm, Montana, though along the west shore travel route, did not develop non-Indian settlements until after the allotment of the reservation in 1910.

Almost immediately, homesteads in the fertile lands surrounding the lake were claimed. Longtime resident Roberta Culp wrote:

When the homesteaders claimed their 40 to 160 acre farm units in Big Arm in 1910 and 1911, there were about six or seven families of Indians already settled. The surveyed townsite was 645 acres and the population was 640 people. The U.S. Government had set aside one-half-mile square for a townsite, giving it the name of Big Arm because it lay on the "big arm" of Flathead lake. Over the area with checker board precision could be seen the survey stakes; most were wood, some were iron with shiny brass caps. The lots on the water front and those most suitable for business location sold like hotcakes as soon as the homesteaders began to move in. Residence lots went begging; some never sold.

Neatly tucked away in the same small valley with Loon Lake district is Big Arm district. Bounded on the north by Flathead Lake and on the east and west by hills that so separate it from the rest of the world as to make it seem almost like a world of its own.¹³

The Montana School Board established the Big Arm School District #65 on September 1, 1911. Prior to construction of the Big Arm School, students met first at one of the local churches. Residents of the Loon Lake District #43, located just to the south and established November 26, 1910, cooperated with the Big Arm residents to build the Loon Lake School, where children of both districts attended. The U.S. government established a separate school for Indian children at that time, "but that was dropped when all the kids attended classes in the new Big Arm School."¹⁴

Big Arm townspeople constructed the Big Arm School in the mid-1910s, which served the students of the community, both Indian and non-Indian, for fifty years. The school house was used not only as a classroom, but also as a dance hall, meeting forum, and polling place. Mr. Howe served as Big Arm's first teacher. By the 1915-1916 school year, M.P. Elder served as instructor, and taught 33 students from 15 families. The summer of 1916, thanks largely to a thick snow pack, yielded a bountiful harvest, but local farmers were disappointed the following years, as below-average rainfall made successful farming difficult.¹⁵ This fluctuation in agricultural fortunes may account for the substantial drop in the number

¹¹ "Flathead Facts, Descriptive of the Resources of Missoula County" (Missoula MT: Missoula Publishing Co, 1890), available in Montana – Flathead County – History file, Flathead County Library, Kalispell, MT., pg. 21; Isch, "Development", pg. 73; Swaney, Andres, :statement of Andrew W. Swaney" (1923, typed) available in Montana – Flathead County –History file, Flathead County Library, Kalispell, MT. pg. 1.

¹² Swanberg, A. V. in Elwood, *Kalispell*, op. cot. Pg. 107

¹³ Roberta Culp, *In the Shadow of the Missions*, p. 16.

¹⁴ p. 83.

¹⁵ Roberta Culp, *In the Shadows of the Missions*, p. 18.

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of students at the school. During the 1916-1917 school year, Myrtle Balwin taught 16 students, and 14 students, many from the same families, the following year. Despite the economic downturn, the Big Arm community endured, and the school catered to local families through the 1920s and early 1930s.¹⁶

By 1935, however, economic problems forced the school to close. Students attended school in a small one-room shack, and were taught by Glenn Walker. Five students attended the "shack school" in the 1935-36 school year, taught by Miss Louise Senft. In 1936, the Loon Lake School closed, and the students from both districts returned to the Big Arm School. According to Sid Walker, a student during the mid-to-late 1930s, attendance varied from five to 20 students during that period.

Sid vividly remembers the coffee pot incident with Teacher Paul Syverson who taught the 1939-1940 school year. Mr. Syverson used a one gallon honey bucket as a coffee pot everyday. He had clamped the lid on tight and put it on to heat. The pressure built up and the lid hit the ceiling. One girl said she got hot coffee spilled on her but the worst was the terrible stain the coffee made on the white calcimine ceiling. Every time it was repainted it would not be long and the stain would come through.¹⁷

In her wonderful book, *Lake County Country Schools*, Joyce Decker Wegner offers the remembrances of various former Big Arm students. One student, Hazel Montgomery Lenoir attended from 1940 to 1949. Wegner explains: "Enrollment was small most of those years with 1944-45 school year having only five students: Hazel and her two brothers, Martin and Alvin, sister Betty and teacher Marie Twitchel's brother Tommy Twitchel. Hazel wrote:"

There was a shortage of teachers due to the war and high school graduates were allowed to teach after a three-month training after graduation. Looking back, it must have been difficult for her with so little training and being so young. She had never lived away from her parents St. Ignatius home before and being so young, her parents insisted her brother go to Big Arm with her.

Other memorable teachers were Maggie Lannen; probably one of the best teachers Big Arm ever had, but a bit absent-minded. She would come to school with different colored stockings or blouse buttoned wrong and once came with her skirt caught up in the back of her underwear!! She never had any children of her own but knew how to bring out the best in her students. (Sid Walkers also agrees she was "better than most with discipline, which we rowdy boys needed. She made it interesting and kept us in line.") Grace Linse was a favorite of mine. She lived in Ronan and went home on weekends to be with her family.

The schoolhouse was one big room with a large entry that went the width of the building. We called it the Hallway. We hung our coats out there and extra desks and books were stored there. The school had no running water so of course we had outdoor toilets. Water was hauled in cream cans for drinking and washing hands. There was a dipper that everyone used to get a drink. Not very sanitary but we didn't know the difference. The school was heated with a big wood stove and hot lunch program consisted of bring soup in a jar to be heated at noon in a big pan of water. In the winter if you forgot and left it in the hallway with your coat it was apt to be frozen by lunchtime. Of course, you didn't dare put it in the hot water until it had thawed. I remember a few broken jars because we were too impatient. Big Arm also got some food from the government. I don't know if it was a school lunch program or food surplus. Two things that have stuck in my mind are raisins and grapefruit juice. The raisins because I loved them and the canned grapefruit juice because it was so sour and bitter. No one would drink it and the teacher finally divided it between families and sent it home with us. Our mothers probably couldn't get us to drink it either!

¹⁶ Joyce Decker Wegner, *Lake County Country Schools*, p. 5-6.

¹⁷ Joyce Decker Wegner, *Lake County Country Schools*, p. 6.

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We had the flag raising ceremony every morning, with the pledge of allegiance. It was quite an honor to be selected to take care of the flag. It was put up in the morning and taken down at four when school was dismissed, folded correctly and carefully put away. On Friday just before time to go home we cleaned the school room. Black board and erasers were cleaned, oiled sawdust was sprinkled on the wood floor and swept up. Wastebaskets were emptied and desks had to be neat and tidy and lined up in a row. At recess and noon when the weather was good some of the games we played were softball, pump-pump-pull away, Red Rover, Green Light-Red Light, and Kick the Can. In winter we built snow forts for snowball fights, made snowmen and played Fox and Geese.

We had the usual holiday parties but the Christmas program was the highlight of the year, with a play, Christmas Carols and poetry, etc. We practiced every Friday afternoon for at least six weeks to prepare for the Christmas program. Santa Claus would arrive at the end and hand out bags of candy and nuts to everyone, even the adults got a bag of candy. We made Christmas gifts to give to our parents. Some that I remember were crushed egg shells glued to nice shaped jars and painted with gold paint, cigar boxes decorated with macaroni and painted gold, and a length of two by four with three holed drilled for candles, and chicken wire attached to hold red candles and fir boughs.

Wegner continues with a story from Sid Walker:

Sid Walker remembers those Christmases with candles snapped onto the trees that were lit for only a few minutes. People kept a good eye on them. There was always a big turnout with people you hadn't seen all year. Winter was ice skating time on the bay – even the old ladies in long skirts skated until dark. Everyone used to get out and skate. Some had those big long blades. We used to get together and have a good time for the holidays. Sometimes Dad took us the three miles to school with a sleigh and team during the winter. Most of the time we went by Model T, our school bus.¹⁸

Hazel Lenoir continues:

One fall we had a pageant about the first Thanksgiving. I wore a beautiful beaded buckskin dress borrowed from the Couture family so I must have played Pocahontas. We made a stage with bed sheets on a wire for the curtain. It was fun and entertainment for the whole community. In the spring we practiced for the annual track meet with Rollins, Proctor, Dayton, and Elmo. Our eighth grade graduation was also combined with the other West Shore schools.

Roy and Richard Couture graduated eighth grade with me. Others I remember attending Big Arm were Dick and George Vinson, Gracie and Alice McBroom, Perry Price, and Kipling girls, Ensinger boys, Bernard and Leo Eneas and Tom Antiste, Frankie Thompkins, the Walkers, Jerry and Artie Rude whose mother taught the 1947-1948 school term, and Bobby McBroom. I have many good memories of the Big Arm community and the little one room school.¹⁹

¹⁸ Wegner, pp. 7-8.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 8.

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Consolidation and Closure of Big Arm School

Though enrollment remained steady after World War II, national trends in public education toward consolidation spelled the end to numerous one-room schoolhouses across the country, including Big Arm School.

The following account of Big Arm School District's consolidation and closure is taken directly from Wegner's book, Lake County Country Schools, pp. 8-9.

The high school consolidation to Polson caused a bit of a stir in February 1949. Ronan District #28 petitioned the commissioners to review high school districts. With growth on the West Shore Polson District #23 taxpayers were carrying all their building costs while serving the whole West Shore for high school. Small districts did cover bussing costs. Dayton called for a joint meeting of the Big Arm and Dayton boards on February 22 hoping to oppose the high school reorganization. They feared further consolidation of the elementaries in the future and little to no representation once part of Polson. It passed ten to six. So by February 23, 1949 the West Shore High School district was consolidated with Polson High School District #23.

In 1950 three Big Arm Eighth Grade Graduates: Robert Choate, Bradley Ensinger, and Richard Vinson were presented diplomas by Lake County Superintendent of Schools, J. B. Kiracofe in joint ceremonies with Elmo, Dayton, Proctor and Rollins at the Proctor School house. Big Arm students recited the "Kentucky Philosophy".

The consolidation issue with Polson continued. By February 4, 1952 Clerk Hazel Vinson recorded this issue at the Big Arm Board Meeting:

...the subject of moving the school into Polson in an effort to lower taxes and solve the bus problem. James Rude made a motion to call a community meeting to find out how everyone felt about it and to take a tentative vote, if necessary. Motion was seconded by Bob McBroom.

It was agreed that the board would look into the matter thoroughly and get all of the figures and facts to put before the people at such meeting.

The open meeting was held March 10, 1952 with all board members and clerk present with Mrs. Bartlett (?) to present information and answer public questions:

The Polson board had offered to take the Big Arm pupils for \$100 each tuition – plus their state money—also to take any extras who may move in on the High School bus – Big Arm to transport all possible(figured on 10) to Polson. Figuring that it would be possible to get a bus for \$2500, she showed the people that the school could be sent to Polson for 20 mills, where, if they remain here it would be 35.23 mills. She showed them the amount of extra mills that would have to be raised to continue with the bus at Big Arm another year and how they would save 15 mills by sending them to Polson. Vote was taken – Big Arm 23 – Polson 20.

Big Arm students joined with Elmo students to sing: "It Is No Secret" and "That Lucky Old Sun" for the graduation ceremony held that year with Big Arm, Elmo, Dayton, Proctor and Rollins. Big Arm graduate Betty Montgomery performed "Wit Weather Talk". George Vinson also graduated from Big Arm eighth grade in 1952. Mrs. Seibert was their teacher.

The board then held a meeting at which they asked Mrs. Seibert to teach the 1952-53 term. Mrs. Seibert asked for a raise, which cannot be given without voting more millage as the present budget is already as high as it can go. It was decided that a special election would be held to vote on levy's for raise in teacher's salary and transportation.

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A special May 9, 1952 board meeting was held to deal with the failure of the voted levies. Bob McBroom moved and Ed Hoyt seconded "*that the pupils be sent to Polson the next term is a bus could be contracted at a reasonable figure – inasmuch as the levy for the increase was voted down at the election.*" Big Arm students were thereafter bussed to Polson.

Some furnace problems, disputes over who would ride the Big Arm school bus, some new desk concerns and regular election and budget business consumed board meetings over the next months and years with annual letters to Polson to request acceptance of Big Arm students and agree on tuition. With the school closed board meetings were held in the home of the clerk to save heating and utility costs. This continued until Big Arm School District #65 was officially abandoned July 2, 1962.²⁰

E. Ross Hoyt attended the Big Arm School, and was a member of the last graduating class in 1952. He explains the significance of the school building to the community:

This building was built pre World War One and had been a vital center of the community. After the school closing in 1952 the building was further used as a community gathering center for the Big Arm Community Club, the Saddle Club, informal community library, and the Harmony Club, amongst other groups. This building was so central to the community that it was used as Big Arm's polling place. The school House is the last remnant of the original settlement and has a proud heritage of being an integral part of the village...²¹

Architectural Significance

National Trends in School Architecture

(taken from Architectural Historian Paul C. Diebold's excellent *Indiana's Public Common and High Schools MPD*, available online at: <http://www.in.gov/dnr/historic/adobepdf/schoolsmpdf.pdf>.)

Few cultural icons so completely illustrate and embody the historical trend that created them as the one- room school. A basic definition of the one-room school is a one story building, made for educational purposes, with only one classroom. Incidental storage rooms were often part of the floor plan. Most existing one-room schools date from the 1852-1910 period and reflect both vernacular and architect-style influences. One-room schools developed out of the vernacular building traditions of Anglo-American settlers. The same gable roofed, rectangular box with a temple-front orientation was used in churches, schools, town halls, and other public or semi-public buildings on the frontier. Its origins can be found in the simple proportions of the single-pen house, however, the change in orientation to a front gabled form was likely a functional consideration, allowing the main room to remain a single large volume with uniform window distribution. The symmetrical gable-front box also probably appealed to citizens and builders because it approximated a classical appearance. During the settlement era in Montana, the gable-front schoolhouse remained a dominant form.

The gable-front school began as a vernacular tradition, but architects latched onto the form by the mid-19th century and propagated it in building pattern books. Samuel Sloan published a design for a twelve room brick classical gable fronted school in his 1852 Model Architect. Sloan's design was a multiplicative expansion of the one-room school. James Johonnot's School-Houses of 1871 featured school houses by S.E. Hewes. Despising the one-room schools of previous generations, Hewes recommended updated designs with antechambers for storage and cloakrooms. Several of Hewes' plans were gable-front schools, while others were T-shaped or had other configurations and stylish Gothic or Italianate decoration. The State Superintendent's office did not recommend exterior treatments, other than to say they should be substantial and well built. The 1875 Report did include a recommended floor plan, a simple box with ante rooms for the

²⁰ Wegner, pp. 7-8.

²¹ E. Ross Hoyt to School District 23, May 1, 2006, letter on file at MTSHPO, Big Arm School National Register file, Helena, MT.

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entrance and cloakrooms. This plan conforms to a gable-fronted exterior by way of its window and door placement. The 1875 plan featured a heating stove, along with a discussion of proper ventilation for schools. Large windows were thought to be important not only for light, but for ridding schools of stale (exhaled) air. Stoves often did not pull fresh air from the outside to heat.

Siting was a very significant part of planning a schoolhouse. Land near the highest number of intended pupils was essential. Beyond this, builders gave careful planning to window placement in relation to natural light. Flanks of gable-front schools had banks of large double-hung windows, so that lighting typically came from due east or due west. 19th century educators believed that cross lighting was harmful to the eye. Some planners or trustees understood the benefits of steady northern facing natural light and oriented schools to have a bank of windows facing north. Without exception, one-room schools were placed to be square with the cardinal compass points. Unless site constrictions necessitated it, schools were usually set back from the road and provisions were usually made for a playground.

The considerations for standard schoolhouse design, then, were well established and widely available to communities by the turn of the twentieth century. Though the State of Montana did not regulate school architecture until 1919, it did so using the priorities outlined in nation-wide plan books and embodied in the Big Arm School.

Schools in Montana

The first public school districts in Montana Territory were established in 1866. The early schoolhouses were rough buildings, often of log construction, poorly lit and heated, with no running water. Compulsory attendance legislation was passed in 1887 although it was impractical and often impossible to enforce in rural areas. Records in 1901 indicate there were 182 rural schools in Montana, but that the average attending stood at less than 8 children per school. Beginning in 1902, the Superintendent of Public Instruction requested legislative assistance for transporting rural students and consolidating single room schools into larger, more inclusive programs. By 1906, standardized courses of study for Montana elementary and secondary schools were adopted widely. A movement to replace early log school buildings with frame, brick or stone gained momentum through the early years of the 20th century. Under state school law, the secretary of the State Board of Health was mandated to issue "suggestive plans for rural school buildings", and in 1919, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction May Trumper wrote:

With the rapid increase of population in Montana and the correspondingly large number of new school buildings being erected each year, it has become imperative that increased attention should be given to the furnishing of plans and specifications particularly for our smaller types of school buildings.²²

Superintendent Trumper introduced the work of architect W.R. Plew, Professor of Architectural and Civil Engineering at the State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts at Bozeman, who had compiled over two years a series of one and two room school building plans with "up to date suggestions regarding the best types of buildings and detail directions for their constructions."²³ Designed between 1917-1919, the building plans incorporate such recommendations as site selection, natural fitness, size of grounds, sanitation, layout, and site beautification. On the interior, optimal lighting, blackboard placement, heating, desk arrangements, etc. are all discussed.

²² Plew, W.R. "One and Two Room Rural School Buildings," University of Montana Bulletin, State College Series No. 11, Bozeman, Montana, 1919, introduction.

²³ Plew, p. 7.

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The Big Arm School is a fine representative of the philosophy and design recommendations of the State Departments of Health and Public Instruction. An exemplary prototypical Plan C1 school building, the Big Arm School demonstrates the guidance offered to rural school districts during this era. Plew noted that though the "C1" plan's exterior "is simple and plain it has not been prepared in a haphazard manner. The proportions are carefully considered and to obtain the desired result the plans should be faithfully followed." The basic design called for an entrance at the gable end flanked by single double-hung windows, and a bank of windows on one side-gable elevation. On the interior, small cloakrooms were located on either side of the entrance, while a large single classroom filled the rest of the space. The Big Arm School floorplan embodies this model exactly.

Conclusion

The Big Arm School is significant and eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its representation of the earliest settlement of the community and the local history of education. It gains additional significance under Criterion C, as an excellent and important example of early twentieth century one-room schoolhouse design.

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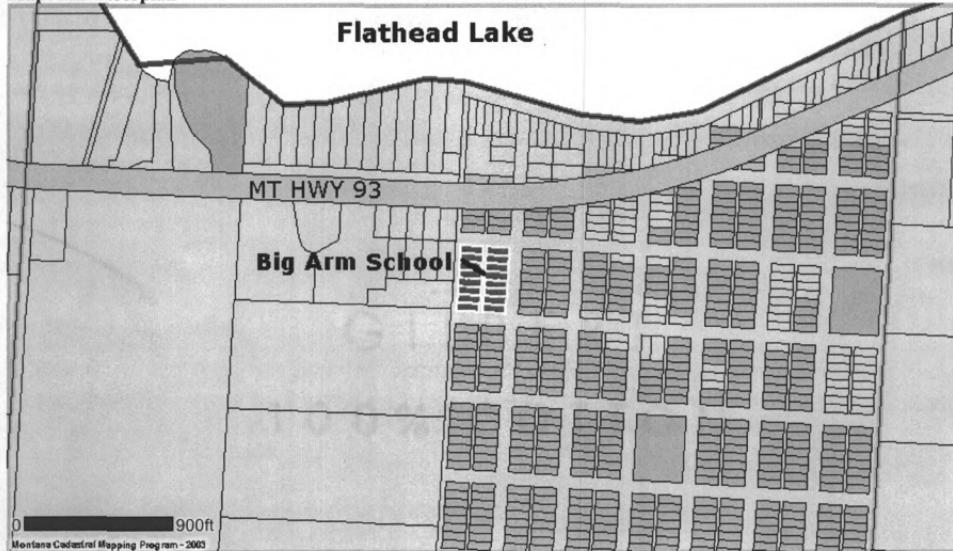
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Maps and Floorplan



Detail of Montana Cadastral Survey map showing location of Big Arm School.

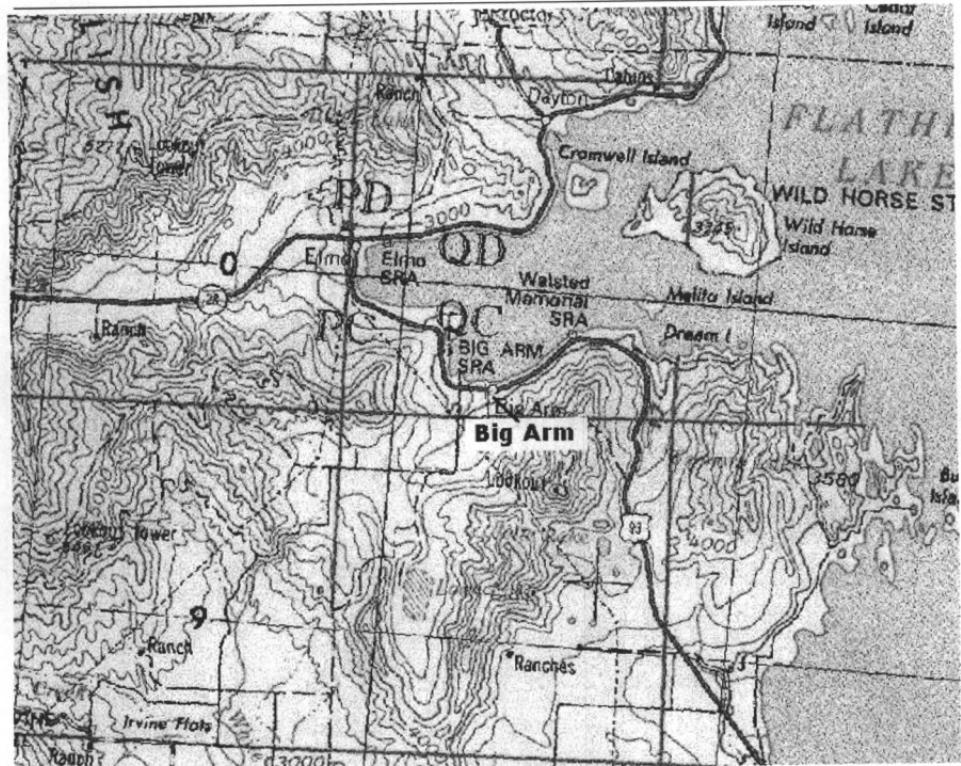
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Detail of USGA 100K Map – Polson, Montana, showing location of Big Arm in relation to Flathead Lake.

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2005 aerial photo showing location of Big Arm School in relation to Big Arm community.

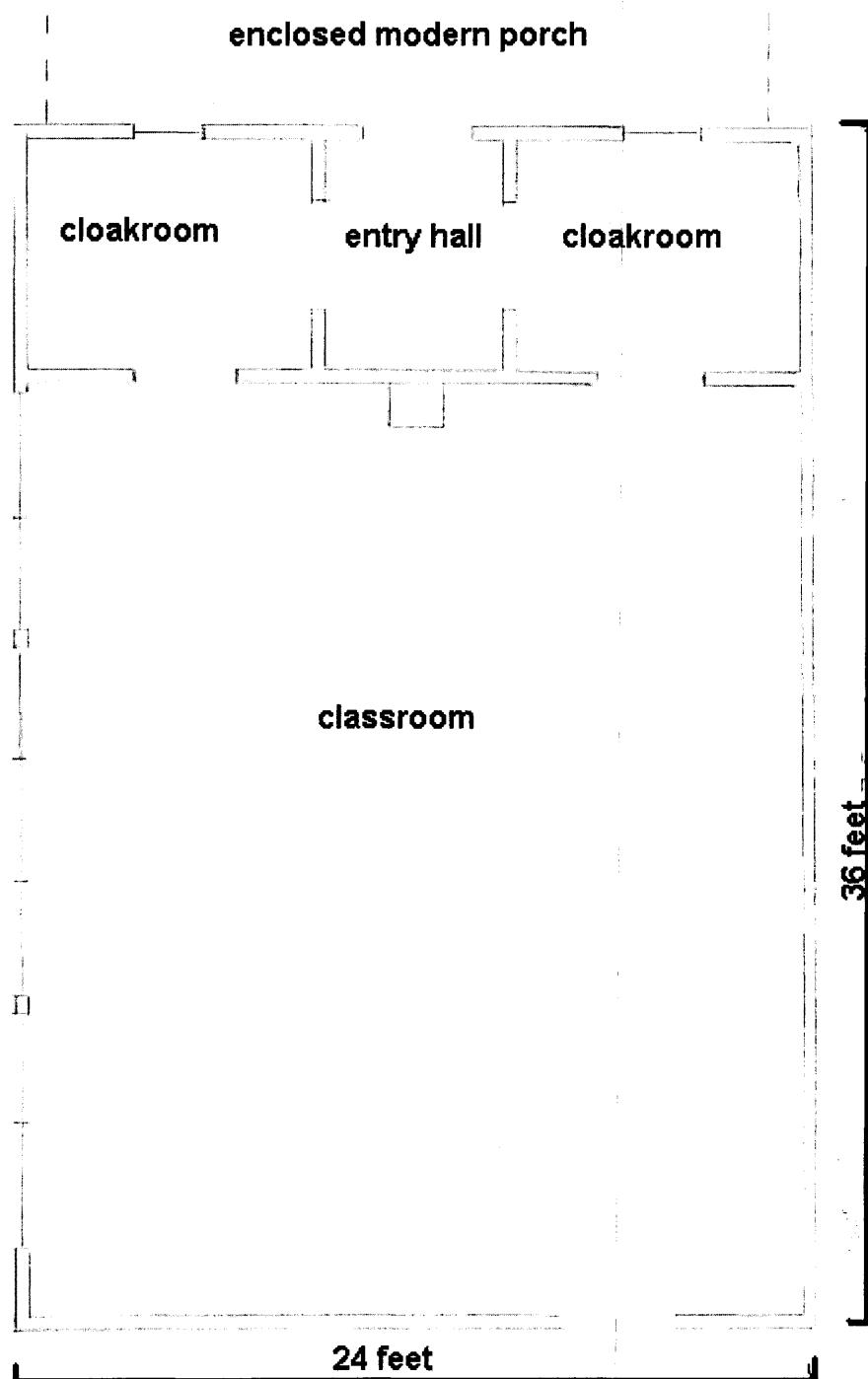
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Big Arm School Floorplan: Entry Hall/Cloakrooms at east end, classroom makes up the west $\frac{3}{4}$ of the 24' x 36' building.

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Photographs

In accordance with the March 2005 Photo Policy expansion, the photos that accompany this nomination are printed on HP Premium Plus Photo Paper, using a Hewlett Packard 100 gray photo cartridge. This combination of paper and inks is included on the NR's list of "Acceptable Ink and Paper combinations for Digital Images." The images are also recorded on an archival CD-R with a resolution at least 1200x1800 pixels, 300 dpi in "true color" 24-bit format. The images were taken in February 2007 by Alison Meslin.



East Elevation, 2007.

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North elevation, 2007.

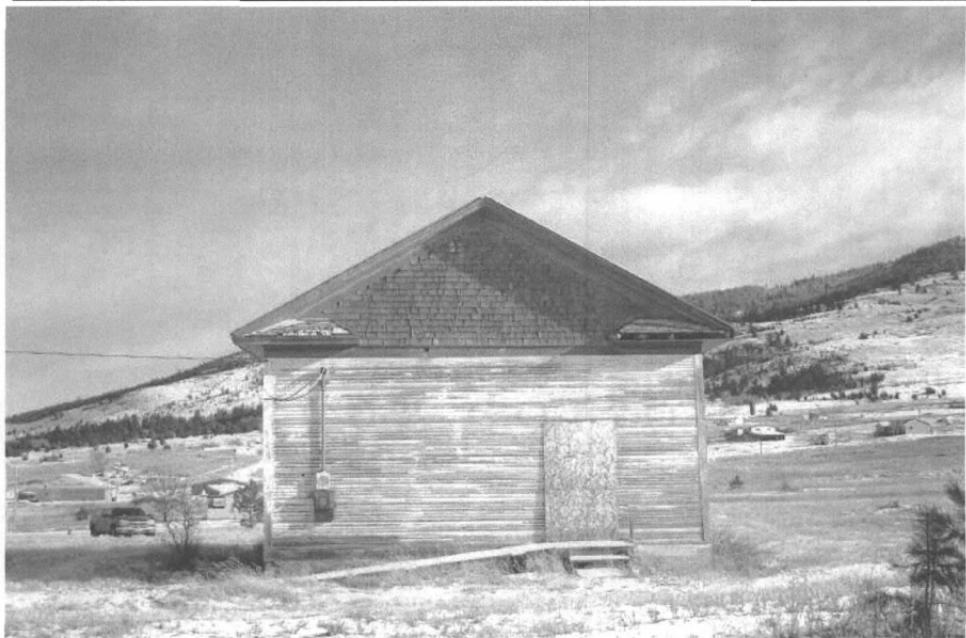
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West elevation, 2007.

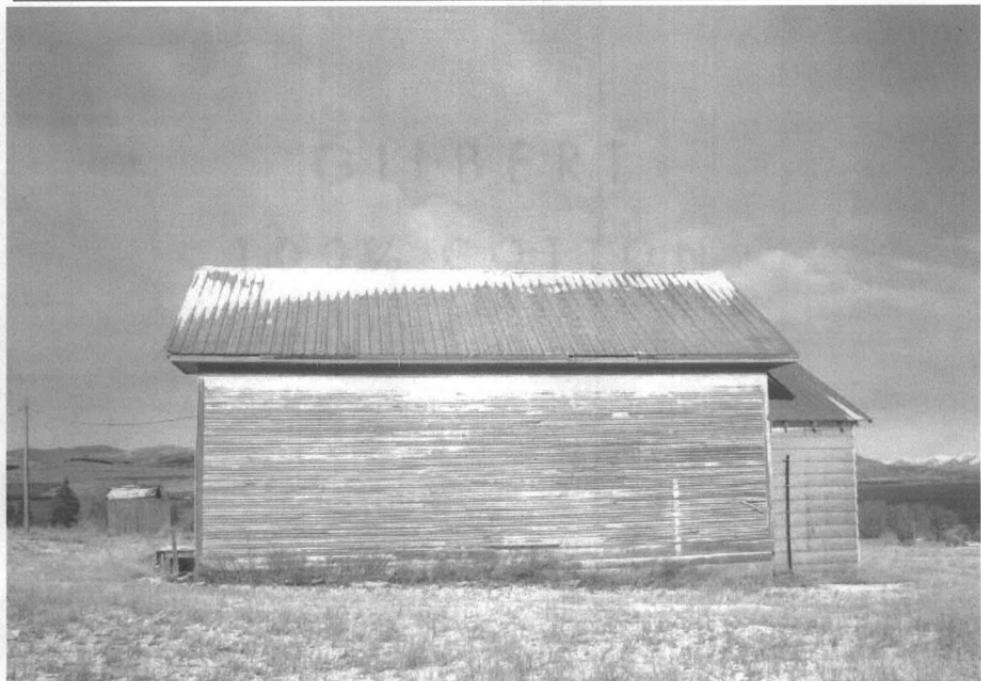
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South elevation, 2007.

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Outhouses, 2007.

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Interior view of south cloak room from entrance hall.

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Interior photo looking north from entry hall.

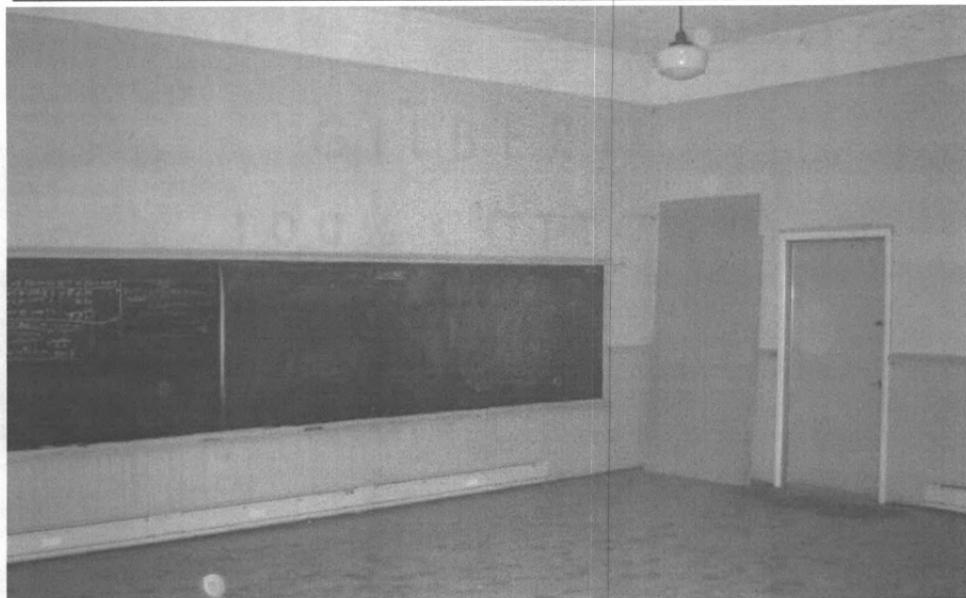
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Interior view of classroom to the southwest.

The rear exit door was installed during the 1960s when the building was used as a polling place.

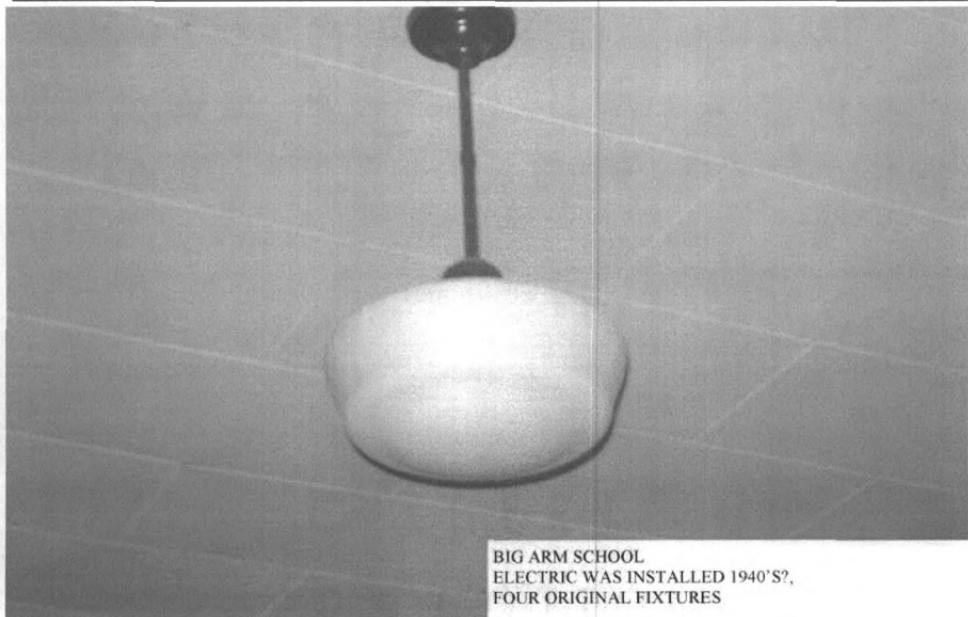
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BIG ARM SCHOOL
ELECTRIC WAS INSTALLED 1940'S?,
FOUR ORIGINAL FIXTURES

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Interior view of northeast corner of classroom.

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