

MANHATTAN PUBLIC SCHOOL BUILDINGS

The first school in what is now Manhattan was built in Moreland in 1884, that town's first year. It stood on a lot on the north side of town that was later occupied by a house that was the residence of a man named Sig Larson. The school was a small frame structure.¹

The second school, constructed in 1896, was used through 1913. It was a much larger, two-story frame building, located on the old Verwolf place east of town. That farm has also been known as the Elmer Parker and the Jake Voight place. The first floor of the building was used as a classroom and the second floor mostly as a community center.

Apparently, the construction was done without first arranging a means of adequate financing. At any rate, trouble commenced shortly after completion when a "Mechanic's Lien" was filed in District Court.

The lien is interesting in that it contains the names of all parties supplying building materials, a great deal of 'legal jargon' and a -complete list of all materials used, with their cost.

The lien was filed by J.F. Ogle and R.I. Fisher, copartners doing business as the Manhattan Fuel and Lumber Company, versus Oliver Skow, D.N. Weber and Mrs. C.A. Curtis, Trustees of School District No. 3, and W.F. Hancock, contractor and builder.

The "Bill of Goods," more than six full pages, gave the amounts and cost of all materials used. Since there is a considerable difference between costs then and now, two of Bozeman's present lumber yards were contacted and the following table compiled.

Item	1896 Cost	1985 Cost	
		Yard ' #One	Yard # Two
2 X 4's and planks (some 26 ft long)	\$15.00 per M	\$218.00 per M	\$225.00 per M
Nails	\$0.06 per lb.	\$0.75 per lb.	\$0.95 per lb.
Brick	1.50 each		
Shingles	\$3.00 per M	\$24.00 per bundle	\$16.00 per bundle
Lime for plaster	\$0.63 per bu.		\$4.75 per #50 bag
No. 2 grade flooring	\$22.00 per M	\$540.00 per M	
Tar paper	\$1.75 per roll	\$10.45 per roll	\$9.75 per roll
Lath	\$3.50 per M	\$8.75 per bundle of fifty	\$7.50 per bundle of fifty
Shiplap	\$15.00 per M	\$505.00 per M	\$640.00 per M

In 1900, the following thirty-six students were in attendance: Helen Serrette, Edith Serrette, Tommy Johnstone, Synthia Serrette, Martha Bos, Clausen Ouldhouse, Garrett Oulhouse, Grover Swetland, Josie Weber, Clausen Bos, Everett Beck, Henry Oyler, Edwin Beck, Waldo Ogle, N. C. Rogers, Cleo Martin, Fauntie Oyler, Clausen Townsend, Hannah Bos, Adolph Bos, Maud Oyler, John Hyink, Belle Lemons, Nora Small, Willie Serrette, Helen Hancock, Glen Beck, Leta Mae Skow. Bennie Oyler. Azel Serrette, Geo. Edwards, Gerrett Hyink, and Lillie Potter.

Teacher: F. A. Clothier

MANHATTAN'S COMBINATION GRADE AND HIGH SCHOOL

Manhattan's first brick school building was completed and occupied in February, 1914. It was a "strikingly handsome structure, whose durability and utility was not surpassed. . . ." The board of trustees at the time of construction consisted of Harry J. Thomas, President; L.M. LaLacheur; Harry Altenbrand and Mrs. H.E. Becker.

The new building located at the north end of Broadway "had a commanding appearance with its eighty-six foot frontage and three-story height, the depth of the structure being fifty-six feet." The superstructure was brick with cement floors and stairs. However, the floors had been overlaid with hard maple flooring. The building contained a "cozy apartment for the janitor. . . ." Two boilers provided the heat.

The Manhattan school had recently been "raised" to an accredited high school, "by which the district received \$500 (per pupil ?) from the high school fund of Gallatin County." The high school had "fifteen students taking courses above the eighth grade studies." Their instructor was Prof. W. Templeton, and his "corps of assistants" were "Miss Olive Selen, Miss Hilda Anderson, Miss Dorothy Gatton and Miss Ethel Seely."¹

Another article, written in 1917, stated that Fred F. Willson, Bozeman, was the architect and that the building with its equipment had cost \$32,500. It also said that "the Altenbrand Park, now completed and in front, gives it a most complete surrounding, and with the present faculty, Manhattan has the finest and best school of any town its size in the state."²

During the nationwide flu epidemic in 1918, the school was closed and the building converted to a hospital for the duration of the epidemic. Four people are said to have died there during that period.

The combination arrangement continued through the spring of 1923. The new high school became available that fall.

Notes:

¹*The Manhattan Record*—February 5, 1914, page 1, col. 3

² *Ibid.*, —April 26, 1917, page 1, col. 4

FIRST HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

The first class to graduate from the new high school consisted of Lona Meece, Madge Gibson and Ruth Green. To accommodate the anticipated large crowd, the commencement exercises were held in the Kid Theatre, Thursday evening, June 1, 1916. The Senior reception had been held Friday, May 26, in the high school assembly hall. The baccalaureate services took place in the same hall Sunday, May 28. The senior play, "The Man Who Came Down," was presented May 31 at the Kid Theatre. (The theatre was also used as a gymnasium for basketball games until the new high school was completed in 1923.)

This was "the first class ever graduated from the Manhattan high school with full credit and (was) the first commencement in the history of the school. The class, though small, (had) been a working one and (was) much deserving (sic) of their diplomas which now (entitled) them to enter any of the state schools of higher education without examination or having to make up any back work.

Note

The Manhattan Record—May 18, 1916, page 1, col. 3

REASONS FOR CONSTRUCTING THE NEW HIGH SCHOOL

Three years previous to the dedication of the new building, "the Manhattan school authorities were having a problem with the school boys frequenting the pool hall. The businessmen and others were appealed to (to) help solve the problem." Efforts were made to raise thirty thousand dollars for the construction of a Community building. "The preliminary pledges were most promising, indicating that enough money could be raised for this purpose. ... In working out the plan, however, for the maintenance of this building . . . the committee in charge had their hardest problem, in fact successful or continuous maintenance could not be worked out," so the project was abandoned.

At the same time, the old school was overflowing and being forced to go outside its own plant and rent additional quarters. Both the high school and grade school were being maintained in a building designed only as a grade school. "The need for having a new high school was becoming more and more necessary."

Considering these facts, the need for a community service building and the need for a high school building, developed the idea of a Community high school building. The following May an election was held to determine if a new school should be

constructed. The proposition passed by a vote of one hundred ninety-five to fifteen, thus instructing the school board to secure the necessary funds and draw up plans.

The bond market being poor at that time and the cost of building materials at a high peak, plans were deferred until the following spring.

By then, the requests and demands of the citizens became so acute that the board determined to take action. In the meantime, the bond market had greatly improved, and the costs of building materials had “decreased tremendously.” In addition, labor and contractors were experiencing “stagnation conditions ... so that every circumstance seemed to justify the board’s action.” A six percent bond issue for sixty-four thousand dollars was sold and, as the plans for the school had been drawn the year’ before and carefully worked over by the board, all was in order to call for bids.

The fact that it was to be a Community High School became a real problem as so many other details, or angles, had to be considered, and “so many peculiar problems had to be satisfied. . . .” all were eventually solved.

One year after the election approving construction, the board moved forward and, a year later, the building was dedicated.

About that time, an experienced school man from the Middlewest toured the building and expressed his opinion of the new building: “This is the finest high school plan I have ever seen and I have seen a great many. It is so beautiful, so well built, so well planned, so full of light . . . and so complete in every conceivable respect.”¹

Apparently the Manhattan Commercial Club promoted and secured the installation of the big Olympic-sized swimming pool in the new building. The pool was supposedly constructed without direct cost to the taxpayers and was not to increase taxes. “The result had been accomplished through a philanthropical loan of the amount of money necessary for the construction of the pool by Mr. Lew Frank of the firm of Kroffgans and Frank (contractors of the new building), to the Manhattan Swimming Pool Association, Inc.” The association had been organized by the Commercial Club for the specific purpose of financing the pool.

It was the only nonprofit-sharing corporation in the state of Montana. It had no assets and depended on contributions, the revenue from the use of the pool and other school activities to pay for the pool.²

Notes:

¹ *The Rocky Mountain American*—June 28, 1923, page 1, col. 4

² *Ibid.*, October 12, 1922, page 1, col. 3

DEDICATION OF THE NEW HIGH SCHOOL

Elaborate arrangements were made for the dedication of the new building that included the cooperation of the Bozeman Chamber of Commerce and many of its members.

April 4, 1923, was the date set for the evening occasion, that included speeches by Governor Joseph M. Dixon, President Alfred Atkinson of Montana State College, State Superintendent of Schools May Trumper, and Charles Brannon, President of the University of Montana.

The Manhattan Committee in charge of the arrangements included Harry Altenbrand, president of the Commercial Club; J.W. Black, Mayor of Manhattan; Professor Wyatt, Superintendent of Manhattan Schools; George M. Lewis, President of the School Board; and Martin Jacoby. Arrangements were made “to have all the county superintendents of schools in the state present, as this occasion had been arranged to meet with their convenience. . . .” At that time, the superintendents were attending their annual two-week institute being held in Bozeman that year. Transportation from Bozeman for the superintendents was provided in the private cars of the members of the Bozeman Chamber of Commerce.

Note:

The Rocky Mountain American—March 22, 1923, page 1, col. 5

THE NEW HIGH SCHOOL'S FIRST FACULTY

The new school opened September 17, 1923, with the school board feeling that the faculty chosen that year was the best all-around group of teachers ever employed by the district. The members of the faculty were as follows:

- “Geo. Kildow, Bachelor of Science, Master of Science, Washington State College —Mathematics and Science (including chemistry).
- “Mary V. Harris, A.B., Grinnell College —Public Speaking, Debate and Dramatics. Miss Harris is a specialist in this line of English work.
- “Clayton Harrington, A.B., Montana State College — History and English. Mr. Harrington is a fine musician and is anxious to start musical organization.
- “Chive Cox, Montana State College—Home Economics. She will handle swimming and gymnastics for girls.
- “Homer Rice, A.B., Spokane University—Latin, Athletic Coach and principal of grade building.
- “Marion J. Russell, A.B., Montana State College, University of Michigan — Commercial.
- “Marie Badgley, Montana State University—Music in both schools.
- “Ruth J. Fausett, Montana State Normal—Journalism and Librarian.
- “Howard J. Clemmons, Bachelor of Science, Iowa State College—Agriculture.

Notes:

The Rocky Mountain American – August 30, 1923, page 1, col. 6

OTHER NEW SCHOOL FACILITIES

The old brick grade school, first used in 1914, was torn down in 1970 and replaced with the single-story elementary school now in use.

Another new addition was completed in June, 1986, and placed in use that fall. The one and one-half million-dollar structure, approved by the voters in 1984, has 24,000 square feet of floor space, containing a multi-purpose room, cafeteria, girls volleyball facility and seven class rooms used primarily by junior high students.

Notes:

Manhattan Area History-1986, page 36

ROBBERS BREAK INTO HIGH SCHOOL

During some years, Manhattan and other small towns in the county, seem to have experienced more than their share of robberies, two of which occurred in late March 1949. On a Sunday night, the Manhattan High School office and the Monarch Lumber Company office in Three Forks were both burglarized.

The burglars entered the high school through a side door, knocked off the vault tumbler and made off with about one-hundred dollars. "Little disturbance was made in contrast to the recent robbery at the Belgrade high school where doors were smashed and papers strewn about."

At Three Forks, the thieves found the safe unlocked but only obtained about twelve dollars for their trouble.

It was presumed that the thieves expected to find money taken in during a carnival at the high school on Saturday evening and at the Fireman's Ball, the same night, at Three Forks. If so, the thieves were greatly disappointed.

THE MANHATTAN HIGH ONCE HAD A DORMITORY

In August 1925, *The Rocky Mountain American*, announced that students from out of town would "be able to secure board and room at a very small figure," and that a "dormitory would be opened in connection with the Manhattan High School," for students from out of town. "The dormitory would be operated with no profit. The plan (was) to start with the low cost of eighteen dollars per month for each student and if the dormitory (could) be maintained for this amount, (that) would be the set figure for the entire term. It (was) figured that the students (could) furnish their own bedding, take care of their own rooms and laundry and take turns helping around the house, that the dormitory (could) be run at this figure. The care of the rooms, however, (would) be under supervision and certain rules would be enforced." My mother, Mrs. Wm. W. Niven, was to be in charge.

Our family had moved into the old Monte House Hotel (later known as the Bums Place) March 1, 1925. Mother had then "taken care of several boys and girls from outside the district and (had) proved herself most worthy of the charge, looking after the children in the same manner as if they were her own."¹

Following the very strong earthquake June 24, 1925, that severely damaged the Manhattan schools and placed the district in a very precarious financial position, someone (possibly Oliver H. Campbell, superintendent of the Manhattan Schools) conceived the idea of bringing in extra students from outlying communities such as West Yellowstone, Maudlow, West End, Ringling, etc. The larger enrollment would increase the amount of money received from the state and county, and thus

help relieve the “strapped” condition that had been brought on by having to reconstruct and refurnish the school buildings after the quake.

Mother, Mrs Niven, managed the dormitory during the 1925-1926 school term and during the 1926-1927 term until the first of February, 1927, at which time the family moved to Bozeman. At eighteen dollars per month, she certainly didn't get rich, but by my raising a large garden, keeping a milk cow that had been loaned by my Uncle George M. Lewis, and with my flock of Rhode Island Red chickens providing the eggs, she got by.

It was not an easy job for Mother, as the county superintendent of schools occasionally found an incorrigible individual that required special attention and counseling, and that was sometimes very difficult. There were others who had never lived under supervision with others and had never had specific rules to follow, so had a difficult time making the necessary adjustments. Others objected to taking their turns washing dishes, raking the yard, or doing other necessary chores around the place. However, it may have helped some to have Mr. Campbell as a roomer, even though he did not take his meals with us.

There would have been a dozen or more students, away from home for the first time, who profited from this experience and were thus aided in obtaining a high school education.

Notes:

¹*The Rocky Mountain American*-August 27, 1925, page 1, col. 3

MANHATTAN'S 1925 EARTHQUAKE

The destructive earthquakes that struck Manhattan, Saturday evening, June 27, 1925, as I recall, were preceded by a few small tremors during the foregoing weeks, but they did not create much excitement. However, the two sharp quakes, the epicenter of which was in the Manhattan, Three Forks, Sixteen Mile Canyon triangle, secured everyone's attention, as they were strong and did considerable damage, and left a lasting impression.

I was working for Lee Hays, east of Manhattan, that summer, and except for a few things knocked off the shelves or walls in the Hay's house, the main damage was to the chimney. It, like most others in the area, was twisted around about one-eighth of a turn where it emerged through the roof

Being Saturday night, the Hays family had intended to take in the dance at the Legion Hall in Manhattan, so after supper the whole family, myself included, loaded into their little old car and drove into Manhattan. There was no dance that night, or for some time to come.

When we arrived in town soon after 7:00 P.M., not a soul was in sight on Railroad Avenue and the cornices of nearly every brick or stone building on the street had crashed down onto the sidewalks, necessitating that many walks be replaced. It's a wonder someone wasn't killed, but fortunately no one was on the street at that time.

Many small after-shocks continued through the night and for many days to come, so most people in Manhattan slept out on the ground under the trees that first night.

Along with the brick and stone buildings on the main street, the buildings that suffered the most were the two brick school houses both of which had to be practically rebuilt.

The editor of *The Rocky Mountain American*, published in Manhattan, who had been in Bozeman that afternoon, reported:

“Upon my arrival in town, I saw nothing unusual with the exception of a bottle of ink that had fallen off my desk and broken on the floor. I only stopped long enough at the office a minute or two as I was hurrying to make the hotel in time for supper, and according to reports, two shocks had already occurred, but I was wholly ignorant of it, but as I started to drive up the street, when I got about opposite the post office, I noticed people all running from the building. I saw bricks fall and the dust rise. I could not imagine what had gone wrong until I asked one of the boys I knew. When he told me an earthquake had occurred this was the first inkling I had of it. (His car had been moving during the previous quakes.) My first impression was that some explosion had occurred in the rear of some of the buildings.”¹

The editor did not at first realize the seriousness of the damage done, other than it would be necessary to rebuild the chimney of his building, and for a time, seemed to belittle the earthquake damage. In reality, practically every chimney in the area had to be rebuilt. Most frame buildings escaped damage, but the brick buildings, especially the schools, had to be repaired.

On Tuesday, June 30, a delegation from Gallatin County, including Miss Lucile Quaw, County Superintendent of Schools; George Lewis, chairman of the Manhattan School Board; O.H. Campbell, Superintendent of the Manhattan Schools; R.H. Johnson, Superintendent of the Logan Schools; Senator Wm. Buttleman, of Willow Creek; H.S. Batchelder, of the Three Forks School board; and J.C. Menapace, representing the Three Forks School district, all went to Helena to “interview the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Miss May Trumper, Governor Erickson and Attorney General Foote, to determine IF state help could be secured.”

The committee was without a definite plan and had little hope for help, but had to try something as a last resort. All four school systems were already bonded to the limit of the law, and therefore, had no legal way to rebuild their buildings with tax money and feared that their children would be without school facilities for many years to come.²

As a result of their trip, the middle of July it was announced that Governor Erickson was establishing special county committees to handle subscriptions towards the restoration of the five school houses in Gallatin County, and that W.R. Flew, head of the Department of Architecture at Montana State College would take an active part. It was also stated that "Montana has given gladly and deliberately to Belgian, French, Japanese and other outside relief and this is Montana's first opportunity to help home people.

"This is not a drive in any sense, but merely an opportunity for voluntary subscriptions to help fellow Montanans, principally children of school age. "Will the people respond? Of course they will, even more promptly".

"The reason Professor Plew was selected was that since he 'was already an employee of the state, it is considered wise in the interest of economy that he take charge of the work.' The saving in money is the main thing to be considered in the present emergency, and Montana State College is anxious to cooperate in the reconstruction in any way possible."³

Governor Erickson appointed a county chairman in each county in Montana who was responsible for conducting campaigns to raise the necessary amount. Charles Vandenhook, Bozeman banker, was chairman of the Gallatin County committee. Monday, July 27, was the day set for the drive to commence and the various committees were requesting the support of Commercial, Rotary, Kiwanis, and other service clubs all over the state.

Gallatin County was extensively organized for the drive with E.J. Parkin, chairman of the Bozeman District. J.A. Woodward and D.S. Williams, both associated with the Bozeman schools, were the chairmen of the "outlying districts" in the vicinity of Bozeman.

In Bozeman, the following were appointed and were to choose their own solicitors; District No. 1-L.Z. Copeland and L.W. Truett; District No. 2-W.S. Davidson and L.K. Pence; District No. 3-Fred B. Williams and F.O. Wilton; District No. 4-Roy Keister and one other.

Dr. Heetderks, president of the Manhattan Commercial Club, was chairman for the Manhattan District, with John Vanderlaan, R.G. Hibbard, C.C. Vaughn, R.G. McPherson and J.N. Talbot as solicitors. The Odd Fellows Lodge in Manhattan started off the local fund by contributing two hundred dollars towards the quota of

\$8,000 for Gallatin County. ⁴

In August, Senator B.K. Wheeler contributed one hundred dollars, but the committees serving throughout "Montana either were ineffective, or were slow forwarding their contributions, so it became necessary to lay off the crews working on the Manhattan schools for lack of funds."⁵

Apparently the subscription drives did not raise much money. In August the Manhattan paper stated:

“It seems that the well-to-do and the able to donate are either making small donations, or none at all, and thus are apt to deprive the little school children . . . (of) the schooling they are entitled.”⁶

At Willow Creek, some of the funds for rebuilding their school were contributed by Mr. Wm. A. Flaherty who staged barn dances and then contributed the proceeds to the school. Frank Collins, from Manhattan, “the professional ‘jollier,’ promised to insert pep into the evenings enjoyment.”⁷

In the long run, it was the several boxing cards, with Harry Altenbrand as their promoter, that saved the day for the Manhattan schools. The fights, held in the school gymnasium, were well staged, and the competition between the fighters excellent. There were frequent “grudge fights” that helped draw large crowds. The several fights between Frankie Wine of Roundup and Earl Womack of Ennis were memorable and frequently bloody. Hubert Dennis of Bozeman always gave a good account of himself and received a lot of local support. Several Manhattan boys, trained by Kid Johnstone, made frequent appearances fighting outsiders. Joe Calie and his brother were among them. I was fortunate in getting to serve as an usher for most of the cards, so got to see the fights for free.

The reconstruction of the schools in Manhattan was completed so that school could commence in the rebuilt buildings a little after the middle of September, 1925.

Notes:

¹*The Rocky Mountain American* – July 2, 1925, page 1, col. 6

²*Ibid.*, July 9, 1925, page 1, col 6

³*Ibid.*, July 16, 1925, page 1, col 5

⁴*Ibid.*, July 23, 1925, page 1, col 3

⁵*Ibid.*, August 20, 1925, page 1, col 6

⁶*Ibid.*, August 27, 1925, page 1, col 1

⁷*Ibid.*, page 1, col 3