NPS Form 10-900
(Rev. Oct. 1990)

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Eagle Butte School

other name/site number: North Eagle Butte School/24CH1118

2. Location

street & number: Eagle Butte School Road, 23 miles off State Highway 80 not for publication: n/a

city/town: Fort Benton vicinity: X

state: Montana code: MT county: Chouteau code: 015 zip code: 59446

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 X locally.

Mark F. Baumler / SHPO 12/15/2008

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:
X 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

1/22/2009

5. Classification

Ownership of Property: public-State

Category of Property: building

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: n/a

Name of related multiple property listing: n/a

Number of Resources within Property		
Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
		sites
	1	structures
		objects
1	1	Total

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:
EDUCATION/school

Current Functions:
VACANT

7. Description

Architectural Classification:
Late 19th and Early 20th Century American Movements
Craftsman

Materials:
foundation: STONE
walls: WOOD/clapboard
roof: ASPHALT COMPOSITION/shingles
other:

Narrative Description

Eagle Butte School stands at the intersection of two gravel roads on the broad rolling benchlands above the south shore of the Missouri River, about 23 miles northeast of Fort Benton, Montana. The school site includes a wood-frame, single-story rectangular schoolhouse with an attached teacherage and one associated wood-frame structure that covers a cistern. The schoolhouse is north-south oriented. Eagle Butte School Road runs east-west along its north-facing façade. Crop fields stretch out from the school in every direction, and the Bear's Paw Mountains that mark the skyline to the north are clearly visible from the schoolhouse entryway.

School (one contributing building)

The Craftsman-style schoolhouse/teacherage stands on a mortar foundation of cobblestones and sedimentary quartzite. On the exterior it measures 52 feet long by 20 feet wide. The front three-quarters of the building forms the schoolhouse. The teacherage occupies the rear quarter. Its front-gabled roof is covered in asphalt composition shingles. Prior to the asphalt shingles, the roof was covered by wood shingles overlaying tongue-and-groove boards. It has exposed rafter ends and deep eaves supported by brackets. The roof comprises two distinct sections, a main section covering the schoolhouse and a second, slightly lower section covering the teacherage. A ten-foot-tall wooden flagpole is affixed to the ridge of the roof at the building's north end, above the schoolhouse entrance. A barely-legible board sign affixed to the wall above the front entry reads "Eagle Butte Dist. 14."

The walls of the building are clad in narrow clapboard wood siding finished with vertical corner boards and frieze boards at the gable ends. All windows have double-hung sashes and wood-frames and are currently covered with sheets of plywood for protection. At least some of the existing windows are replacements: the six-over-six pane pattern in the west-wall windows differs from the one-over-one pane pattern visible in those windows in the 1915 school photo attached to this report. All exterior and interior doorways lack doors. The north elevation of the building contains the main entry to the schoolhouse. The entry is centered on the wall and is flanked by symmetrically-placed one-over-one windows to either side. An opening located over the front door that originally contained a glass transom has been filled in with drop-lap siding. The west elevation of the schoolhouse has a ribbon of four window openings clustered at the south end of the wall (where they are centered on the interior wall of the classroom). Each of the openings is filled with a single large six-over-six window. The west elevation of the teacherage features a single, two-over-two window centered in the wall. The south elevation of the building is the rear wall of the teacherage. It features two two-over-two windows symmetrically placed in either half of the wall so that each window lights one of the two interior rooms. The east elevation of the teacherage contains a doorway flanked to the north by a single two-over-two window. The east elevation of the schoolhouse itself is featureless.

(see continuation sheet)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria: A; C

Areas of Significance: EDUCATION; ARCHITECTURE

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): n/a

Period(s) of Significance: 1915-1965

Significant Dates: 1915, 1965

Significant Person(s): n/a

Architect/Builder: n/a

Cultural Affiliation: n/a

Narrative Statement of Significance

The Eagle Butte schoolhouse is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with the homestead boom (and bust) in north-central Montana and the associated development (and demise) of rural communities like Eagle Butte. In the rural West of the late 19th and early 20th century, the one room schoolhouse embodied progress and permanence and proliferated with the rise of countless countryside communities. "To the western frontier settlements, however, the rural school was much more than a nostalgic heirloom of Americana—it was a potent message carrier of progress. The schoolhouse symbolized the earliest visual proof of a commitment to a better way of life for the families who ventured west[1]." Built in 1915, the schoolhouse remains the single biggest testament to the repeated social, economic, and ecological transformations that accompanied the rise and fall of homesteading in the Eagle Butte area. Few homestead-era residential complexes endure, and no other building in the vicinity conveys the associated historic contexts as forcefully as the Eagle Butte schoolhouse, which ceased operations in 1965.

Furthermore, the Eagle Butte schoolhouse is a prototypical school building representative of those recommended by the State Departments of Health and Public Instruction for rural school districts during the period of its construction. An exemplar of the State's suggested "Plan C1," it is a fine representative of Progressive-era health and education philosophies and associated architectural design elements. The basic one-room schoolhouse design en vogue during the northcentral Montana homestead boom, and embodied by Eagle Butte, called for an entrance at the gable end flanked by single double-hung windows, and a bank of windows on one side wall. On the interior, small cloakrooms were located on either side of the entry hall, while a large single classroom filled the rest of the schoolhouse. Other interior features recommended by the State and present in the Eagle Butte School are the chalkboard situated behind the teacher's desk, the chalkboard located on the side wall, and the book shelves located in the corner of the classroom. The Eagle Butte school floorplan deviates from the C1 plan only by virtue of the fact that its bank of windows occupied the right, not the left, wall of the classroom and the fact that it has an attached teacherage. Although the State Departments of Health and Public Instruction preferred that the windows be on the left (east) wall, having the windows on the right (west) wall was acceptable as long as there were "two large unbroken walls for blackboard space," as at Eagle Butte.[2] The teacherage also conforms to modifications prescribed to accommodate common local conditions: Plan C1 Architect W. R. Plew and his employers recognized that "for rural communities in Montana it is sometimes necessary that the district furnish a house for the teacher," and his publication included specifications and plans for attached living quarters. Those specifications suggested teacherages of two symmetrical rooms attached to the rear of the schoolhouse. It retains sufficient integrity to clearly convey its historical associations for listing under Criterion A.[3]

The building is also significant architecturally, and is eligible for listing under Criterion C, for its aforementioned exemplification of one-room schoolhouse architecture of the period as well as its status as a well-preserved example of early-twentieth century Craftsman construction. Although simple in design and modest in scale, the school reflects common Craftsman characteristics, including a gently pitched gable roof, exposed rafter tails, multi-pane windows, and narrow-gauge lap siding. The Craftsman style proliferated in modest residential building around the time of Eagle Butte's construction. Its embodiment of both a widespread architectural style of the period as well as of more specific Progressive-era schoolhouse design elements make Eagle Butte School worthy of listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C.

(see continuation sheet)

[1] Kingston Heath, *A Dying Heritage: One-Room Schools of Gallatin County, Montana*, edited by Camille Wells (Harrisonburg, VA: Vernacular Architecture Forum, 1982): 201-216.

[2] W. R. Plew, *One and Two Room Rural School Buildings. University of Montana Bulletin, State College Series No. 11.* (Bozeman, MT: MSU bulletin prepared for the State Departments of Health and Public Instruction, 1919): p. 24.

[3] Ibid, p. 53.

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:
_x_ State Historic Preservation Office
___ Other State agency
___ Federal agency
___ Local government
___ University
___ Other
Specify Repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: less than one acre

UTM References: **Zone** 12 **Easting** 562,052 **Northing** 5,303,930 (NAD 83)

Legal Location (Township, Range & Section(s)): NW-NW-NW-NE ¼ of section 34; T25N, R12E

Verbal Boundary Description: The site is contained within an area that measures ca. 150 ft. N/S by 35 ft. E/W. This rectangle is centered on UTM Point 562052E, 5303930N (Zone 12, NAD 83).

Boundary Justification: Site boundaries arbitrarily established based on the visible extent of cultural materials and cultural features on the ground surface that are associated with the Eagle Butte School.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Delia Hagen
organization:
street & number: 660 River Court
city or town: Missoula
date: Dec. 2008
telephone: (406) 360-0120
state: MT zip code: 59801

name/title: Patrick Rennie; Rachel Manley
organization: DNRC; MTSHPO
street & number: 1625 11th Ave.; 1410 8th Ave.
city or town: Helena state: MT
date: March 2005
telephone: (406) 444-2882; (406) 444-3647
zip code: 59620

Property Owner

name/title: State of Montana-DNRC
street & number: 1625 11th Ave.
city or town: Helena state: MT
telephone: (406) 444-2882
zip code: 59620

(Section 7 continued)

The interior of the schoolhouse section of the building is a simple four-room affair: two cloakrooms flank either side of the entry hall, and a large classroom, dominated by a full-length chalkboard on the rear (south) wall, fills the remainder of the schoolhouse. The cloakrooms are each lit by a single window on their north walls and are accessed by doorways opening onto the entry hall. They measure 8' long by 6' 3' wide. The eastern cloakroom has a second doorway that opens onto the classroom. The eastern cloakroom walls have remnants of pink paint like the rest of the interior schoolhouse walls. The western cloakroom was previously painted mint green. The classroom that fills the main part of the building is 30' 10" long and 19' 3" wide. The floors are hardwood and the 10' plaster-and-lathe walls were once painted pink. The plaster-and-lath ceiling was formerly white. Most plaster in the building is missing. The chalkboard on the south wall is 3' high and 15' 7" long. As prescribed by Progressive-era school standards, like those summarized in the State of Montana's 1919 bulletin *One and Two Room Rural School Buildings*, this chalkboard was situated behind the teacher's desk. The bookshelves that still stand in the NW corner of the classroom also conform to the prescriptions offered by the *School Buildings* bulletin.[4] Toward the north end of the classroom, on the wall between the classroom and the western cloakroom, is a red-brick chimney that has been plastered over. It was once used to vent a wood stove. The schoolhouse is wired for electricity and extant interior features, such as an in-floor air-return (marked by a metal grate), indicate that it may have once had a central heating system.

A doorway at the rear (southeast) corner of the classroom accesses the two-room teacherage. Each room of the teacherage measures 11' 10" long (N/S) x 9' 6" wide (E/W). The eastern room of the teacherage that is accessed from the classroom was originally a kitchen area, and features a chimney located on the west interior wall. It is lit by single windows in the center of the east and south walls. A doorway on the south end of the east wall leads outdoors. An interior doorway on the west wall accesses the bedoom, also lit by single, centrally placed windows on its exterior (south and west) walls. A small closet is built into the southeast corner of the bedroom.

Cistern (one non-contributing structure)

The other feature of the site is a cistern located off the southeastern corner of the building, within a few steps of the exterior door of the teacherage. The cistern is 4' in diameter, made of concrete, and holds about 200 gallons of water. It is enclosed in a crude wood-frame structure with clapboard siding and a gabled roof. A small door on the south wall of the enclosure provides access to the cistern.

Condition

After years of benign neglect, Eagle Butte School has recently been stabilized (at least in terms of protection from the weather) with new roofing and protective plywood sheets covering window openings. Prior to recent stabiliziation, the building was allowed to fall into a general state of disrepair. It is in need of patching and repair work on the foundation as well as new windows, doors, exterior paint, and general interior restoration. The exterior of the building, however, has by and large been preserved by luck and aridity despite almost a hundred years of total exposure to the Northern Plains elements. The building is level, the framing sound, the original siding and trim restorable, and the walls are still plumb. Throughout, the wood is weathered but not rotted. The new roofing material is securely attached and the window coverings will delay further deterioration of the interior.

Integrity

Although the Eagle Butte schoolhouse has been modified slightly since its original construction, it retains all seven aspects of integrity, including location, setting, feeling, association, workmanship, design, and materials. The original chimneys (one near the ridge of the northwest slope in each section of the roof) were removed sometime after 2005, as were the four concrete stairs and landing leading to the main entry. The original interior and exterior doors are missing (though most hinges are extant), the original

[4] Ibid, p. 22.

glass transom above the front entry was covered with siding years ago. Although at least some of the windows have been replaced, all windows appear to date to the historic period and the original fenestration openings are intact. An outhouse once associated with the site is no longer extant. Like many rural schools of the era, the site probably also originally featured a barn which was removed long ago.[5] All other architectural features appear much as they must have when first constructed, and the schoolhouse site is still utterly rural and agricultural. Distance from developing urban centers since the historic period has translated into a remarkable amount of integrity of location, setting, feeling and association. The biggest change in the surrounding area since the historic period is the demographic decline that has left the schoolhouse more isolated than ever. The schoolhouse clearly conveys its historic function, and its familiar form is identifiable as a historic schoolhouse from some distance in either direction: its isolation amid agricultural fields throws it into stark relief on the horizon.

The schoolhouse has suffered no substantial exterior modifications since its construction. The same is true of its interior, which retains the period floorplan officially sanctioned by the State of Montana. The unmodified, historic attached teacherage contributes to the schoolhouse's integrity and enhances its ability to convey its historic significance. Eagle Butte is a prototypical homestead-era, one-room country schoolhouse with a high degree of integrity. It readily evokes the significant historical developments that led to its construction almost 100 years ago.

[5] Descendents of Bernard and Delia Hardy, Eagle Butte area residents since 1911, report that the Hardy children "went to the old Eagle Butte school. They rode horses to school and kept them in the barn behind the school. The barn was still standing when [their grandchildren] went to school 30 years later. It wasn't used for horses then, just for hide and seek." Geraldine History Committee. *Spokes, Spurs and Cockleburs.* (Fort Benton, MT: River Press Publishing Company, 1976): p. 297.

Section 8 continued

Pre-1800 historical context

Eagle Butte schoolhouse stands in what archaeologists call the Northwestern Plains study area. In the 15,000 years before large-scale non-Indian immigration to the area, human societies on the Northwestern Plains underwent "shifts from early Paleoindian big game hunters of the Early Prehistoric Period, to broad-spectrum foragers with varying subsistence strategies during the Middle Prehistoric Period, and then to prosperous communal bison hunters during the Late Prehistoric Period."[6]

Archaeologists commonly describe the Early Prehistoric (Paleo Indian) Period as dating from 11300 to 7000 BP (before present). At that time, during the retreat of Pleistocene glaciers Paleoindians in small groups hunted large grassland ungulates like horse, camel, mammoth, bison, elk and mountain sheep, as well as small game. They stalked and killed their prey using spears, as demonstrated by representative projectiles of the period including large lanceolate spear points. They supplemented their hunting by gathering edible plants. Some archaeologists propose two different subsistence adaptations in the Northwestern Plains study area during the Paleo Indian period, "an open country, bison adaptation for the Plains and a 'more archaic' broad-based hunting and gathering adaptation for the foothills."[7]

The Middle Prehistoric or Archaic Period (ca. 7500-1600 BP) in the Northwestern Plains is divided into three sub-periods, the Early, Middle, and Late Archaic (7500-4500 BP, 4500-3000 BP, 3000-1600 BP, respectively).[8]

Judging from the location and frequency of archaeological sites, a warming climate during the Early Archaic (7500-4500 BP) encouraged people to move to higher elevations. There they were more apt to encounter the bison that had moved off the Great Plains to the northern, eastern, and western margins of the grasslands following receding prairie plant species. As they adapted to the changing ecology, Northwestern Plains inhabitants diversified their economy and expanded their subsistence base. Their new hunting regime included a greater number of ungulates (like pronghorn antelope and mule deer), small mammals and plants. A change in technology accompanied the emerging subsistence regime, as atlatls increasingly replaced spears as the primary hunting weapon.[9]

The Middle Archaic (4500-3000 BP) ushered in an enduring cooler and wetter climate. This shift expanded humans' geographic options. "A wide variety of animals and plants were utilized and small groups were distributed widely over the landscape."[10] Habitation sites and artifacts from the period suggest an increased emphasis on bison as well greater exploitation of plant and seed resources. Since the Middle Archaic "modern vegetational limits have essentially been in place."[11]

The Late Archaic (3000-1600 BP) produced abundant archaeological sites in the Northwestern Plains. These sites indicate that, during this period, bison returned to the Plains en masse and the region's inhabitants intensified their exploitation of them via the use of jump sites and corrals. Evidence suggests a possible increase in human as well as bison populations. Some scholars assert that the

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[6] Delia Hagen, Derek Beery and Ann Emmons. *Inventory and Recordation of Cultural Properties in Fort Benton, Montana.* (Missoula, MT: unpublished report for Bureau of Land Management Lewistown Field Office, Historical Research Associates, 2002): p. 5-6.

[7] Matthew Thomas, Delia Hagen, Ann Emmons, and Janene Caywood. *Results of a Cultural Resource Inventory of the Fairfield to Dupuyer Study Corridor, Teton and Pondera Counties, Montana.* (Missoula, MT: unpublished report for BRW, Inc., Historical Research Associates, 2000): p. 17; Shannon Gilbert, Delia Hagen and Janene Caywood. *Phase III Cultural Resources Inventory of the Havre-South Project Corridor Along a Portion of State Highway 234, Hill County, Montana [MDT Project No. STPS 234-1(4)0].* (Missoula, MT: unpublished report for Montana Department of Transportation, Historical Research Associates, 2000): p. 5.

[8] Thomas, *Results of a Cultural Resource Inventory of the Fairfield to Dupuyer Study Corridor,* p. 17-18.

[9] Gilbert, *Phase III Cultural Resources Inventory of the Havre-South Project Corridor,* p. 6; Thomas, *Results of a Cultural Resource Inventory of the Fairfield to Dupuyer Study Corridor,* p. 18.

[10] Gilbert, *Phase III Cultural Resources Inventory of the Havre-South Project Corridor,* p. 6.

[11] Thomas, *Results of a Cultural Resource Inventory of the Fairfield to Dupuyer Study Corridor,* p. 19.

Late Archaic marked the advent of a single-resource focused bison economy, while others argue that it brought a broadening spectrum of faunal exploitation. Proponents of the latter theory have concluded that, in addition to bison, Northwestern Plains populations in the Late Archaic consumed pronghorn antelope, mollusks, rabbit, catfish, deer, birds, fox, canids, and floral species that were harvested with digging sticks and processed with grinding stones.[12]

The period after the Archaic Period has been labeled the Late Prehistoric Period. It endured from about 2000 to 300 BP. During these centuries, Northwestern Plains populations abandoned the atlatl in favor of bow and arrow technology. Excavated sites suggest "the economy was almost exclusively focused on the procurement of bison," although some archaeologists report evidence of a "wide variety of adaptive strategies." Late Prehistoric Northern Plains sites occasionally attest to the use of pottery.[13]

Among archaeologists, the hundred years between A.D. 1700 and 1800 is known as the Protohistoric Period, a label with which many historians would take issue. In the Northwestern Plains, this century was characterized by the introduction of the horse, which resulted in greater human movement and expanded hunting and trade relationships. Tribes known to use the region during the 1700s include, among others, the Blackfeet, Coeur D'Alene, Plains Kootenai, Gros Ventre, Assiniboine, Chippewa, Cree, Métis, Crow, Salish, Shoshone, Nez Perce, and fluctuating combinations thereof. "In the middle and latter half of the eighteenth century, the region was used by many Indian groups and remained a contested area."[14]

By the 1700s, "the existence of Euro-Americans was known to many American Indian groups. More importantly, Euro-American material items, often in the form of trade goods, had become available, augmenting and in some case replacing, native technologies."[15] Excavated artifacts complement the period's documentary record, and attest to the appearance of trade beads, metal and iron products in Northwestern Plains communities.[16]

Simultaneously, "the introduction of the horse changed the organization and interaction of Plains and Plateau tribes. Horses permitted larger tribal gatherings, created wealth differences among tribal members, allowed for expanded knowledge of the region, permitted faster and wider spread of diseases, and increased the incentive and methods to engage in warfare and raiding."[17] Horses encouraged "increased movement of river-based populations onto the more arid Plains, greater participation in nomadic hunting and gathering lifestyle, and expansion of the Plains trade network."[18]

American archaeologists generally described the Protohistoric Period "as ending with the presence of the Corps of Discovery in the area in AD 1803." However, as demonstrated below, this periodization is somewhat misleading. It stems, in part, from the influence of modern political borders on archeology departments in United States universities.[19]

Post-1800 historical context

Although substantial permanent non-Indian settlement in northcentral Montana dates to the 1870s, the de la Verendrye brothers made the first recorded Euro-American forays into the region more a hundred years earlier. In 1743, they traveled west from New France (modern-day Quebec, Canada) and eventually followed the Missouri River far enough upstream to view the Rocky Mountains on the

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[12] Thomas, *Results of a Cultural Resource Inventory of the Fairfield to Dupuyer Study Corridor,* p. 19; Gilbert, *Phase III Cultural Resources Inventory of the Havre-South Project Corridor,* p. 7.
[13] Gilbert, *Phase III Cultural Resources Inventory of the Havre-South Project Corridor,* p. 7.; Thomas, *Results of a Cultural Resource Inventory of the Fairfield to Dupuyer Study Corridor,* p. 20.
[14] Thomas, *Results of a Cultural Resource Inventory of the Fairfield to Dupuyer Study Corridor,* p. 22-23; Hagen, *Inventory and Recordation of Cultural Properties in Fort Benton, Montana,* p. 9-10; Gilbert, *Phase III Cultural Resources Inventory of the Havre-South Project Corridor,* p. 7.
[15] Thomas, *Results of a Cultural Resource Inventory of the Fairfield to Dupuyer Study Corridor,* p. 22.
[16] Gilbert, *Phase III Cultural Resources Inventory of the Havre-South Project Corridor,* p. 7.
[17] Thomas, *Results of a Cultural Resource Inventory of the Fairfield to Dupuyer Study Corridor,* p. 22.
[18] Hagen, *Inventory and Recordation of Cultural Properties in Fort Benton, Montana,* p. 9.
[19] Hagen, *Inventory and Recordation of Cultural Properties in Fort Benton, Montana,* p. 6.

western horizon.[20] Some sixty years later, President Thomas Jefferson directed Captains Meriwhether Lewis and William Clark to lead a "corps of volunteers for North Western Discovery" up the Missouri into the traditional territory of the many indigenous groups listed above, including the Blackfeet. There he hoped they would find a water route to the Pacific Ocean. The Lewis and Clark expedition passed through the Eagle Butte area on both its westbound trip in 1805 and its return in 1806. Another 15 years passed before Euro-Americans began trying to establish a permanent foothold along the Missouri River to further economic and military aims in the northcentral Montana.[21]

Early Euro-American settlement in the area was limited to a series of trading and military posts, of which Fort Benton, founded in 1846, was not only the most important but also the most enduring. After Fort Floyd, which later became Fort Union, was completed near the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers in 1822, trappers and traders increasingly penetrated the upstream river corridor. In 1831, James Kipp of the American Fur Company constructed Fort Piegan at the mouth of Maria's River in order to capitalize on trade with the Blackfeet Indians who predominated in the region at that time. Although Fort Peigan lasted but one season, it spawned a series of upstream forts in the years the followed, and from that time forward Euro-American occupation of the region continued unabated. The fourth and final trading post on the upper Missouri, Fort Benton, opened for business in 1846.[22]

The construction of fur trade posts in the Upper Missouri signaled a fundamental shift in the lifeways of the region's indigenous residents. With Euro-Americans came European diseases, and small pox epidemics that had earlier been triggered by small trapping groups became more pervasive as contact with European pathogens increased. In 1837, a small pox outbreak killed an estimated 50 percent of the Blackfeet people. While the tribe struggled to cope with the devastation wrought by the disease, it also faced a rapidly changing economic and social climate that would soon threaten its subsistence base, the bison herds that grazed the northern Great Plains. In an effort to protect their buffalo hunting grounds, and the human communities those grounds supported, the Blackfeet signed their first treaty with the United States in 1855. The treaty reserved to the Blackfeet people all of the land in present-day Montana lying east of the main range of the Rockies and north of the Musselshell River. This original Blackfeet reservation would be reduced and divided several times over the next 25 years as Euro-Americans encroached on Blackfeet territory in their quest for land, minerals, markets, and adventure.[23] As they did the new political and social circumstances, the Blackfeet and other indigenous groups in the region adjusted to the emerging economic order. Through the 1850s, tribal members conducted a brisk business with the traders at Fort Benton. After 1855, with the signing of the treaty, the fort also functioned as the first Blackfeet agency, a role that would gain importance by the end of the decade as the once-abundant buffalo began to disappear.[24]

By the end of the 1850s, Fort Benton was still an isolated trading post and U. S. government agency in the midst of a vast prairie populated almost solely by Native American and Métis people. But as the Civil War brewed in the East, regional transportation improvements combined with gold discoveries at Grasshopper Creek in western Montana to transform Fort Benton into a bustling port and regional supply center. Steamboats first docked at the town in 1860, and shortly thereafter Lieutenant John Mullan, following established Indian trails, completed a road between Fort Benton and Walla Walla, Washington, the head of navigation of the Columbia River. Other roads soon connected Fort Benton east to St. Cloud, Minnesota and north to Fort Whoop-up (an important settlement in present-day Canadian territory).[25] Fort Benton boats carried guns, whiskey, blankets and other gold camp supplies up the Missouri from St. Louis and other downstream ports, and returned laden with gold, buffalo robes, high grade ore, and wolf hides. As a town of

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[20] John Lepley. *Birthplace of Montana: A History of Fort Benton.* (Missoula, MT: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 1999): p. 11.

[21] Ibid, p. 1, 17-19; Montana State Engineer's Office. *Water Resources Survey, Chouteau County, Montana, Part I: History of Land and Water Use on Irrigated Areas.* (Helena, MT: State Engineer's Office, 1964): p. 9-10.

[22] Lepley, *Birthplace of Montana: A History of Fort Benton*, p. 1, 17-19; Montana State Engineer's Office. *Water Resources Survey, Chouteau County*, p. 9-10.

[23] Kappler, Charles. *Indians Affairs: Laws and Treaties, Vol. II (Treaties.)* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904): p. 736; Lepley, *Birthplace of Montana: A History of Fort Benton*, p. 16, 19, 31-32.

[24] Lepley, *Birthplace of Montana: A History of Fort Benton*, p. 31-32.

[25] Geraldine History Committee. *Spokes, Spurs and Cockleburs*, p. 4; Montana State Engineer's Office. *Water Resources Survey, Chouteau County*, p. 10-11; Michael Malone, Richard Roeder, and William L. Lang. *Montana: A History of Two Centuries.* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1976): p. 191.

adobe and log buildings arose outside of the confines of the fort, decades of continuous trapping and hunting began to take their toll on the surrounding region's fur-bearing mammals. In 1865, the American Fur Company sold its trading post to the North West Fur Company. The buffalo robe trade lasted another 18 years before over-hunting brought the once-vast bison herds to the brink of extinction. In the interim, Fort Benton settled into its role as the Missouri's uppermost port and supplier for the region's Euro-Ameircan mining towns and the nascent agricultural settlements they spawned.[26]

At that point, Fort Benton remained the only significant Euro-American settlement in Montana Territory outside of the mountain mining districts to the west. Ranches and small farms sprang up in the valleys near western diggings, but the plains of central and eastern Montana supported few cattle and fewer Euro-American settlers. Despite its geographic isolation, the river port played an integral role in the early development of the distant mining regions. Montana's first gold strikes at Gold Creek and Bannack in 1862 created a headlong rush into the territory, and early that year a single boat arriving in Fort Benton carried some 400 miners. These first arrivals began a tradition that would endure for the next ten years: some 75 percent of the prospectors who panned for gold in Montana during the placer boom passed through Fort Benton as they came and went.[27]

Merchants hoping to capitalize on the trade with miners set up shop along Front Street, and the building boom they initiated shaped the town's early commercial district. Other entrepreneurs profited by producing food for hungry prospectors. In 1867, Winfield Stocking started the first ranch in the Fort Benton region. From his base on the Teton River some three miles outside of town, Stocking ran cattle on the abundant open range in northcentral Montana and marked the advent of an industry that would soon eclipse all others in economic importance.[28] At that time, all of the land north of the Mussellshell River remained in Indian hands, and legal and practical prohibitions limited domestic stock-raising to those lands in the immediate vicinity of the Fort. But additional Indian land cessions in 1873 freed much of the region's range for commercial exploitation and four years later the defeat of the Nez Perce at the Battle of the Bear's Paw on Snake Creek marked the end of organized, armed conflict between the U.S. Government and Indian people in the region. The United States government constructed a brick military complex called Fort Assiniboine north of Fort Benton in 1879, thereby giving architectural expression to the recent fundamental shift in regional power relations. [29]

The shift from Native American to Euro-American control of the ranges that underwrote the ascendance of the open range cattle industry coincided with the decline of the placer mines. By 1870, most of western Montana's placer deposits had been exhausted. Business slowed in the supply center of Fort Benton. Steamboat arrivals declined from a high of over several dozen to only a few each year, and the town's population dropped. In 1869, the federal government dealt another blow to the region's economic base when it moved the Blackfeet Agency from Fort Benton to a site just north of the present-day town of Choteau. These changes foretold a bleak future for the river port, but bespoke brighter times for the area's Euro-American agriculturalists. By the mid-1880s stock-raising had increased to the point that a regional newspaper declared "there seem to be cattle not only on a thousand hills, but a thousand cattle on each hill." Sheep raisers, too, recognized the potential of the central Montana range early on, and by 1883 they formed the Montana Woolgrower's Association in Fort Benton in order to cooperate in capitalizing on the rewards it offered.[30] Fort Benton began to make the transition from a frantic frontier boom town to a more sedate commercial center serving surrounding rural areas. Farm and ranch trade would sustain the town after the late 1870s, when Euro-Americans began settling in central Montana in earnest and created an enduring agricultural population base.[31] The early settlers established home bases along the streams, and towns

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[26] Montana State Engineer's Office. *Water Resources Survey, Chouteau County*, p. 10-11.
[27] Lepley, *Birthplace of Montana: A History of Fort Benton*, p. 37.
[28] Ibid, p. 39-40, 44-49, 110.
[29] T. Weber Greiser, Derek Beery, and Delia Lee Hagen. *Draft Report, Volume I, Class III Cultural Resource Inventory of Selected Bureau of Land Management Parcels in Blaine, Fergus, Hill, Chouteau, and Toole Counties, Montana [BLM Report No. 02-MT-066-011 and 02-MT-068-008 (*Missoula, MT: unpublished report for Bureau of Land Management Great Falls Oil and Gas Field Station and Lewistown Field Office, Historical Research Associates, 2002): p. 20-21.
[30] Lepley, *Birthplace of Montana: A History of Fort Benton,* p. 127.
[31] Dissly, Robert. *A Short History of Lewistown* (Lewistown, MT: Lewistown Division of Great Falls Federal Savings and Loan,1979): p. 2; Lepley, *Birthplace of Montana: A History of Fort Benton*, p. 60.

grew up around the region to serve them. Soon stage lines converged on Fort Benton from every direction, carrying cargo and passengers alike to and from the outlying agricultural settlements.[32]

While the surrounding countryside swelled with newcomers, Fort Benton's civic infrastructure expanded sporadically. During the fur trade era, those children from the region who received formal education, including many Métis of mixed Indian and white descent, did so only by traveling east to convent schools in population centers like St.Louis. By 1868, a "short term" school operated in a log and adobe cabin on Main Street. It closed with the drop in population in the early 1870s, but by 1873 some 25 Fort Benton children attended classes led by J. A. Kanouse, a local attorney. Renewed population growth in the next several years inspired plans for the construction of the town's first schoolhouse. Completed in 1877 on the site of the current elementary school, it earned the distinction of being Fort Benton's first brick building. Enrollment continued to climb and an addition in 1880 expanded the school's capacity. By 1883, voters passed a funding measure for a second, two-story brick building to house the 176 students then enrolled. During this period, Fort Benton still boasted a sizeable Indian and mixed-race population, and early teachers included Helen Clarke, the Métis daughter of famed fur trade figure Malcolm Clarke and his Blackfeet wife. [33]

In completing their community's first school, Fort Benton's residents carried on a well-established tradition. 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 symbolized stability and progress, as well as a community's commitment to providing for the future by educating the next generation. After the onset of mass immigration in the 1880s, schoolhouses also stood for, and furthered, the acculturation and assimilation of numerous, diverse cultures. Indeed, much of the "process of Americanization took place in country schools."[34] Schoolhouses appeared in the Chouteau County countryside as a rural settlement spread outward from established towns. By 1885, at least eight schools served students in the smaller Chouteau County communities outside of Fort Benton.[35]

The history of country schools is nearly as old as non-Indian settlement of the Americas. In 1647, colonial New Englanders enacted the first statute providing for the establishment of a school system in America. The institutions that resulted were called "petty schools" and provided the model for later public grammar schools. Their curricula reflected contemporary New England culture, with instruction emphasizing reading, religion, and law. Elsewhere in the colonies, schooling took place at "subscription schools," attended primarily by children from white upper or middle class families who could afford the tuition, or at home.[36]In the last decades of the 1700s and the first decades of the 1800s, Thomas Jefferson actively advocated for public education in the United States, for he thought "free education imperative for a strong democracy."[37] His efforts contributed to the inclusion of schooling provisions in the Land Ordinance of 1785. The ordinance dictated that a "school section" be reserved within each township surveyed in the Northwest Territories. Though battles over the form and content of public education continued through the first half of the nineteenth century and beyond, by 1860 the public country school had become a vital part of the economic and social fabric of the young country.[38]

In the wake of the Civil War, and with the increase in immigration and the invasion of Indian territories, the American population looked to public schools to educate children not only in the basics of arithmetic and reading, but also in sanctioned aspects of American culture. Curriculums began to be standardized, and a new emphasis was placed on the English language and history of the United States. School administrators hoped that rural, poor, immigrant and Native American students could be socialized into an idealized, homogenous and "proper" American culture.[39] So determined was their pursuit of this goal that they sometimes resorted to

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[32] Lepley, *Birthplace of Montana: A History of Fort Benton*, p. 48-49.
[33] Ibid, p. 80-88, 91-95; Ken Robison, Historian, Overholser Historical Research Center, personal communication with Delia Hagen, Dec. 2, 2008.
[34] Andrew Gulliford, "Country School Legacy," *Utah Preservation/Restoration*, vol. II, 1981, p. 44.
[35] Ken Robison, Historian, Overholser Historical Research Center, personal communication with Delia Hagen, Dec. 2, 2008.
[36] Andrew Gulliford, *America's Country Schools* (Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1984): p. 36-38.
[37] Gulliford, *America's Country Schools*, p. 38.
[38] Ibid, p. 38-40.
[39] Kate Hampton, *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Big Arm School* (Helena, MT: Montana State Historic Preservation Office, 2007): p. 3.

physical violence: an early Fort Benton principal, Mary Johnstone remembered that in her desk "was a rawhide whip... I thought I could get along without it. But after a month of moral persuasion and nearly wrecking the school and myself, I decided to 'go forth' with the little weapon. It was not pleasant for the recipients nor for me, but from that time we had a good school."[40]

In the case of Fort Benton and the surrounding region, the stability symbolized by the completion of the community's first school proved ephemeral. A series of events in the 1880s completed the radical transformation the region had been undergoing for 50 some years, and few of the region's inhabitants emerged unscathed. Most devastated were area Indian tribes, who reeled under the impact of the disappearance of the last of the Plains bison herds. In terms of physical survival, the pressures on Plains communities during this period cannot be overstated. Reduction of the buffalo herds occurred so rapidly that many indigenous groups had little time (and fewer and fewer resources) to devise replacement subsistence strategies. The destruction of the buffalo eliminated not only an important food source but also a mainstay of the market economy of many Northern Plains tribes. Between 1878 and 1883 traders exported more than 250,000 buffalo hides from the region. A single firm in Fort Benton shipped some 20,000 hides in 1880. Three years later hunters had only 500 hides to sell there, and the following year they had none. That winter, people died in droves. Among the Piegan Tribe of Blackfeet alone some 600 people starved to death. The Gros Ventre and Assiniboine suffered similar losses, as the demise of historical lifeways was compounded by the failure of the United States to provide even the barest of necessities. [41]

The demise of the buffalo and the resultant devastation among Great Plains Indians may have seemed promising to the territory's ranchers, but the heady growth of the central Montana stockraising industry would not last. In their rush to profit from the plains grasses, producers stocked the range well beyond its carrying capacity. In the mid-1880s their overuse collided with the extremes of Northern Plains weather. Poor rainfall in the summer of 1886 was followed by the fabled "Hard Winter," seared into historical memory by survivor's tales and Charlie Russell's famous painting "Waiting for a Chinook." The next spring, devastated livestock operations rounded up what remained of their vast herds. Cattle ranchers on the Shonkin range just south of the Eagle Butte area suffered herd losses of 25-50 percent. Sheep outfits benefited from the sheds they'd constructed on patented lands, and enjoyed a higher survival rate among their flocks.[42] The open range stock industry never recovered from the "Hard Winter." Many operations shut down for good, while others survived only by making major changes. Those stockmen who salvaged something of their herd enjoyed relatively rapid recovery: herd deaths from the "Hard Winter" reduced pressure on the range, and ranchers incorporated haying into their yearly routines to provide winter feed.[43]

As cattlemen in the countryside around Fort Benton struggled to deal with the devastation of the "Hard Winter," townspeople faced a deathblow of their own. The recent, rapid end of the buffalo robe trade had already decimated several sectors of the town's economy when, in early 1887, James J. Hill, owner of the St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Manitoba Railway, received permission from Congress to lay track west from Minot, North Dakota to Helena, Montana. The rails stretched across Montana's high line by September of that year, and the following month a branch line bound for Butte arrived in Fort Benton. The railroad offered faster and cheaper shipping than steamboats, and with its arrival river traffic effectively ended. The last river boat docked at the world's innermost port in June of

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[40] Helen Micka, ed. *Montana Memories.* (Harlowton, MT: Times Clarion Press, 1976): p. 13.

[41] Peter Nabokov, ed. *Native American Testimony: A Chronicle of Indian-White Relations from Prophecy to the Present, 1492-2000* (New York, NY: Viking Penguin, 1999): p. 184; Frederick Hoxie, *Parading Through History* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995): p 115; Robert Utley, *The Indian Frontier of the American West, 1846-1890* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 229; John Ewers, *Ethnological Report on the Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boy Reservation and the Little Shell Band of Indians.* In Chippewa Indians VI, American Indian Ethnohistory: North Central and Northeastern Indians. edited by David Agee Horr (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 1974): p. 106.

[42] Anna Zellick. *A History of Fergus County, Montana, 1879-1915,* (Chicago, IL: unpublished master's thesis, University of Chicago, 1945): chap. 3 p. 16, 19 and chap. 4 p. 6, 9; Geraldine History Committee, *Spokes, Spurs and Cockleburs*, p. 9.

[43] Lepley, *Birthplace of Montana: A History of Fort Benton*, p. 117.

1889.[44] "Gone, too, with the river trade... were the bull trains and mule trains and stage lines that fingered out from Fort Benton in all directions."[45]

In northcentral Montana, the end of 1880s ushered in what one local historian, perhaps nostalgic for a romanticized frontier, has labeled "the drab decade."[46] During the 1890s, while Indian people struggled to find a place, and a way, to make a life in their over-run homeland, Euro-American colonizers turned themselves to the task of governing their newly acquired territory. Montana became a state under the Enabling Act of 1889, which "required that new states provide for establishing and maintaining public schools. To give an incentive, the federal government set aside in new states not one but two sections of land per township for the support of elementary education."[47] These initial provisions for schooling gradually expanded with the spread of Progressive ideas about standardized, universal education and the accelerating agricultural immigration to the region. At the end of the decade, the state established a system of County High Schools. Shortly thereafter it implemented a special school tax on county property, which became an primary source of funding for local schools.[48]

As non-Indian settlers spread across northern Montana following the arrival of the Great Northern Railway, local, state, and national governments worked to establish the legal and commercial infrastructures upon which agricultural production depended. In 1888, Front Street merchants constructed a bridge across the Missouri in Fort Benton, thereby making the lands east of the river more accessible for agricultural pursuits.[49] The General Land Office rushed to survey settling areas, and the plat of township 25 north range 15 east was approved on April 29, 1896. Homesteaders began laying claim to the area almost immediately, and on July 12, 1899, the state selected 160 acres of section 34 of T25N R12E "for Schools."[50] In doing so, state officials looked to the future, for another 15 years passed before the North Eagle Butte schoolhouse stood on the chosen lands. In the interim, the region found itself radically transformed yet again: Demographic patterns and new agricultural ideologies that re-imagined the possibilities of the Great Plains combined to populate the grasslands with hordes of homesteaders bent to the plow.

In 1900, the region's economy was still based primarily on stock-raising. Since the 1880s, Fort Benton had earned distinction of being Montana's most important sheep and wool shipping point, and regional producers formed an important link in a booming world wool market. By freighting their wool to Fort Benton, central Montana ranchers "were assured of a market which attracted buyers from all the leading woolen houses in the east and at the same time they could purchase their necessary supplies."[51] But after the turn of the century, economic and social forces in Europe and the U.S. combined to create a surge of immigration into the Northern Great Plains. Intense promotional efforts by railroad companies, realtors, and Western civic and state governments drew newcomers to northcentral Montana by promising peace and prosperity to hard-working families willing to try their hand at planting the plains. Good weather, strong markets, cheap credit and new tillage methods produced a period of agricultural prosperity that, in some areas, spanned the first two decades of the twentieth century, an era that would thereafter be known as the Golden Age of American Agriculture. In the arid Great Plains, of which the Eagle Butte region composed the western edge, the scarcity of water had long been an obstacle to large-scale farming. But by 1910 the dryland farming movement was in full swing. Under that rubric, state agricultural colleges, businessmen, and large-scale producers in the Northern Plains proselytized throughout the region, urging farmers to adopt new methods of cultivation on non-irrigable land.

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[44] Montana State Engineer's Office. *Water Resources Survey, Chouteau County,* p. 13; Centennial Book Committee. *Thunderstorms and Tumbleweeds: 1887-1987, East Blaine County,* (Visalia, CA: Jostens Publishing and Printing, 1989): p. 27.
[45] Harley Henderson, *Montana Passage: A Homesteader's Heritage*, (Helena, MT: Falcon Press Publishing Co., 1983): p. 12.
[46] Ibid, p. 13.
[47] Stevensville Historical Society, *Montana Genesis: A History of the Stevensville Area of the Bitterroot Valley*, (Missoula, MT: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 1971): p. 203.
[48] Stremick, Paul. *School District Consolidation in Montana,* (Missoula, MT: unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Montana, 2001): p. 19.
[49] Lepley, *Birthplace of Montana: A History of Fort Benton*, p. 97, 101, 132.
[50] Montana Tract Book 45, MF 496, Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana, April 19, 2005.
[51] Zellick, *A History of Fergus County,* chapt. 4, p. 14; Lepley, *Birthplace of Montana: A History of Fort Benton*, p. 123.

In 1911, scientists with the Montana Agricultural College estimated that of the 30 million cultivable acres within the state, only 6-10 million could ever be irrigated. Prior to the 1910s, consensus held that semi-arid areas that could not be irrigated were suited only to grazing. Dryland farming advocates disagreed, arguing that "the reduced condition of the range, due in part to overgrazing, and its growing inaccessibility because of the incoming farm settlers has lessened the profits of the range stock business, so that these lands must be brought into productivity in some new form."[52]

Though originally dedicated to the promotion of irrigation, James Hill, owner of the Great Northern Railroad, soon became an ardent advocate of dryland farming. In 1909 he persuaded the Dry Farming Congress to hold its annual meeting in Billings. In the words of historian Howard Dickman, "Hill threw his influence behind the movement to turn Montana into another kingdom of wheat. He became the titular head of an organized campaign to settle the State with tens of thousands of small, family sized, intensively cultivated stock and grain farms; the pied piper to a vast, spectacular land rush that began in the fall of 1909, and which, during the next eight years, turned 29 million acres of land into farms."[53]

In his quest to attract settlers and customers, Hill predicted a grand future for the state, which he envisioned as the proverbial frontier safety valve for areas of the country deemed overpopulated: "Montana, in my judgment, will be the greatest grain growing State in the Union . . . We know there are thousands of sturdy, brainy, and enterprising men of moderate means in the overcrowded east who are eager for just such an opportunity as is afforded in Montana."[54]

Supporters of dry farming believed that through a combination of alternate cropping and fallowing, increased mulch, modified plowing methods, and the use of particular grain strains, lands receiving between 12 and 16 inches of rainfall a year could yield profitable harvests without irrigation. Agricultural Experiment Stations established in the first two decades of the century in central and eastern Montana claimed to confirm central Montana's suitability to dryland farming. The federal government helped further the cause of the dryland farming movement by passing the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909. The Act increased the size of homestead filings on non-irrigable land to 320 acres, an area which many considered sufficient for alternate cropping and fallowing.[55]

Great Plains railroads joined agricultural scientists and regional businessmen in promoting the dryland farming potential of the region. Hill's Great Northern Railway employed its own dry-farming expert, Dr. Thomas Shaw, a professor at the Minnesota Agricultural College. Shaw promoted lands along the railroad, managed several dry-land experiment farms in Montana, and wrote promotional articles distributed by the railroad throughout the east and in Europe.[56]

Promotional efforts combined with international migration patterns to successfully populate northcentral Montana. During the homesteading boom, "the population of the U.S. increased by 21 percent, while the population of Montana increased by 54 percent."[57] Though the immigration would not peak for another 5 or 6 years, the 1910 census for Chouteau County reveals a region undergoing intense demographic change. From 1900 to 1910, the county's population grew from just under 11,000 to just over 17,000, and increase of 57 percent. The immigration brought qualitative, as well as quantitative, demographic change. Immigrants and their children made up just under half of the county's residents, hailing most commonly from Canada, Italy, and Germany but also representing large populations of Danes, Norwegians, English, Scotch, Irish, Swedes, and Austrians. Another 45 percent of the population was composed of native-born whites of native parentage, while Native Americans made up 7 percent of the county's

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[52] Alfred Atkinson, *Dry Land Farming Investigations in Montana. Montana Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin No. 83,* (Bozeman, MT: Montana State Agricultural College, 1911): p. 156.
[53] Howard Dickman, *James Jerome Hill and the Agricultural Development of the Northwest,* (Ann Arbor, MI: unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1977): p. 146, 156.
[54] Ibid, p. 145.
[55] L. F. Gieseker, *Soils of Mussellshell County, Montana State Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin No. 374,* (Bozeman, MT: Montana State College , 1939): p. 12.
[56] Historical Research Associates and James R. McDonald, *Historical and Architectural Survey of Selected Area Within Great Falls Revitalization District,* (Great Falls, MT: unpublished report prepared for the Cascade County Historical Society, 1984): p. 3-21.
[57] Katherine Mitchell, *Rediscovering Montana, The Expedition of 1910,* The Expedition's Home Page, http://www.montanaheritageproject.org/edheritage/HE_03win/1910.html, 2008.

residents according to census enumerators. The county also housed small populations of other groups categorized as non-white: the 156 "Japanese," 40 "Chinese," and 56 "Negros" that remained in Chouteau County in 1910 represented a substantial decline from

1900 population numbers for those groups. A disproportionately male population further characterized the county in this period. In the county as a whole there were 185 men for every 100 women.[58]

About one third of northcentral Montana's occupants in this period were children under the age of 18.[59] Most children in the area were enrolled in school, though the likelihood of enrollment varied by age and ethnicity. Fifty-five to sixty percent of younger children (those aged 6 to 9) were enrolled in schools, while for those aged 10 to 14 that figure climbed to 80 to 85 percent. Only about half of teens aged 14 to 17 were formally enrolled in school. Enrollment figures differed drastically for those categorized in the census as white and Indian. School-aged children in the former category boasted enrollment figures reaching 70-75 percent, while only 31 percent of Indian children were formally enrolled in Chouteau County schools. In all cases, attendance was probably sporadic. The demands of farming and ranching, the vagaries of weather, and other external forces frequently precluded regular attendance.[60]

People flooded into northcentral Montana. Among the innumerable homestead boom communities that rose from the Northern Plains was Eagle Butte. Land Tract records document dozens of families filing claims on the 36 sections contained in Township 25 North Range 12 East between 1906-1918. Homesteaders cooperated in constructing a civic infrastructure to meet their needs: in 1913 the Eagle Butte Post Office opened its doors, and that same year a committee of locals completed the Eagle Butte Community Hall to provide public space for dances, Sunday school, box suppers, and socials. [61] Like similar small towns scattered over the state, Eagle Butte relied on external connections to regional centers as well as internal bonds of community to conduct its daily affairs: years later locals recalled that in the community's heyday, lumber, coal, people and supplies came from Virgelle and Fort Benton, and mail and groceries came from Geraldine.[62]

The surge of community-building that accompanied agricultural settlement of the Eagle Butte area included organizing schooling for local farm children. Eagle Butte school district number 14 first appeared in Chouteau County Superintendent's records in December of 1912. According to Dale Apple, who moved to Eagle Butte that year, the 27 students in the district met seasonally wherever they could: "School was held one or two months during the summer in the shacks of the Homesteaders who could not take it and left."[63] The County Superintendent described the teacher, Miss Mary Pemberton, as "holding school in a shack." Despite her unimpressive facilities, and the fact that she had to teach at two separate school locations in the north and south sections of the community, Pemberton reportedly had "a good manner" with her pupils, who were "bright and interested."[64]

Like many rural schools in homesteading communities, the Eagle Butte School struggled with expenses, truancy, and retaining teachers in the face of low pay and difficult working conditions. Infrastructure improvements were sorely needed to meet the needs of the students and teacher, and in 1914 the Eagle Butte community began building two schoolhouses to accommodate both the north and south student clusters. The North Eagle Butte school proceeded slowly, for it was "demolished in the process of building by a wind and hail storm."[65] Undeterred by nature's discouragement, the community completed the North Eagle Butte schoolhouse and attached teacherage in time for the beginning of classes in August, 1915.[66] The front-gabled, rectangular, single-story schoolhouse erected by

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[58] Delia Hagen, *Northeastern Montana in 1910: An Historical Profile,* (Austin, TX: unpublished master's thesis, University of Texas, 1999), p. 7-9, 15-16.
[59] Ibid, p. 14.
[60] Ibid, p. 30-31.
[61] Geraldine History Committee, *Spokes, Spurs and Cockleburs*, p. 293.
[62] Ibid, p. 287-288, 291.
[63] Ibid, p. 289; Daisy Blackstone, Supt. Chouteau County schools, report on apportionment of school funds, dated Dec. 11, 1912, Chouteau County Superintendent of Schools records. Chouteau County courthouse, Fort Benton.
[64] Superintendent's notes from Eagle Butte school visit, dated Aug. 26, 1913, Chouteau County Superintendent of Schools records.
[65] Geraldine History Committee, *Spokes, Spurs and Cockleburs*, p. 289.
[66] Ken Robison, Historian, Overholser Historical Research Center, personal communication with Delia Hagen, Dec. 4, 2008.

the Eagle Butte community conformed to contemporary understandings of established architectural norms. 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. The schoolhouse's adoption of front gabled form was likely a functional consideration, allowing the main room to remain a single large volume with uniform window distribution. The symmetrical front-gabled box also probably appealed to citizens and builders because it evoked classical architecture. The gable-front schoolhouse remained a dominant form throughout Montana during the state's settlement period.[67]

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 monograph *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.[68]

Administrators considered siting an important part of planning a schoolhouse. First and foremost, they tried to select a site accessible to the maximum number of eligible students. Beyond this, builders gave careful planning to window placement in relation to natural light. Late nineteenth and early twentieth century educators believed cross-lighting to be harmful to the eye. As a result, gable-front schools usually featured ribbons of large, double-hung windows on only one of the two side walls, so that light came from either the east or west but not both. 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.[69]

Eagle Butte embodied most of the schoolhouse design elements common at the time of its construction. A few years after crews completed Eagle Butte schoolhouse, the state of Montana published a booklet prescribing plans and considerations for the construction of rural schools. The booklet's author, W.R. Plew, was a Professor of Architectural and Civil Engineering at the State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts at Bozeman. Plew studied one- and two-room school buildings for several years before publishing his "up to date suggestions regarding the best types of buildings and detail directions for their constructions."[70] Based on research completed between 1917-1919, Plew's building plans incorporated elements of the Craftsman Style, then in vogue. Plew also dictated criteria for site selection, natural fitness, size of grounds, sanitation, layout, and site beautification. With regard to the interior of school buildings, Plew offered recommended configurations for optimal lighting, blackboard placement, heating, and desk arrangement, among other things. His suggestions reflected contemporary beliefs about the effect on students of all of these architectural elements.[71]

The Eagle Butte School exemplifies the philosophy and design recommendations propagated by Progressive-era educators like Plew and the officials of the State Departments of Health and Public Instruction, which hired him. The exterior of the Eagle Butte school illustrated the general specifications offered to homestead-era rural school districts, which were instructed to erect "simple and plain" buildings with "carefully considered" proportions. Its interior exemplified more specific prescriptions, offering a textbook example of the floorplan Plew labeled a "modified Plan C1 school building."[72]

Plew's basic designs echoed most features of the Eagle Butte schoolhouse. His plans called for an entrance at the gable end flanked by single double-hung windows and a bank of windows on one of the side walls. Banked windows, placed within one foot of the ceiling and located on only one side of the room, like those on the west elevation of the Eagle Butte School, conformed to ideas about the detrimental affects of cross-lighting and ensured it would "be possible to flood the school room at some time during the day with

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[67] Hampton, *Big Arm School*, p. 12-13.
[68] Ibid
[69] Ibid
[70] Plew, *One and Two Room Rural School Buildings*, p. 7.
[71] Ibid, p. 13-22.
[72] Ibid, p. 28.

bright sunlight."[73] On the interior, small cloakrooms were to be located on either side of the entrance, while a single spacious classroom occupied the remainder of the building. The teacherage occupying the south section of the building also conformed to the relevant recommendations of the period: Plew and his employers recognized that "for rural communities in Montana it is sometimes necessary that the district furnish a house for the teacher," and his publication included specifications and plans for attached teacherages.[74]

In addition, the school reflects period Craftsman residential styling, with its gently pitched gable roof, deep bracketed eaves, exposed rafter ends, multi-pane windows, and narrow-gauge clapboard siding. These design elements often appeared in modest residential buildings, called Craftsman bungalows, during the early part of the twentieth century.[75] Architectural and educational philosophies of the period encouraged similarities between residential and educational buildings:

> the transition from a child's home to an elementary school was softened by a home-like ambiance...Some of the earliest schools actually served combined functions of school house and church or meeting house. Because access to these small, insolated Montana schools generally required a long cold journey by horse or by foot, builders and users of the structures attempted to make the environment as inviting and familiar as possible by visually aligning them with domestic and religious structures.[76]

In Montana and other states, "in their size, scale, materials and construction methods, country schools often resembled houses, especially on the frontier. The teacher and his or her charges were like a big family, further increasing the association of schools with houses."[77]

An exemplar of the most up-to-date thinking paired with time-honored architectural traditions, the new Eagle Butte schoolhouse must have presented a much improved prospect to potential District 14 teachers. But in spite of the new facilities, a combination of low pay, difficult working conditions, and isolation helped to ensure rapid turnover at the new school. In its first three years of operation, four different women taught at Eagle Butte. Lulu McKenney presided over the school's first year of operation. She was charged with instructing students in the standard subjects as well as in "the effects of alcoholic drinks and narcotics" and "the prevention of communicable diseases." Additional teacher's duties included ensuring "Pioneer Day" and "Arbor Day [were] observed in accordance with law." The County Superintendent considered Miss Mckenney "a splendid little teacher . . . [who had] wonderful enthusiasm in her school" despite working with neither textbooks nor a library, globe, or "International dictionary." For teaching 13 students between the ages of 6 and 15, she received $65 per month plus, presumably, board in the attached teacherage.[78]

After Lulu McKenney's promising first year, the school enjoyed only two more years of classes before the drought and attendant economic devastation began depopulating the surrounding countryside and the schoolhouses it supported. During this time, Eagle Butte schoolteachers earned mixed reviews. Miss Hunt taught only for a year: the Chouteau County superintendent reported her "pupils not interested, discipline poor. Miss Hunt lacks force—afraid of her authority. Would not advised [sic] retaining her

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[73] Ibid, p. 13.
[74] Ibid, p. 53.
[75] Kate Hampton. *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Evaro School.* Helena: Montana State Historic Preservation Office, 2001, p. 11.
[76] Kingston Heath, "A Dying Heritage: One-Room Schools of Gallatin County, Montana, p. 207.
[77] Andrew Gulliford, *America's Country Schools*, (Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1984), p. 159.
[78] Lulu McKenney, Teacher's Report to be sent to County Superintendent at Close of School, Eagle Butte North, School District No. 14, Term Beginning November 8 1915, Ending July 21, 1916. Chouteau County Superintendent of Schools records; Superintendent's notes from Eagle Butte school visit, dated Nov. 20, 1917, Chouteau County Superintendent of Schools records. The assessment of McKenney's teaching is from 1917, by which time she had moved to South Eagle Butte school.

services."[79] Ms. Mildred Hoffman, her successor, lasted only four months at Eagle Butte before being replaced by Miss Esther V. Holt.[80]

During Ms. Holt's 1917-1918 tenure, Eagle Butte boasted 25 students, 28 books, nine maps, one globe, and one "International dictionary." The Superintendent deemed Miss Holt "unusually good."[81] In retrospect, her words could be used to describe the school as a whole that school year. Rarely, if ever, again would the rural schoolhouse serve so many students. The drought that descended on the region wreaked rapid havoc on homestead families, and they began leaving in search of greener pastures almost immediately.

Years of plentiful rainfall in the early teens had seemed to corroborate the claims of the dryland farming movement, but beginning in 1917, north-central Montana experienced a string of crop failures brought on by five years of drought, hailstorms, and grasshopper and cutworm infestations.[82] The end of the Golden Age of Agriculture came early to the area. Many producers turned to off-farm work and seasonal migrant labor to supplement or sustain their operations. By 1919, "cattle were dying of starvation and people abandoned their land by the hundreds."[83] Although the Great War brought a boom in wheat prices, it also contributed to a public health crisis that compounded homesteaders' hard times. Soldiers returning home after the 1918 armistice helped spread a virulent strain of influenza. In the last three months of that year, public health officials recorded 40,000 influenza cases in Montana resulting in 3,000 deaths.[84]

The devastation of the period remained a vivid memory for Eagle Butte residents who recalled that, in myriad small communities like theirs, "the bust came hard and indeed, was so hard because of a misunderstanding of this country. Completely forgotten was that drought comes as often as rain. In 1917 the rains quit and resemblance of hell began. There were prairie fires, grasshoppers, worms, wind and no rain. To add to the pain the price of wheat dropped and continued to drop. The suffering was monumental. . . Homesteaders . . . fled the state. Some stayed away forever. Some retained their dream, went away only to feed themselves. They returned again and again over the years only to be forced out one more time."[85]

According to a local farmer who lived just south of the Eagle Butte area, in 1919 homesteaders were "still putting in a wheat crop but more in desperation than out of hope. The drought that by then had overspread the northern plains kept a searing breath on the land and little grew. Along with the drought came the grasshoppers and gophers and prairie fires devouring what little could be raised. The record yield in Choteau county that year was nine bushels of wheat per acre. Most farmers harvested far less, around two or three bushels. 1920 brought the unrelenting winds . . . dust storms . . . darkened the skies at noon and piled dirt and debris against solitary shacks and sheds on the treeless prairie."[86]

The Spring of 1920 became infamous. Years later Great Falls historian Joseph Kinsey Howard described it in *High Wide and Handsome*, his iconic history of Montana. "The rain stopped and the wind came. These winds were the first "dusters" the northern plains farmer had ever seen. Day after day he watched, first incredulous, then despairing, as the gale whipped his fields into the sky...The ruined homesteaders gathered in little groups in the towns to compare notes...the fourth dry year, and now the wind! Nothing like it had happened before...But the stockmen grinned wryly, knowing it had happened before and would happen again..."[87]

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[79] Superintendent's notes from Eagle Butte school visit, dated June, 1917, p. 357, Chouteau County Superintendent of Schools records.
[80] Chouteau County Superintendent of Schools records.
[81] Chouteau County Superintendent of Schools records.
[82] Gunderson, Edna, ed., *Grits, Guts, and Gusto: A History of Hill County,*(Havre, MT: Hill County Bicentennial, 1976): p. 408; Shelby History Group of the Montana Institute of the Arts. *Toole County Backgrounds,* (Bozeman, MT: Montana Institute of the Arts, 1958): p. 83.
[83] Janet Allison, *Trial and Triumph: 101 Years in Northcentral Montana,* (Chinook, MT: The Northcentral Montana Cowbelles, 1968): p.164; Shelby History Group, *Toole County Backgrounds*, p. 83.
[84] Henderson, *Montana Passage,* p. 59.
[85] Geraldine History Committee, *Spokes, Spurs and Cockleburs*, p. 293.
[86] Henderson, *Montana Passage,* p. 64.
[87] Joseph Kinsey Howard, *Montana: High Wide and Handsome*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press/Bison Books, 2001): p. 202.

Between 1919 and 1925, fifty percent of Montana homesteaders lost their farms as the value of their land decreased by fifty percent. Over 11,000 Montana farms "blew away," leaving more than 40,000 people in eastern and central Montana destitute. Some farmers turned to the towns for alternate employment. Others moved on to more fertile locales out of state.[88] Montana earned the dubious distinction of being the only state in the country to lose population during the so-called "roaring" twenties, a decade known nationally for its economic growth. Chouteau County exodus rates exceeded state averages: of the 10,450 people residing there in 1920, only 8,600 remained ten years later.[89] Many of those still in Chouteau County abandoned rural areas for the opportunities afforded by regional centers like Fort Benton, the county seat. Fort Benton's population increased by about 10 percent during these years as the town swelled with homestead refugees.[90]

Amid the optimism and strong markets of the early part of the century, agricultural lending institutions had been established with remarkable speed. By 1920 there were eighty-five banks in northcentral Montana, serving a total population of fewer than 38,000 people: the bank to customer ratio for the region was over seven times the national average. Many other banks had been opened and quickly closed the previous decade. A national agricultural depression compounded Montana farmers' woes in the 1920s. Agriculturalists and their lending establishments reeled under the impact: from 1920-1925 over half of the state's banks shut their doors and forced sheriff's sales became common throughout the countryside.[91] Among those that closed were many in the commercial centers that served Eagle Butte residents, including both of Fort Benton's banks. The agricultural depression weakened many sectors of the region's economy, and other businesses closed as well, among them Fort Benton's weekly newspaper. *The Benton Record* ceased publication in 1920 after 45 years in operation.[92]

Falling enrollment at Eagle Butte school attested to the sudden depopulation of the surrounding countryside. Enrollment dropped by almost 25 percent the first year of the drought and by 1920 the attendance sheets listed only nine students. Student numbers peaked briefly again in 1921-1922, when an all-time high of 29 children attended Eagle Butte. Thereafter enrollment fell to ten or fewer, where it stayed into the 1930s.[93] Teachers disappeared almost as rapidly as students. From 1919 to 1924, no fewer than six teachers led classes at the schoolhouse. They included, in order of appearance, Miss Martine, Miss Zoa Hicks, Miss Georgia Bockenkamp, Mrs. H. C. Clay, Miss Henriette Gebhart, and Miss Ms. Anna J. Jones.[94]

The teachers' days were highly regimented. Their reports to the county superintendent document a daily schedule in which every minute between 9:00 am to 4:00 pm was carefully planned. Lessons included numbers, arithmetic, word sounding, writing, reading, language, oral hygiene, history, and spelling. Two 15-minute recesses and an hour lunch break at noon separated formal instruction periods. A flag salute at 4:00 pm preceded class dismissal.[95] For their work the (predominantly single) women who taught at Eagle Butte were paid a pittance. Although the district steadily raised its wages over the years in an attempt to recruit teachers, rural school teachers continued to make far less than other workers in the period. In 1920, the State Department of Public Instruction in Helena linked teachers salaries to teacher shortages in a bulletin it published decrying the shortage-induced "educational crisis." Teachers, the department reported, made less money than

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[88] Clarence W. Groth, *Montana Banking History 1864-1954*, (Helena, MT: unpublished manuscript produced for the Helena Branch of the Federal Reserve Bank, 1955): p. 42-3; Michael Malone, Richard B. Roeder, and William L. Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, rev. ed., (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1991): p. 283.

[89] C. F. Kraenzel, *Farm Population Mobility. Montana State College Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin No. 371*, (Bozeman, MT: Montana State College, 1939): p. 8

[90] Great Northern Railway Company, *Fort Benton, Montana,* (St. Paul, MN: Great Northern Railway Company, 1956): p. 4.

[91] Malone, *Montana,* p. 218.

[92] Lepley, *Birthplace of Montana: A History of Fort Benton*, p. 149.

[93] In 1928, 10 students attended the Eagle Butte School. In 1930 only 5 were enrolled. Chouteau County Superintendent of Schools records.

[94] Chouteau County Superintendent of Schools records.

[95] Zoa Hicks, *Teacher's Report to County Superintendent,* Eagle Butte School District #14, May 1919, Chouteau County Superintendent of Schools records.

> hotel chefs, moving picture operators, bricklayers, plumbers or plasterers . . .cooks, street car conductors, jailors, head washers in laundries, day laborers, firemen, engineers, teamsters, truck drivers, millers, meter men, blacksmiths, hardware clerks, . . . all classes of typographical workers . . .butchers, brick setters, linemen, colored porters on trains . . . sheep herders and hod carriers. . .waitresses, barbers, dish washers and scrub women . . chambermaids, telephone girls and cigar stand girls.[96]

Female teachers like those who lived at Eagle Butte schoolhouse suffered especially low pay: the bulletin listed "the very great difference in salaries" between them and their male counterparts as contributing to the teacher shortage crisis. During Eagle Butte's heyday, that crisis crippled schools across the state. In 1919, 227 Montana schools did not open at the start of the new school year "because not even a weak teacher" could be hired. [97]

As area homesteader Arthur Henderson put it, "the teacher had to be about the most resourceful person around . . . educator, disciplinarian, janitor, repairman, nurse, and handler of any and all emergencies. The state prescribed a rigid curriculum which had to be taught without benefit of adequate instructional materials and supplies. Eighth graders would be expected to pass an exam before moving on to boarding school and further education in town. . . .twice a year the county superintendent would come around to check on conditions and, perhaps, give a boost to morale. . .Later, the visits of the county health nurse found reluctant children lining up for inspections of mouth, nose, and ears, fearful she might also want to look at their toes. . . .If the district was prosperous, a 'teacherage' of two rooms or so might adjoin the school and spare the teacher the need for boarding around."[98]

In a pattern repeated in townships across the Great Plains, District 14 coped with declining enrollment by consolidating. The last year the community supported two schoolhouses was 1924. Thereafter, all area schoolchildren attended the North Eagle Butte school. The South Eagle Butte school closed and the North Eagle Butte School was later designated the Eagle Butte School.[99]

The Dust Bowl and the Great Depression of the 1930s, followed the farm depression of the 1920s, and making a living on dryland farms became even more difficult. Between 1929 and 1934, American agricultural commodity prices fell an average of 40 percent, while industrial prices fell only 15 percent.[100] The "dryland, small grain agricultural Montana counties" lost, on average, 10 percent of their population from 1919 to 1938. Farm failure figures were even higher. [101] The 1930s census returns for Eagle Butte's township showed 12 resident families, five of which included school age children. In 1935, the Eagle Butte post office closed, as depopulation in the township undermined its ability to support civic services.[102]

The outcome would have been worse if not for the infusion of vast amounts of federal aid under the auspices of the New Deal: only one state received more federal funds than Montana in the 1930s. At times, roughly one in four residents relied on some form of relief.[103] General and devastating droughts plagued Chouteau County producers in 1934, 1936 and 1937. In 1935 and 1936 came the "greatest scourge of grasshoppers" in residents' memory. "Mormon crickets moved along like black molasses covering up to one mile a day and leaving a path of destruction."[104] During these years of drought and depression, local and federal programs put Chouteau

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[96] State Department of Public Instruction, *School Bulletin*, Feb. 1920.
[97] State Department of Public Instruction, *School Bulletin.* Salaries at Eagle Butte crept up from $90 a month in 1919, to $100, then $125, then $135 by 1922. The following year it dropped to $85 a month before climbing again to $110 in 1924. Chouteau County Superintendent of Schools records.
[98] Henderson, *Montana Passage,* p. 45-46.
[99] Chouteau County Superintendent of Schools records.
[100] John Garraty, *The Great Depression: An Inquiry into the Causes, Course, and Consequences of the World Wide Depression, as Seen by Contemporaries and in the Light of History,* (San Diego, CA: Barcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1986): p.54.
[101] Kraenzel, *Farm Population Mobility,* p. 8. The loss percentage is a new figure over a twenty year period, the end of which marked the beginning of the nation's economic recovery. During that period half the farms in an area might fail, only to be repopulated by hopeful families desperate to make a living. Such a cycle could be repeated several times in any given region, yet the high population turnover would not be reflected in figures on net population loss.
[102] Ken Robison, Historian, Overholser Historical Research Center, personal communication with Delia Hagen, Dec. 4, 2008.
[103] Malone, *Montana*, p. 227-237.
[104] Henderson, *Montana Passage,* p. 96-97.

County people to work building roads and civic infrastructure such as schools, public swimming pools and parks, and town water treatment plants.[105]

The infusion of federal aid buoyed the spirits as well as the finances of north-central Montana producers. When a rise in wheat prices followed the 1933 Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA), a Fort Benton journalist hailed it as "the first bright note in three years." Over the following four years, AAA made some 140,000 contract agreements with Montana farmers and brought over $10 million to state. Other New Deal programs also specifically addressed the plight of dryland farmers. The farm credit administration, for instance, increased the loans available to agricultural producers.[106]

The coming of World War II expedited recovery from the Dirty Thirties and reversed the fortunes of Chouteau County producers. Cooperative weather and the spread of new farm technologies like pesticides meant that farmers enjoyed great wartime harvests. "Grain for Europe's devastated people was in great demand following the war," and the county had the highest per capita income in the nation.[107] Reflecting the renewed prosperity, and population, in the countryside, Eagle Butte enrollment increased and stabilized. In 1941, School District 14 counted 19 students on its roster. Five years later, in 1946, enrollment stood at 18, and in 1964 the school census listed 17 school-age children in District 14.[108]

That year, as Chouteau County residents flocked to Fort Benton to celebrate the centennial of the raucous fur-trade post turned staid county seat, economic indicators suggested a future full of promise. Wartime rationing had slowed business in town, but the end of the war brought a retail boom as flush farmers rushed to replace worn-out household goods they'd long relied on. "Benton was growing again, after decades of hovering between 1000 and 1200" people. By 1950, the region had achieved a certain level of stability, with some 5,000 rural residents in the area around Fort Benton traveling, as they long had, to the town of 1,500 to meet many of their commercial and social needs.[109]

But even as Chouteau County producers celebrated prosperous times and stabilizing populations, a more gradual demographic shift developed. The "[m]odernization of farming techniques and the introduction of the automobile generated a migration of small farming families to urban areas. The one-room schools thus faced declining enrollment, which caused many of them to be closed or abandoned during the 1940s and 1950."[110] Although relative prosperity in northcentral Montana delayed the closure of some Chouteau County country schools, the question of district consolidation and closure eventually arose. In 1959, eligible voters 21 and over considered whether or not to annex Eagle Butte School District 14 to School District 44 in Geraldine. Sixteen school district residents cast ballots and Eagle Butte averted annexation by a vote of 7 "for" to 9 "against."[111]

The Eagle Butte school district's independence did not last. "During the 1960s, there was a strong national movement to consolidate school districts . . . With the political pressure on schools to provide higher quality educational standards, to lower drop-out rates, to be technologically sophisticated, and to be competitive with foreign nations, the consolidation issue re-emerged."[112] The 1960s zeal for consolidation was a recent manifestation of an age-old tradition. "School consolidation," had "'been part of the educational milieu for almost as long as there have been schools'. . . Throughout most of this century," school reformers "have attempted to create larger

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[105] Lepley, *Birthplace of Montana: A History of Fort Benton*, p. 153-162.
[106] Henderson, *Montana Passage,* p. 95.
[107] Lepley, *Birthplace of Montana: A History of Fort Benton*, p. 165-167, 171, 173; Great Northern Railway Company, *Fort Benton,* p. 4, 13; Henderson, *Montana Passage,* p. 110.
[108] Chouteau County Superintendent of Schools records; Ken Robison, Historian, Overholser Historical Research Center, personal communication with Delia Hagen, Dec. 4, 2008.
[109] Henderson, *Montana Passage,* p. 111; Lepley, *Birthplace of Montana: A History of Fort Benton*, p. 165-167, 171, 173; Great Northern Railway Company, *Fort Benton,* p. 4, 13.
[110] Heath, "A Dying Heritage," p. 201.
[111] Clerk of Election of District No. 14, Certificate of Annexation of Elementary School District No. 14, Jan. 23, 1959, Chouteau County Superintendent of Schools records.
[112] Paul Stremick, *School District Consolidation in Montana,* (Missoula, MT: unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Montana, 2001): p. 24.

more efficient schools, likening the 'laws' of school administration to the 'laws' of efficient industrial and agricultural production."[113] The question of annexing Eagle Butte school arose repeatedly through the first half of the 1960s, and 1964 seems to have been the last year students attended school at Eagle Butte.[114] On July 1, 1965, the County Superintendent of Schools declared Eagle Butte school "abandoned . . [and] annexed to School District No. 44, Geraldine Elementary."[115]

Like schools across that state, Eagle Butte school fell victim to "better roads, improved transportation, increasing emphasis on quality education, and movement toward administrative efficiency." These developments and many others "contributed to clos[ing] the small outlying schools that were a necessity" in the populous homesteading era of the early 20th century.[116]

The Eagle Butte School is reflective of its association with the homestead boom in north-central Montana. The school is representational of the rise and fall of homesteading in the Eagle Butte area. It served as an educational facility for 50 years to the homesteads that once dotted the surrounding area. It is an exemplification of one-room schoolhouse architecture of the period, as well as a well-preserved example of early-twentieth century Craftsman construction.

[113] Stremick, *School District Consolidation*, p. 23, 26.
[114] Ken Robison, Historian, Overholser Historical Research Center, personal communication with Delia Hagen, Dec. 4, 2008.
[115] Margaretha Thomas, County Superintendent of Schools, To Whom it May Concern, July 1, 1965, Chouteau County Superintendent of Schools records.
[116] Stevensville Historical Society, *Montana Genesis: A History of the Stevensville Area of the Bitterroot Valley,* (Missoula, MT: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 1971): p. 203.

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Topographic Map

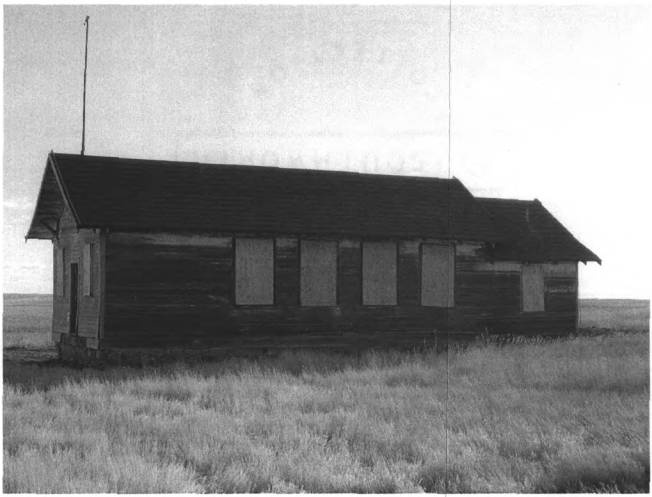
In accordance with the March 2005 Photo Policy expansion, the photos that accompany this nomination are printed on HP Premium Plus Photo Paper, using a Hewlett Packard 100 gray photo cartridge. This combination of paper and inks is included on the NR's list of "Acceptable Ink and Paper combinations for 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.

Photographer: Delia Hagen
Date: Nov. 30, 2008
Negatives: N/A, digital photographs, disk on file at MT SHPO

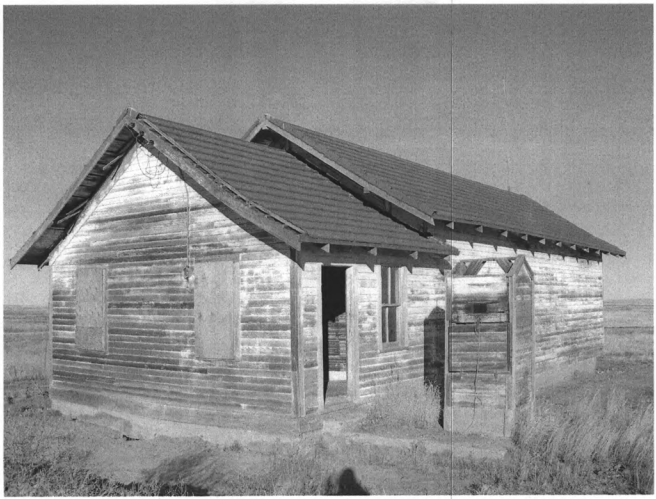
Photo Number	Description
1.	overview of school, view to southeast
2.	school, façade (north elevation), view to south
3.	school, west elevation, view to east
4.	school and cistern, south (and east) elevation, view to the northwest
5.	school, east elevation, view to west
6.	cistern, south and east elevation, view to northwest
7.	view to north from schoolhouse entry, Bear's Paw Mountains

1. *Overview of school, view to southeast*

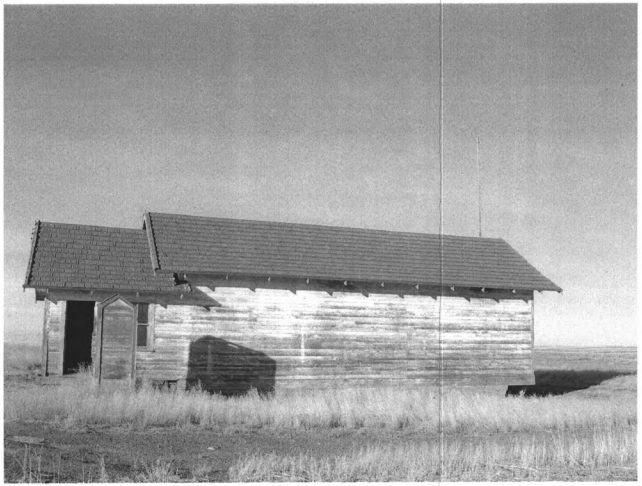
2. School, façade (north elevation), view to south



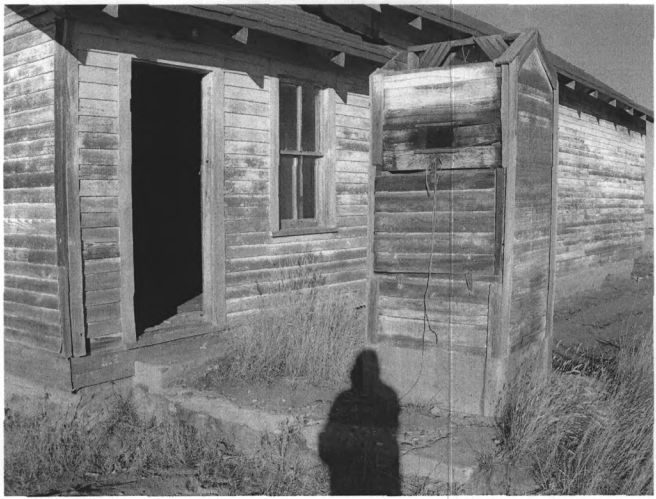
3. School, west elevation, view to east



4. School and cistern, south (and east) elevation, view to the northwest



5. School, east elevation, view to west



6. Cistern, south and east elevation, view to northwest

7. View to north from schoolhouse entry, Bear's Paw Mountains