Spring 1960

Pioneer Schools In The Gold Mining Camps Of Bannack, Virginia City, And Helena In Montana Territory

Barbara Ann Walker
Carroll College

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This thesis for "cum laude" honors leading to the B. A. Degree, by Barbara Ann Walker has been approved for the Department of History by

Thomas A. Clinch

Date: May 4, 1960
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the assistance given to me by the following individuals and organizations. Mr. Thomas Clinch, the head of the Carroll College History Department, aided me in many valuable ways, especially by helping me select a topic. The staff of the Carroll College Library was very considerate in making available their material. The staff of the State Historical Library, especially Miss Mary Dempsey, was most helpful and generous with their time and knowledge. My good friend Rita Rickl contributed many good suggestions and typed this thesis. My sister Geraldine gave numerous aids which helped me finish this work. Most important of the people to whom I owe thanks are my beloved parents, who gave me the opportunity to go to college.

To all these people go my thanks. My God bless them.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. EARLY BANNACK SCHOOLS</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. PIONEER SCHOOLS OF VIRGINIA CITY</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. SCHOOLS OF EARLY DAY HELENA</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PIioneer schools in the gold mining camps
of
Bannack, Virginia City, and Helena
in Montana Territory
by
Barbara Ann Walker
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Carroll College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for
"cum laude" honors leading to the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
Department of History
April 1, 1960
INTRODUCTION

In reading and studying about the West one finds a good deal written about such heroic figures as the fur trappers, the miners, and the cowboy. But these are the tales of high adventure which make for exciting reading. The everyday life that went to building up a community is neglected. For example, when one now thinks of a gold mining camp such as Virginia City one thinks of a roaring city of stores and saloons frequented by men with gold fever, who busily hunt the hills for gold and on occasion for the bad men who attempt to get their gold the "easy way".

But this is no adequate or balanced picture of the time, for although high adventure played a part, other factors were of importance too. To demonstrate this fact, I am going to attempt to give an account of one of these factors. By a study of the schools of the three gold mining cities of Bannack, Virginia City, and Helena, I hope to show that one of the pictures of life in a gold mining city is the picture of boys and girls trudging off to school.

The fact that it was so much a part of the everyday life of an ordinary family perhaps accounts for the fact that so little has been written about it. Also the first schools were private and hence official records contain little or no
information regarding individual schools. So today we find the existence of whole schools may be indicated by only a few lines in a newspaper or letter.

But these hints and glimpses let us know that parents attempted to give their children the best that was available. The community also recognized the desirability of having educated citizens, even though the more exciting news may have been that there was another hanging last night.

Education, that important link between the past, present, and future because it deals with people, was a matter of concern to people in Montana in the 1860's and 1870's, and they made many efforts and sacrifices to enable their children to be educated.
CHAPTER I

EARLY BANNACK SCHOOLS

In Bannack as in Virginia City and Last Chance Gulch the first rapid growth in population resulted in demands for schools. Private schools were the first to meet this need of the community, although public schools quickly followed.

In most cases these early private schools do not seem to have lasted long. But the private schools met the requirements of the time and without them, Montana would have been much poorer in educated citizens.

Information indicates that the first of these private schools in Bannack seems to have been in the summer of 1863. "Mrs. Henry Zoller had a private school for two months for primary scholars."\(^1\) In October of 1863 Miss Lucia Darling opened a school.\(^2\) Mrs. Curtis also notes that in '64 I think some one had a short term of school in a building owned by Mrs. George D. French. I do not remember the name of the teacher. Mrs. Major Watgon had a private school in the winter of '64 and '65.\(^3\)

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\(^2\)Mrs. S. W. Park (nee Lucia Darling), "The First School In Montana," \textit{op. cit.}, p. 191.

\(^3\)Curtis, \textit{op. cit.}
A slightly different version has that Mrs. Thomas Watson taught in the summer of 1864, and William Mitchell in the winter of 1864-1865.1

Of all these schools mentioned the most information available seems to be about the one taught by Miss Lucia Darling. This lady is an example of the fact that the people who operated and supported these private schools were often well educated and from very prominent families in the community.

In 1863 Miss Darling was requested to take charge of a school.2 There was good reason for asking her to do so for, although there were no legal qualifications necessary during this pre-territorial period, even while Montana was under the jurisdiction of Idaho Territory, we find that these early teachers had some qualifications to recommend them to the profession. Miss Darling had taught school in Ohio before coming to Bannack and had spent a year attending Oberlin College during the year 1859-60.3

Miss Darling had come to Montana in the fall of 1863 with her uncle, Sidney Edgerton, who was to be the Chief Justice of Idaho Territory and who later was to become, in 1864, the first governor of Montana Territory. Edgerton was well aware of the educational problems of the time and did much to help Miss Darling and all Montana. Miss Darling

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1John Bishop, op. cit., p. 196.
2Park, op. cit., p. 191.
tells how her uncle went with her to interview the owner of a house they thought might be suitable for a school. Here in her own words is an account of what happened.

With some difficulty, we found his humble residence and rapped loudly at the door. For some time, no one responded, but finally a man's voice called 'Come in.' Pushing open the door, we saw in the dim light a man lying on buffalo robes on the floor. He did not rise to meet us, for he had not fully recovered from the results of imbibing too freely from the favorite and profuse beverage then so plenty, and his voice was still too thick to be easily understood. My Uncle stated to him our errand. 'Yes, glad of it,' he said, 'D-------d shame; children running around the streets; ought to be in school. I will do anything I can to help her; she can have this room.' He kept on telling us how much a school was needed, and how willing he was to assist in establishing it, till my uncle interrupted him by asking what rent he would charge for the room. 'Well, I will do anything I can; I will give it to her cheap. She shall have it for fifty dollars a month. I won't ask her a cent more. It is dirt cheap.' And he continued dilating upon his interest in educational institutions, with many profane expletives. We left him still telling of his wish to be generous; but we decided that a rude habitation of that quality, plastered inside and outside with mud, with a mud roof and dirt floor was not dirt cheap, even with the exorbitant prices at that time prevailing in Bannack, and that the room was not suitable for my purpose.

This incident may have helped influence the fact that when the school did open in October of 1863, it opened in the Edgerton home.  

This school had about twenty pupils. The schedule for the school was not the same in those days as it is in present day Montana, for at first this early day school had just morning sessions. On the matter of textbooks, Miss Darling says,

1Park, op. cit., p. 191.
2Ibid.
3Ibid.
There was no discussion nor was there any difference of opinion as to what system of school books should be used, for the scholars were obliged to use such books as they had brought with them, or as could be secured from their neighbors, for there was no book store in the country, and the American book Company had not then been invented. It was a somewhat strange gathering of school books for they came from Maine and Missouri, and many other states were represented.  

Miss Darling also notes, "Some difficulty was encountered in improvising seats and desks for the pupils."  

A second term of school was taught by Miss Darling in a cabin owned by Charles Sackett and Richard Finn, opposite from the Edgerton home. Later this cabin was sold "to the government to be used as a Senate Committee room, while the First Legislature was in session."  

Besides her regular school, Miss Darling worked at home with her cousin Martha Edgerton Plassman. In this regard Mrs. Plassman relates, "Although I studied with my cousin (Lucy Darling), I did not attend her school, as the subjects I took were more advanced than those she taught."  

Miss Darling and her relations were indeed important to the education of Bannack's children. The interest her uncle took in education is stressed by the fact that when he became the first governor of Montana Territory at the

1Park, op. cit., p. 192.
2Ibid.
3Ibid.
opening session of the Territorial Legislature, which met at Bannack on December 12, 1864, this was part of his gubernatorial message:

It will devolve upon you to devise some system of education to meet the immediate wants of our people. The government, with wise forethought, has made liberal provisions for this purpose in the Organic Act, setting apart two sections of land in each township for the establishment of a school fund. With proper care, these lands will furnish a rich endowment for our common schools, placing them upon a sure and permanent basis. But these lands are not now available, and it may be years before we can realize any considerable advantage from them. Hundreds of children are now in the Territory, which a wise legislature will not permit to grow up in ignorance; for, in a free government like ours, where public measures are submitted to the judgment of the people, it is of the highest importance that the people should be so educated as to understand the bearing of public measures. A self ruling people must be an educated people, or prejudice and passion will assume the power, and anarchy will soon usurp the authority of the government. Children are in one sense, the property of the public, and it is one of the highest and most solemn duties of the State to furnish ample provision for their education. It has been well said by a distinguished jurist that it is cheaper to educate the boy than to punish the man, and if the education of the boy is neglected, the punishment of the man may become a necessity, for crime and ignorance go hand in hand.¹

Accordingly, the first legislature acted upon the Governor's suggestion by promptly having a bill introduced on December 30, 1863, less than three weeks later, which would provide a legal means for the establishment of a system of schools. Council Bill No. 38, entitled "An Act establishing a Common School System for the Territory of Montana," was passed by both houses of the legislature and became the first school law of Montana upon its approval by the Governor on February 7, 1865.²

With this I will close the brief chapter on the Bannack schools and pass on to that roaring neighbor town, Virginia City.

¹Montana Post, Virginia City, M.T., December 24, 1864, as cited in Sasek, op. cit., p. 30.
CHAPTER II

PIONEER SCHOOLS OF VIRGINIA CITY

The great discoveries of Alder Gulch brought about a very rapid growth in population. The most important center of this gulch was Virginia City, which was at one time the capital of Montana Territory.

Although Virginia City was the most prominent, its neighbors in Nevada City were ahead of them in acquiring a school. In the "summer of 1863, Miss Kate M. Dunlap taught a subscription school in Nevada City in Alder Gulch."¹ This school is thought by some to be the first school in present day Montana.

After this first effort in Nevada City there was establishment of several other schools.

The winter of '63 and '64 Michael Roach and a man who was known as Professor Davis each taught subscription schools in Nevada. The summer of 1864, Miss Dunlap and A. H. Van Brocken each taught subscription schools of twenty or twenty-five pupils. The following winter there were three subscription schools taught by Mrs. A. B. Davis, formerly Miss Dunlap, Messrs. Roach and Van Brocken.²


²Ibid.
In Virginia City itself Thomas J. Dimsdale seems to have been the first teacher. He may have arrived there in the summer of 1863. Dimsdale was an outstanding man in the area. But he is most famous today for his well-known work _The Vigilantes of Montana Or Popular Justice In The Rocky Mountains_. This is the work which the Vigilantes themselves paid Dimsdale to write. Dimsdale was also at one time editor of the _Montana Post_.

As is the case with the other early schools of Montana, Dimsdale's school was a private one. He charged a fee of two dollars a week per child. Stuart, the famous miner, calls this a "very modest sum for those days."¹ Stuart also adds that "The school was a good one."²

Dimsdale was well-qualified to teach. An Englishman, he had once planned to enter church work and had obtained his education at Rugby and at Oxford University. But because of failures in his father's business he had to leave the university before completing his studies. Then he migrated to Canada where he was a school teacher until hearing of the western gold fields.³

The interest Dimsdale had in church work carried over into his life at Virginia City. Bishop Daniel Tuttle, first

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²Ibid.
bishop of the Episcopal Church in Montana, says that Dimsdale had served as a lay reader in the Episcopal Church in Virginia City. In an article of the *Montana Post*, January 21, 1865, regarding the Union Church Festival, we are told that:

The tableaux ended with a series - "The Road to Ruin," in which Mr. Collins of the Montana Theatre, Prof. Dimsdale, Messrs. G. W. Hynson and William Chick took part, commencing with polite card playing, and ending in murder and the suicide of the victim, and was well received.2

A former pupil of Dimsdale from Ontario writes of him, "In Millbrook Professor Dimsdale taught the young idea how to shoot and then came West, where apparently he was still interested himself in the shooting industry."3 This same pupil adds in regard to his ability and personality:

The striking personality of the man recalls him still to memory: A large man, full-blooded, florid, large mentally and physically; certainly an ideal instructor. He must had had considerable magnetic influence or a large fund of benevolence, for always at intermission a crowd of youngsters were at his heels following him everywhere, receiving instructions while being amused with some scientific plaything... He is still remembered in Millbrook as a model schoolmaster and an educated gentleman of the old school, with abilities far above that demanded in the position he held as head school master in a country village.4

A woman who was his student in Virginia City recalls:

He was an Englishman, small, delicate-looking, and gentle. I liked him. It seemed to me he knew everything. In his school all was harmonious and pleasant. While his few

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2*Montana Post*, Virginia City, January 21, 1865.

3Letter in *Anaconda Standard*, July 9, 1893.

4Ibid.
pupils buzzed and whispered over their variously assorted readers, arithmetics, and copy books, the professor sat at a makeshift desk near the little window of the log schoolhouse writing, writing during the intervals between recitations at recess time always writing.

Of course the professor's being busily occupied with writing did not go unnoticed by his students. Thus the same pupil notes:

We children took advantage of Professor Dimsdale's pre-occupation. Carrie Crane and I would frequently ask to be excused. We would run down the slope, for the school house was just below what tourists now call Boot Hill Cemetery, into a corral, in the bottom of Daylight Gulch and spend a few thrillful moments sliding down the straw stacks. We thought our absences daringly prolonged; probably they were not; at any rate we were never chided.  

In the Montana Post of September 17, 1864, this advertisement appeared.

Prof. Dimsdale, Begs To Inform The Public that he has opened a school on Idaho street, behind Mr. Lomax's Corral. Having been long and successfully engaged in tuition, he feels sure that the friends of Education will support him in his attempt to establish a really good school in Virginia City. ALL the branches included in the curriculum of the best Seminaries will be taught in the most approved manner:

**TERMS:** $1.75 per week.

A night school will be opened next Monday for those whose vocations prevent their attendance during the day. The strictest attention will be paid to the morals and deportment of the pupils.

Young beginners $ 1.25.3

The same paper carries an article urging people to take advantage of this offer. It is interesting to note that

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3 *Montana Post*, September 17, 1864.
already there was demand that the public help out, "A school house should be built belonging to the district."¹

More information on Dimsdale's school is obtained from a letter in the Montana Post of November 5, 1864.

Editors Montana Post: - I am glad to notice that the subject of education is beginning to receive from our citizens some of that consideration which it deserves at their hands.

I have watched with interest the progress of the schools in our midst and been gratified at the success which has attended the efforts put forth in that direction though exerted under such disadvantageous circumstances as they have been thus far.

It is with peculiar satisfaction I have recently learned that by the energy of our townsman, Nathan Gibson, Esq. - a building of generous proportions is in process of completion, especially intended for a school house, and is to be well lighted and furnished with all the conveniences of double desks, recitation forms, maps, . . . as are to be seen in the east.

I am happy to be informed that Prof. Dimsdale, whose popularity has for some time past inconveniently crowded the building in which his school now meets, is to occupy the edifice.

I have no doubt that his efforts for the good of the young will be appreciated to the full extent of its accommodations. For I believe in matters of education the best is none too good for all, and that the unanimous sentiment of our community will be, that the little folks must be taught by the Professor.

Scrutineer²

This same issue of the Montana Post which carries the letter by the Scrutineer has the advertisement of the City Book Store where they claim to "keep constantly on hand the best assortment of stationary, school books."³ This would seem to indicate that the students could now buy books instead of depending on having their books when they came West or trying

¹Ibid.
²Montana Post, Virginia City, November 5, 1864.
³Ibid.
to borrow them from neighbors.

Some of the things said in urging parents to take advantage of the offer have a nice modern ring, as for example, "every lover of his country and of children should use his influence to keep the rising generation out of the streets."¹

This is not to say that there were not some strange sounding things, at least to our modern reading ears, in the newspapers of the time. The same paper quoted above, notes that there is a new gulch on the Yellowstone with immense wealth, and that "The scoundrel Kelly was hung on the Snake river."²

The second school of Dimsdale in 1864 seems to have been a success, for on December 3, 1864, the Montana Post carried the article:

Prof. Dimsdale has removed his school to room on Idaho street, formerly occupied as a printing office, by the proprietors of this paper, which has been fitted up for a school room and is well adapted for that purpose.³

Because the school moved to the old printing office, leaves one wondering about the "building of generous proportions . . . especially intended for a school house"⁴ mentioned in the Montana Post of November 5, 1864.

The fact that the second school was such a success brought an interesting comment from the Montana Post regarding the first.

¹Montana Post, Virginia City, September 17, 1864.
²Ibid.
³Montana Post, Virginia City, December 3, 1864.
⁴Montana Post, Virginia City, November 5, 1864.
The attempt made here last winter to establish a permanent school, be it said to the shame of our city, resulted in failure. Virginia was not ready for the advantages it offered. Prof. Dimsdale came here unheralded, a stranger to all our citizens, but by earnest labor he has achieved permanent and sure success.¹

The failure of the first school could not have been too bad as Dimsdale had the courage to try the next year again. Also we have the comments of Stuart that "all of the children of school age attended,"² and "the school was a good one."³

A singing school was one of the features of life in Virginia City for which Dimsdale was responsible, as he conducted one twice each week during the winter of 1863.⁴

A Mr. Davis took over the Dimsdale school in the spring of 1865 when Dimsdale was appointed as the territorial superintendent of public instruction.⁵

Dimsdale did not live long after this. In September of 1866 we find Stuart noting "the death of our beloved friend Professor Dimsdale."⁶ Stuart describes Dimsdale as a "gentle, kind-hearted Christian."⁷

¹Montana Post, Virginia City, December 3, 1864.
²Stuart, op. cit., I, 267.
³Ibid.
⁵Montana Post, May 6, 1865 as cited in Sasek, op. cit., p. 25.
⁶Stuart, op. cit., II, 30.
⁷Ibid.
Pioneer Tom Baker says:

The remains of the pioneer journalist were taken in charge by Montana lodge, No. 2, A. F. and A. M., and were buried with the grand honors of the Masonic fraternity, of which he was an honored and conspicuous member.¹

Having gone into some detail on Dimsdale and his school I will pass on to the public school of Virginia City.

It is a coincidence that the first public school in Montana opened on the same day as the first session of the territorial Legislative Assembly convened - on the 5th of March, 1866, at Virginia City.²

In January of 1866 Virginia City held its first public school election and picked its school trustees, Col. W. H. Rogers, Jos. H. Millard, and Mr. Word with Rev. George Smith elected clerk of the Board.³

The first school had been organized in January, but severe weather had prevented it opening until March 5. This school then continued until August 17. "The first teacher was Miss Sarah Raymond, later Mrs. J. M. Herndon."⁴

Mrs. Herndon gives us some information on the school and her experience as a teacher. Some of this will be repeated here:

The first Superintendent of Public Instruction (school commissioner he was called at that time) was a Mr. Thrasher. I took the examination at my home, and received a first grade certificate, for which I paid six dollars, besides answering every question he gave me.

³ Sasek, op. cit., pp. 46-47.
⁴ Burlingame, op. cit., p. 312.
The school-house was the Union Church, built of logs, fifty feet long by thirty wide. . . . It had two windows in each end, a door in the middle of the front and, a platform or porch, with about four steps at the entrance. It was used on Sundays for preaching and Sunday-school by the Rev. Smith. There were eighty-one pupils registered, and average attendance was from fifty to sixty. It is an impossibility to tell of the text books used, for the families were from almost every state in the Union and every family had different text books. There were none to be bought except Webster's little blue backed speller at John Mings' book store at a cost of one dollar each, and there were not enough to supply the demand.

There was appropriated $200 per month to pay the teacher. Mrs. Farley taught the primary classes the first month, four hours each day, and I taught the higher grades six hours, so I received $125 and Mrs. Farley $75. During the first month, Miss Jennie Bell of Helena, was chosen primary teacher in place of Mrs. Farley, and the appropriation divided equally between us, although I was still principal.

We had a paper edited by the pupils, called the "School Dispatch," read every other Friday afternoon, and a spelling match the intervening Friday. There were always visitors at our Friday afternoon exercises.1

In the summer of 1866 a new school house was built, and Virginia City public school started a nine month's term. This school house was of logs and had two rooms, one for the primary and one for the higher grades. Mr. W. D. Marshall and Mrs. Farley were the teachers for the next four years.2

The February 9, 1867, issue of the Montana Post tells us that it was not only the children who wanted to learn. It stated:

As there has been many inquires made in regard to whether persons over age can attend the public school, we are authorized by the Board to state that males or females


2Ibid, p. 199.
over age wishing to attend, can do so by paying a moderate tuition fee. We have no doubt many will take advantage of this privilege while the weather prevents them from working as the tuition is only about one dollar per week.\(^1\)

Teachers seem to have been very interested in church work as well as their schools. Marshall, like Dimsdale, was also active in the Episcopal Church as a lay reader.\(^2\)

From the subjects taught at the school where Marshall was principal one may gather that the teachers were very capable. Several of the subjects would easily be classified as of high school rank. The Montana Post gives the following information on subjects taught and the number of children.

The whole number of children residing in the district between the age of 4 and 21

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<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>152</td>
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<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>252</td>
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Whole number attending the public schools

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<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>117</td>
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Total in Reading 117
in Writing 63
in Mental Arithmetic 41
in Written Arithmetic 43
in Grammar 6
in Geography 27
in Book-keeping 2
in Algebra 1
in Natural Philosophy 1

In studying the number of school children it is important to note the age range of from four to twenty-one. It is

\(^1\)Montana Post, Virginia City, February 9, 1867.

\(^2\)Tuttle, "Early History of the Episcopal Church in Montana," Contributions To The Historical Society of Montana op. cit., V, 290.

\(^3\)Montana Post, Virginia City, April 13, 1867.
certainly easy to see where there would be large numbers of children that would not attend school after the age of about seventeen or eighteen. In fact, this would be the case even today, and would not mean that education was not stressed. Also the report does not give any indication of how many children might have been attending private schools inside or outside the district, nor does it tell how many might have been studying at home, etc.

There were and had been other schools in and around Virginia City other than the two previously mentioned, namely that of Dimsdale and the public school. But there is not a great deal of information available regarding them.

In the November 26, 1864, issue of the Montana Post there is a notice of French lessons to be given by Jos. O. Hamel. It was followed on December 3, 1864, by this notice:

Mr. Hamel will open his French class on Monday evening at Nevada, and on Tuesday evening at this place. The class here will meet at Dr. Maupin's office. Those wishing to take lessons, will leave their names at Milton & Co.'s Book Store, or at Dr. Maupin's and at the People's store in Nevada. Mr. Hamel has a lot of French books which he will either sell or loan to the pupils.

A young man gives us this side light on Mr. Hamel in his diary. He says:

Mr. Hamel who is teaching me French who has been somewhat irregular in the delivery of instructions owing to his endeavors to be a 'shinning light' in the Catholic

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1Montana Post, Virginia City, November 26, 1864, as cited in Sasek, op. cit., p. 57.

2Montana Post, Virginia City, December 3, 1864.
choir of this city during the Christmas festivities.\textsuperscript{1}

But Mr. Hamel must not have been too lazy about assigning work, for on the same day there is also the notation, "Studied French for a couple of hours."\textsuperscript{2}

Another school of more extensive nature was that of J. B. Patton according to notices in the \textit{Montana Post}. On August 12, 1865, there is this article:

Professor J. B. Patton, a graduate of Lafayette College, Easton, Pa., has arrived in town. It is his intention to open a public seminary where, in addition to the usual curriculum of a Common School, the German language, vocal music, and the higher branches of an English education will be taught. The Professor has been teaching for upwards of ten years.\textsuperscript{3}

In the \textit{Montana Post}, September 2, 1865, an advertisement states that the school is for both sexes. Also the following information is given.

The school will be divided into four departments, viz., Primary, Middle, Higher English and Classical. The terms for tuition will range from $1.25 to $5.00 per week according to the branches studied. Pupils admitted at any time.\textsuperscript{4}

Even less seems to be known about the school of Professor Heard than about that of Patton. In February of 1866 we see in the \textit{Montana Post} under the heading,

\begin{quote}
Virginia School Exhibition
Professor [sic] Heard will give a School Exhibition in the Theatre Hall, Wallace street, on the evening of
\end{quote}

\begin{enumerate}
\item James K. P. Miller, \textit{My Diary}, (on microfilm at the State Historical Library, Helena, Montana), December 20, 1865.
\item Ibid.
\item \textit{Montana Post}, Virginia City, August 12, 1865.
\item \textit{Montana Post}, Virginia City, September 2, 1865.
\end{enumerate}
February 27th. The programme is very extensive and a good time may be reckoned upon. We hope the citizens will do their best to encourage the cause of education by their presence. Young folks are very sensitive in such matters, and so are their preceptors. A goodly number of spectators will act as a proper stimulant to the pupils, both then and afterwards.¹

This paper also gives notice that Mr. Michael Roach had a school exhibition at Nevada the previous Wednesday evening.²

Lettie Sloss was a teacher in Virginia City at an early date also.³

As a whole very little information is available about these various schools and their teachers.

In this work I have not investigated just how much, if any, influence was exercised on the children of Virginia City by the Roman Catholic schools of St. Ignatius, etc. But it would seem probable that some children from the area of Virginia City attended these Catholic Schools as notices of these schools were published in the Montana Post of Virginia City. This is seen, for example, when on December 10, 1864, we find an advertisement for the Academy of the Holy Family.⁴

Besides these more or less formal schools, students studied in their own homes or with the help of someone else. The material covered by this type of student was often of a more advanced nature. This is indicated by Bishop Tuttle of...

¹Montana Post, Virginia City, February 24, 1866.
²Ibid.
³Ronan, op. cit., p. 55.
⁴Montana Post, Virginia City, December 10, 1864.
the Episcopal Church when he says that:

Eddie Upson, a nephew of Col. Sanders, studied Latin with me, coming to the cabin to recite his Caesar. I was an old teacher and took pleasure in the renewal of an accustomed occupation.¹

People also read and studied on their own. In fact many people today would do well to read as much as young James Miller, even though his late hours can not be recommended for all. For November 13, 1865, Miller notes "Read 'Shirly' until 2 o'clock A. M., a finely written piece inferior in plot to Jane Eyre but much superior in description and language."²

The people who were residents of gold camps were not unaware that there were colleges, and there was a desire on the part of at least one boy to attend. In October, the Miller boy writes in his diary that he received a "Circular from Princeton College of New Jersey"³. As a result he decides to save the needed $2000 by resolving not to "spend a cent for foolishness such as Billiards, Drinking, or eating, Driving, riding, Smoking. That I limit my monthly expenses for Dancing and Gifts to $10.00."⁴

The religious life of children was not neglected. In the Montana Post of 1864, we find this: "Regular religious service is held by three different churches. A Sunday school well

²Miller, Diary, op. cit., Nov. 13, 1865.
³Miller, Diary, op. cit., October 21, 1865.
⁴Ibid.
attended by young and old is progressing.\(^1\)

Mrs. Peter Ronan recalls the first Mass at Virginia City, which she attended as a girl, in these words. "The first Mass in Virginia City on the Feast of all Saints, November 1, 1863, how memorable the event, how difficult to picture."\(^2\)

School was not the only thing which took up the time of the young and not so young of Virginia City. Dancing, sleighing, fights, theater performances, and the like all provided diversion.

The theater performances must have been a big attraction. But because a performance was given does not necessarily mean it always pleased its audience as is indicated in the Montana Post. The play was Shakspeare's "Merchant of Venice" and the writer is criticizing one of the actors.

Mortimer as Bassanio, in what should have been the second scene of the third act - showing of the casket - rendered his soliloquy in what we thought was too strained and unnatural a voice, as though a portion of his sentences were drawn out by a cork screw - and although we do not profess to be a critic in the matter; still it was hardly a just conception of the part.\(^3\)

About 1864 an interesting event occurred in Montana history when a pack train of camels was brought into the state. It is certain that children were well aware of this strange event for:

Circulars were distributed about Virginia City advertising exhibitions to take place on the street, where would be demonstrated how a dromedary would carry ten children or

\(^1\)Montana Post, Virginia City, November 26, 1864.
\(^2\)Ronan, op. cit., p. 47.
\(^3\)Montana Post, Virginia City, November 2, 1867.
one thousand pounds of freight.  

The children of the day must have been greatly excited when in the spring of 1865, there was the famous flour search of Virginia City when "flour sold for $150 gold per 100 lbs."  

Earlier in the year the snow that had kept the freighting business down in the spring, had had a more pleasant side. On November 19, 1864, the Montana Post writes "Snow is two and a half feet deep in Summit District, 8 miles above Virginia City. Sleighing is the finest ever seen in any place, in Virginia City and below." Further evidence that sleighing was a popular activity is seen in the December 30, 1865, comment of the Montana Post under the heading "Sleighing - Both sex and all ages have, apparently, determined upon getting all the amusement possible out of the snow and holidays."  

There were other activities and groups in Virginia City besides. Among these are ones Miller tells of attending, such as the Ball of the Literary Society, where Prof. Dimsdale gave a dedication speech, and also the "Va City Social Club."  

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1 Stuart, op. cit., II, 23.  
3 Montana Post, Virginia City, November 19, 1864.  
4 Montana Post, Virginia City, December 30, 1865.  
5 Miller, Diary, op. cit., December 19, 1865, and November 6, 1865.
In regard to how younger children spent money, this comment by Mrs. Ronan would at the same time dismay and please some parents of today.

We found little on which to spend our gold dust. Sometimes the storekeeper had stick candy, candy beans, or ginger snaps. Twenty-five cents was the least that was ever accepted across the counter.¹

But then as now children will find ways of earning money even though Mother and Father might not approve. Mrs. Ronan tells us what the little girls of Virginia City did.

Boarding-house and hotel keepers began to offer us little girls twenty-five cents in gold dust for a big bouquet of wild flowers with which to deck their tables -- laid, most of them, with red-checked cloths, half-inch-thick earthenware or tin cups and plates, and cheap strangely assorted knives, forks, and spoons.

Naturally no fresh vegetables were to be had during the first spring. We girls knew that "lamb's-quarters," as we called goose foots, were edible, when young and tender, really a more tasty pot-herb than spinach. Lamb's quarters grew riotously in the ground turned by the miners the previous summer and fall. From gathering these for the table at home we extended our activity to selling them at $1.50 in gold dust for a gallon bucket crammed full.²

Mrs. Ronan adds this note. "My career as a marketer of fresh flowers and 'greens' lasted only until my father learned what I was doing."³

It was during the time that Virginia City was a busy gold camp that Lincoln, the president of the United States, was assassinated. This event, which was so sad for the nation as a whole, was in some cases greeted with joy in Virginia City.

¹Ronan, op. cit., p. 49.
²Ronan, op. cit., pp. 61-62.
³Ibid., p. 62.
where there was a strong southern element. Again I refer to Mrs. Ronan, who was a school girl at the time.

It pains me now to recall what we did when we were told of Lincoln’s death. It was noon. We girls were in the schoolhouse eating our lunches, which we sometimes carried to school with us. The Southern girls, by far the majority, picked up their ankle-length skirts to their knees and jigged and hipity-hopped around the room cheering, for the downfall of that great, good simple man who they had been taught to regard as the arch enemy of the South and the first and last cause of any and every misfortune which had befallen their parents and driven them to seek fortune anew amid the difficulties and hardships of a war western frontier.¹

A matter of great interest in Virginia City was the hangings of the Vigilantes. And as is often the case, young children often saw more than their parents might wish them to see. But in so public a matter as the hangings in Virginia City children could not help seeing the unpleasant.

I again refer to the view one girl had of the events of Virginia City. The parents of Mrs. Ronan, (who at the time was Mollie Sheehan), had taken in borders, and among these borders were the "discovery men," such as Bill Fairweather, Henry Edgar, and Barney Orr, but also:

among the men who dropped in now and again to a meal was our companion on the journey to Montana, Jack Gallagher; to us he was always courteous and soft-spoken, and yet within a year we came to know that he was one of the most hardened of all the road agents. Another of the gang who came often enough so that I remember him distinctly was George Ives.²

The actual violent hanging was in some notable cases seen by Mrs. Ronan. This was not a very pleasant sight for a

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¹Ibid., p. 71.
²Ibid., pp. 44-45.
young girl, but here is Mrs. Ronan's account of the hangings of Virginia City.

Coming from school one winter day, January 14, 1864, I cut across the bottom of the gulch, climbed a steep hill, and passed close behind a large cabin which was being built; people were gathered in front on Wallace Street; the air was charged with excitement. I looked. The horror of what that look photographed on my memory still sends a shiver through me. The bodies of five men with ropes around their necks hung limp from a roof-beam. I trembled so that I could scarcely run home. The realization flashed on me that two forms were familiar; one was Jack Gallagher; the other was Club-foot George, who used to notice me and speak in a kind way. His deformity had arrested my attention and made me pity him. I did not know that he and Jack were 'Bad Men'. The three men that hung with them, as all the world has long known, were Frank Parish, Haze Lyons, and Boone Helm.

One frosty morning a few weeks later when I opened the back door of our cabin, I saw in the gulch below a crowd of men gathered around a scaffold. High above the other men and directly beneath the scaffold stood a young man with a rope around his neck. He shook hands with several of the men, then he pulled a black cap over his face. I knew the portent. I rushed into the house and slammed the door, but I could not shut out then nor ever from my memory that awful creaking sound of the hangman's rope.

One day when my stepmother sent me to the meat market, with the usual injunction, 'Now run, Mollie, and don't be afraid.' I was alarmed by a clatter past me of horse's hoofs and the crack of pistol shots. A man galloping a horse recklessly down the street was firing a six-shooter in the air and whooping wildly. Suddenly he reared his horse back on its haunches, turned it sharply, and forced it through the swinging door of a saloon. I sidled into the first open doorway that I dared enter.

'That's Slade,' said the store-keeper, 'one of his sprees, shootin' up the town, scarin' women and children. That Smart Alec orter be strung up.'

He led me out the back door and warned me to run home quickly and to stay in the house out of range of any stray bullets.

'He'll git his needin's yit,' he threatened.

One day in early spring not long after this incident, we children were delayed at school because of a milling crowd of men gathered in Daylight Gulch, directly across the homeward path of most of us, around a corral called 'the elephant's pen'. Many of the men were armed. From the steep hillside path I could look down into their midst. I recognized Slade, dressed in fringed buckskin, hatless,
with a man on either side of him, who forced him to walk under the corral gate. His arms were pinioned, the elbows were bent so as to bring his hands up to his breast. He kept moving his hands back and forth, palms upward, and opening and closing them as he cried, 'For God's sake let me see my dear beloved wife! For God's sake let me see my dear beloved wife!' Three times distinctly I heard him say this in a piercing, anguishéd voice.

The stir among the men increased; voices rose louder, angrier, more excited; gesturing arms pointed to the long road winding down the hill from the east. Down that long hill-road a woman was racing on horseback. Some one shouted, 'There she comes!' A man in a black hat standing beside Slade made an abrupt, vigorous movement. I turned and sought the refuge of home.

Some excited neighbors came in to say that the woman galloping so swiftly down the hill was, indeed, Mrs. Slade on her Kentucky thoroughbred, Billy Boy; that when she was recognized the men of the Vigilance Committee made haste to do their dreadful duty for fear her presence would arouse so much sympathy among bystanders that the hanging would be stayed. They dwelt grimly on the details of how the man in the black hat had hastily adjusted the rope when the warning was given of her approach and had kicked the box from under Slade so that he swag with a broken neck from the cross-piece atop the corral gate.

Many good citizens, among them my own people, criticized this act of summary vengeance, because Slade had actually committed no crime in Montana. All admitted that he was a braggart and a brawler and had risked manslaughter on many a rowdy spree when he 'put' on a show by 'shooting up the town.' When he was sober he was said to be a good workman and a likable fellow.

Slade's body was taken from the scaffold, used ordinarily for hanging beves, and delivered to his wife in the old Virginia Hotel.

My heart ached for Mrs. Slade. I slipped away from home, determined to go and tell her how sorry I was for her. I found her sobbing and moaning, bowed over a stark form shrouded in a blanket. I stood beside her for a moment, trembling and choking, then I slipped away unnoticed, so I have always thought.1

With these various glimpses of schools, teachers, and pupils; I will pass on to the neighboring gold mining camp of Last Chance. We will find that many of the people of Virginia City follow the gold rush to Last Chance Gulch.

1Ronan, op. cit., pp. 55-60.
CHAPTER III

SCHOOLS OF EARLY DAY HELENA

In 1864 the gold rush to Last Chance Gulch started. Many of the former citizens of Virginia City then became citizens of Helena. Thus it is that we find some of the teachers and students of Virginia City moved to Last Chance also. Among these was Prof. Patch, and he himself in a letter dated March, 1866, tells the reason for moving: "At the urgent request of some of my best patrons I came over to Helena last spring, to establish a school here."^1

Patch built and furnished a school house for about twelve hundred dollars. During the second term of the school in the winter of 1865-1866 he had an average of from forty to fifty scholars attending. This school was not completely without public aid. Patch in his letter on the school says: "The public fund of the Helena District has been appropriated to the benefit of the scholars of this school, reducing the tuition to about half the ordinary rates."^2

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^2 Letter of J. B. Patch on First schools in Helena, State Historical Library, Helena, Montana.

^3 Ibid.
The school building and furnishings must have been better than many of these early private schools for Patch said, "We have a small but good Library, and an excellent melodeon belonging to the school, with all other desirable fixtures." ¹

Patch's school was large enough that he had an assistant, J. W. Corum.² The school was a graded one. It is interesting to note, regarding some of the things taught, that Patch says, "We have had eight pupils in the classics, Latin and Greek, a number in the advanced course of mathematics."³

This school was known as the Helena Academy, "and the site bore the name of Academy Hill for some years afterwards."⁴

School teachers of that early day though were not just teachers as, for example, "Prof. Patch was also a mason and when the school business was dull worked at his trade."⁵

Patch also had another job - that of being, for Edgerton County, the first county superintendent of schools.⁶

In the summer of 1865 a Miss Sloss taught a small private school which was located on Bridge St.⁷

¹Ibid.
³Patch, op. cit.
⁵Ibid.
Mrs. Ronan, whose family had also moved to Helena, gives us a little information about the school.

For a short time the beloved Lettie Sloss was my teacher again, and again in a little log schoolhouse clinging to the steep side of the gulch. The distinguishing memory of this school is that on Friday afternoons we had lessons in embroidering and that Miss Sloss directed my making of some pin-cushions.¹

Miss Sloss around 1869 was serving as a Sunday School teacher of the Episcopal Church in Helena.²

During the winter of 1865-1866 a Rev. Pritchard, pastor of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in Helena, had a private school for twenty pupils, most of whom were girls.³

The same winter of 1865-1866 the Rev. Thomas F. Campbell also taught a school.⁴ This school was held "in the front room of his home, which was a log building standing on the corner of Broadway and Rodney streets."⁵ The Campbell school pupils were aided by tax funds which help cut down the tuition costs.⁶

It is in connection with a school taught by Campbell that Helena got its first school bell. Hilger says that:

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¹Ronan, op. cit., p. 81.
⁶Burlingame and Toole, op. cit., II, 372.
The next year Campbell built a small schoolhouse south of his home on Rodney street and here was the first school bell of the town brought by some public spirited miner from St. Louis for that purpose. The roof of the building was not strong enough to support the weight of the bell which was placed on a belfry of four posts in the yard. The miners for their generosity had the privilege of ringing the bell when ever they desired.¹

The Rocky Mountain Gazette carried a notice in 1866, from which it is learned that T. F. Campbell and his wife in their school would teach in the primary department, arithmetic, English grammar, geography, and history at the rate of $1.50 per student per week. The Academic Department would have the physical sciences, higher mathematics, and classics at the rate of $2.00 per week for a scholar. The notice then goes on to explain:

One half of the above charges will be paid out of the public funds; leaving the patrons to pay, for primary scholars, each 75 cts. per week, and for higher branches $1.00. Tuition due and payable Friday morning of every week. School will open at 8½ o'clock A. M.²

Prof. Campbell in 1867 was appointed superintendent of public instruction for the territory of Montana. He served in this position until 1869.³

Campbell was also pastor of the Christian Church. But even these activities did not take all of Campbell's time for in about July of 1868, "Prof. Campbell was out

¹Hilger, op. cit., p. 1.
²Rocky Mountain Gazette, Helena, Montana, December 25, 1866.
in the mines, actively working."¹

Besides the schools already mentioned there was another, but of a slightly different nature. In the Montana Post of 1865 we find this item:

Dancing School - Our dancing school is bound to be a success. The number of pupils has reached thirty, and under the management of Curtis & McCrory, it will be conducted in a manner pleasing to all concerned.²

Thus even at this date in Montana we find an early version of the Arthur Murray dancing school.

Dr. E. Webster Stone and his wife opened a school on July 1, 1866, for advanced students. This school was on Academy Hill.

The course of study was most ambitious listing the natural sciences, higher mathematics, classics, Greek and Roman, etc. They also advertised a commercial course department open in the evenings which gave instruction in penmanship, commercial law, phonography and similar subjects.³

According to the Helena Herald there were by October of 1867, four schools operating and five teachers. The Stone School had seventy pupils who were charged $1.50 per student per week. There was a school in the Methodist Church which had thirty pupils; another school had twenty-seven pupils, and the fourth school had fifteen pupils.⁴

²Montana Post, Virginia City, January 13, 1866.
³Hilger, op. cit., p. 2.
⁴Helena Herald, October, 1867, as cited in Burlingame, op. cit., p. 314.
In his report in 1867 on the schools, Commissioner Carpenter commented on what Stone was doing in these words:

I may be permitted to note, also, the select school of Prof. E. W. Stone, numbering from twenty to thirty students, as an institution in the territory pushing forward the great interest of education. Prof. Stone is now conducting a course of lectures being delivered in Helena, which he proposes to extend through the winter months, from which we anticipate good results by placing the whole subject of education in a clear and impressive light before the people.¹

Although most accounts mention that Prof. Stone's assistant was his wife; at least for some time his brother helped. Mrs. Ronan, who attended this school about August of 1867 says that: "At one end of the long room Professor Stone taught us older children; at the opposite end his brother taught the primary grades. We sat in prim rows on long, rough benches."²

Mrs. Ronan also tells of an incident where the teacher needed more than mental ability. One day Professor Stone's brother was conducting a spelling drill and one of the pupils got stubborn.

A tempestuous climax came in an exchange of blows. Suddenly up jumped all the big boys and precipitated a melee. We girls fled from the schoolhouse to our home. This free-for-all fight was the occasion of much talk among the patrons of the school for many days.³

In August of 1867, Bishop Tuttle visited this school

¹Burlingame, op. cit., p. 315.
²Ronan, op. cit., p. 86.
³Ibid.
and reported that there were forty-four scholars.\(^1\)

By April of 1868, the Stone school was offering Greek, Latin, geometry, and algebra in addition to the usual classes. The *Montana Post* states that although there were over fifty pupils in school in April, during the winter that had just passed there had been one hundred and twenty-five students. The paper says in regard to the large decrease: "The diminution is owing chiefly, we presume, to the fact that many are employed in various avocations during warm weather, which prevent their attendance at school."\(^2\)

Here something is touched on which was a problem in many places even in later days, namely that of children only going to school when the weather was so bad that they could not work.

In November of 1869 there was started at Helena the *Montana Seminary* and Rocky Mountain Institute. This school was established by Rev. S. G. Lathrop, Prof. B. F. Marsh, and Prof. E. W. Stone.\(^3\)

A Mrs. Anderson had a small school of about twenty students at her home on Broadway in the fall of 1868. This school was for younger children with a fee of about five dollars per month being charged. The pupils were mostly

\(^{1}\text{Tuttle, "Early History of the Episcopal Church in Montana," Contributions To The Historical Society of Montana, op. cit., V, 305.}\)

\(^{2}\text{Montana Post, M.T., April 25, 1868.}\)

\(^{3}\text{Leeson, op. cit., p. 725.}\)
boys.\(^1\) One former student describes the school this way:

We had rough benches for desks and planks for seats. One desk accommodated about six or eight boys. There was a small blackboard on the wall and, of course, we provided our own books and supplies and studied the three R's, reading, writing, and 'rithmetic.\(^2\)

The first public school of Helena was built in 1868 on Rodney street. This building cost $4,000. Its capacity was reached almost immediately\(^3\) with fifty pupils. Then they built an addition and when this was not sufficient, use was made of the basement of the South Methodist Church.\(^4\)

Prof. John W. Corum, who had been an assistant at the Patch school, was in charge. He was aided by a lady who taught the younger pupils.\(^5\) A former pupil of Corum wrote of the school and teacher:

One of his hobbies was mental arithmetic and we all acquired an interest in that subject and a certain amount of skill for Corum inspired us all with a love of study and work that was worth much in later years. He had one habit that would bar him from the modern school-room, I am sure, for he was an inveterate tobacco chewer and the sawdust filled cuspidor always had its place beside his desk. Spelling down was a popular pastime and often the 'spelling matches' were held in the evening and every age and occupation represented in the contestants. The lawyer, doctor, miner and school child lined up on the opposite sides of the room with probably Dan Learles to give out the words. Learles was an old time newspaper man. Lights were furnished by miners' candles, jabbing the handle.

\(^1\)Hilger, op. cit., p. 2.
\(^2\)Ibid.
\(^3\)Burlingame and Toole, op. cit., II, 373.
\(^4\)Ibid.
\(^5\)Hilger, op. cit., p. 2.
in the log or frame wall of the building.\textsuperscript{1}

As with the Stone brothers, not all of Corum's pupil's were kept in order by the teacher's mental ability. Hilger says:

Corum kept good order in the school and on one occasion thrashed a son of 'Bed Rock Joe' Williams in front of the entire school which put fear in all our hearts for the boy was larger than Corum. He was a 'good boy' for the rest of the year however.\textsuperscript{2}

In those days as now, the teacher was the subject of pranks. Hilger tells us:

The usual pranks were played on the teacher and one day Corum arrived to find a small burro tied to his desk with a small bundle of hay provided for his comfort. Prof. Corum made a terrible todo about this performance but probably had a good laugh in private. The boys thought they were getting away with murder and derived great satisfaction from the performance.\textsuperscript{3}

The year of 1869 was the year for the arrival in Helena of the Sisters of Charity from Leavenworth, Kansas. This same order still maintains the Catholic grade and high school in Helena.

It was due to the efforts of the famous Father De Smet that a band, consisting of Sister Julia, Sister Bertha, Sister Loretto, Sister Mary and Sister Regina as well as a Miss Rose Kelly reached Helena, October 10, 1869. Father Palladino, S. J., tells of these early days for the nuns.

Beyond securing a site, nothing had been done as yet in regard to the erection of buildings for the new

\textsuperscript{1}Hilger, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{2}\textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{3}Hilger, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 3-4.
Community, as it was thought that, once on the place, the Sisters themselves would know and plan what might better suit their own requirements. After reaching Helena, and sharing for a few days the hospitality of some Catholic families, the little colony was provided with a temporary shelter in the old Gazette shack, which was now vacated and placed at their disposal by the Fathers, who returned for awhile to their holes or little places in the rear of the church.\footnote{L. B. Palladino, S. J., \textit{Indian And Whites In The Northwest}, (1st edition; Baltimore: John Murphy & Company, 1894), pp. 288-289.}

Frankly it sounds very much as if there was a great deal to be desired by all in regard to their quarters. Six move in where there had been only two and the two go back to their old holes.

By the beginning of January, 1870, St. Vincent's Female Academy, the first institution of the kind for the whites in Montana was opened for the reception of pupils, both day scholars and boarders. The old Gazette shanty had now also been fitted up partially into a class-room for boys and, thus, with the opening of St. Vincent's Academy, a day school for boys was also inaugurated.\footnote{Tbid., p. 289.}

This boy's school was taught by Sister Regina and Sister Theresa.\footnote{Hilger, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 3.} In 1875 this boy's school (which was called St. Aloysius) was taken over by Father Palladino who taught until 1876 when a Mr. Timlin was appointed as the teacher.\footnote{Leeson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 725.} 

"A number of boys from the ranches in the Missouri Valley
attended the school.\textsuperscript{1}

The building Father Palladino used was the one used as a church before the building of the Sacred Heart Cathedral.\textsuperscript{2}

St. Vincent's Academy was built at a cost of approximately $10,000.\textsuperscript{3} To open the school, Father De Smet had obtained money from wealthy people in St. Louis.\textsuperscript{4} The school was a log structure consisting of twelve rooms.

Some fifty boarding students attended and a number of day students from Helena also attended. The boarding students came from all over the State, and many of the girls were not of the Roman Catholic faith. Basic academic subjects were given and in addition considerable attention was given to music, sewing, writing of a useful nature and the social graces were practiced.\textsuperscript{5}

One can easily see where this type of school was a blessing for girls whose parents lived in remote districts. With St. Vincent's Academy the girls had an opportunity to attend a school under the guidance of the good nuns.

I was tempted to say peaceful atmosphere here. But this would not exactly be the case for Father Palladino states:

The little band of peaceful souls were but a short while in the new quarters, when they were treated to a gruesome glimpse of western ways. Some three hundred yards east of the Academy and in full sight of its inmates, there arose, in what we called 'Dry Gulch', a grim, solitary tree, with a stout limb that projected from the parent trunk, almost horizontally, about eight or ten feet above the ground. The tree was a very peculiar

\textsuperscript{1}Hilger, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{2}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{3}Leeson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 725.
\textsuperscript{4}Burlingame and Toole, \textit{op. cit.}, II, 370.
\textsuperscript{5}Ibid.
growth in many ways, and brought forth fruit betimes all of a sudden and of most extraordinary kind. A casual glance at it by one of the Sisters one day, sent a shudder through her not less than all the rest. The tree had borne fruit during the night, and a human being was hanging from the limb we have just described. It was but a few weeks later, when the deadly plant had become still more prolific, this time two human forms being seen dangling from its branches.¹

These scenes were also viewed by the students of the schools of Helena. One young girl saw it this way:

One morning when we children came up from Last Chance Gulch to the crest of the hill, we saw the limp form of a man hanging, with a rope around his neck, from a branch of the tree, and there the body continued to hang for three days as a warning to law breakers. During the days of the gruesome display, and for a long time afterward we children were in a state of extreme nervous tension. All the distressing details were viewed and reviewed. The boys kept running down to the tree at recess and between sessions; there was talk and more talk of how the 'bad men' had been aroused from sleep by the avengers, made to dress hurriedly, and taken out and hanged in the dead of night.²

This woman said:

I hated the talk. It made me shiver. I did not want to know by what name he had gone in life, — that dreadful, pitiful object; with bruised head, disarrayed vest and trousers, with boots so stiff, so worn, so wrinkled, so strangely the most poignant of all the gruesome details. I tried to forget. I have never forgotten.³

If the following story is true; it was certainly a way to give some young person a nightmare. Mrs. Ronan states:

I have heard the story told, but for its truth I will not vouch, that one over-zealous Sunday school teacher marched her class to the foot of the tree for a close-up view of this horrible example of the results of a wayward

¹Palladino, op. cit., p. 289.
²Ronan, op. cit., p. 84.
³Ibid.
life, hoping by means of an object lesson to frighten her young charges into paths of righteousness.1

The Indian scares were also a cause of dread in these early days.2

But not all was violence. As in Virginia City, sleighing was a popular sport. Mrs. Ronan tells us that:

Not alone school boys but men, some of them verging on middle age, made merry from morning to night coastering down the steep hills of Helena; down Broadway into Main was a favorite speedway. They vied with each other in the manufacture of sleds. Many of them were gaily painted and, after the manner of ships, displayed names, such as 'The Bird', quite obviously because it flew, or they were named for Helena's belles. This sort of compliment was extended, but the fun of coastering was denied even to little school girls. Coasting was not 'lady-like'. Only 'Tom-boys', term of deep reproach, did so. When the hilarity of the boys did tempt my girl companions and me to try the fun of sliding down hill, we retired to side streets far from the main thoroughfare.3

The theater was also early in Helena. Another feature was the "Oyster suppers"4 which were enjoyed.

As early as the summer of 1867 a circus came to Helena, heralded for weeks in advance. Horses were the only animals shown. Daring bareback riders, equestriennes, acrobats, tight-rope walkers and clowns performed.5

St. Patrick was not forgotten in the rush. Mrs. Ronan mentions that on St. Patrick's Day in 1869, she attended with her parents a costume ball. She "wore a white Swiss dress

1Ibid., p. 85.
2Ibid., p. 116.
3Ibid., pp. 102-103.
4Ibid., p. 100.
5Ibid., p 86.
with rows and rows of paper shamrocks glued on for trimming.\(^1\)

By 1871, there is an active Helena Debating Club. The club members were teachers, pupils and "Persons having been members of the Helena District School No 1."\(^2\) At the meeting of October 6, 1871, the President was Mr. J. W. Corum, and the question chosen to be debated at the next debate of the club was: "Resolved that woman has more influence over man than money has."\(^3\) The 17th of November, 1871 saw: "Resolved that the capital of the United States should be moved west of the Mississippi River discussed and decided in favor of the Aff."\(^4\) On December 1st, 1871, "The following question was chosen 'Resolved that Education promotes happiness.'"\(^5\)

The Helena Independent in the December 15, 1875, issue carries the notice that the dedication of the new school would be on January 3rd, 1876. Chas. L. Wheeler was to be the principal and was to have five assistants.\(^6\)

Helena was very proud of this school built of brick and costing the tremendous sum of $25,000 furnished with regular school furniture, desks, blackboards, maps and such. The territorial legislature was in session at the time the Central school was opened, Jan. 5, 1876, and the dedication ceremonies were attended by both houses, the

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\(^1\)Ibid., p. 122.

\(^2\)Article II of the Constitution, By-Laws and Minutes of the Helena, Debating Club, from a copy in the State Historical Library, Helena, Montana.

\(^3\)Ibid., Oct. 6th, 1871 minutes.

\(^4\)Ibid., Nov. 17, 1871 minutes.

\(^5\)Ibid., December 1st, 1871 minutes.

\(^6\)The Helena Independent, December 15, 1875.
supreme court justices, Superintendent of Public Instruction Cornelius Hedges and other territorial officials. Col. W. F. Sanders and Chief Justice Blake made addresses to the assembled students. At this time the pronunciation of the name of Helena was discussed and Judge Blake in his talk urged the teacher to instruct the children in the proper pronunciation 'He' laa' na'.

This pronunciation was opposed by at least one man who had been at the meeting in 1864 when the town was named, but the teachers seem to have followed the instructions of Judge Blake.2

"Helena in 1876 established the first high school in the Territory and graduated the first class in 1877."3

At about this time there was also a school for colored pupils in Helena.4 It would not be too surprising if there had been some type of private school for the Chinese at an even earlier date for, by 1869, there were about five hundred Chinese living in Helena.5

Although the subject matter was much the same in western schools as it was in the east, Montana managed to give some twists of her own to a class discussion. The following incident told by one teacher illustrates.

1Hilger, op. cit., p. 4.
2Ibid.
4Laura C. Bullou, "Glimpses of Mont. in Territorial Days as seen in Helena, the Capital," a report in the State Historical Library at Helena, Montana, p. 1.
5Autobiographical Sketch of Mr. John H. Miller from an interview August 18, 1939, State Historical Library, Helena, Montana.
United States History lesson on Plymouth Pilgrims being before the class, they were asked how many could give a definition of Pilgrim. Nearly all offered by an upheld hand, followed by selection of one to give the definition. To my eclipsed mind came the reply a 'Tenderfoot'; being no farther enlightened by 'Tenderfoot', I asked for a definition of the latter, and found it was one who lately came to Montana ______ and judging by the merriment elicited ______ I was exposed as one belonging to that not much esteemed class. Then came a discussion whether Pilgrim and Tenderfoot were synonyms, or Tenderfoot only a very fresh Pilgrim.1

People had their slang then as now, for "Tenderfoot", 'Pilgrim', 'Long-eared-Missourian', or 'Greasy Northerner', were superlatives of contempt among the students."2

The same teacher who told of the preceding incident also gives us some general information on teaching and students. The progress pupils made was, for the teachers, a source of inspiration. But she adds that there were pupils close to, or in their teens, who were without educational rudiments and that homes were too busy seeking gold to aid or stimulate teacher or child.3

I think it is important to note here that the desire for education was great enough so that even if a child was older, he was still in school. More important, perhaps, is the fact that even today some people do not contribute to a right attitude toward education.

On the other side of the ledger is this information:

1Tbid., p. 2.
2Tbid., p. 2.
3Tbid., p. 1.
Yet, an encouraging response to efforts in school-room, was quite wonderful; so much so, as to lead to the idea that the stimulating air of the mountains, gave a quickened mental activity to the youth. 

These early schools of Helena led gradually to the fine ones we have today. The number of students and teachers has increased greatly. But if the original interest and efforts in education had not been made when Helena was just a gold mining camp, much of what is here in Helena today might not exist.

\[1\text{Ibid.}\]
CONCLUSION

The discovery of gold in Montana resulted in cities springing up almost overnight. But because the people that came were attracted by the lure of gold did not mean that no one appreciated an education, or that no effort was made to see that the children were provided for in this respect.

With this large population increase the need for schools was felt. This work has studied the manner in which this need was met in Bannack, Virginia City, and Helena.

Most people, in thinking of these gold mining camps, do not think of anything as commonplace as schools. But as this study has shown, the people did not even wait for official government schools to be provided. They went ahead and opened private schools. These people were active in seeking gold, but they loved their children and did their best to provide for them. Among the things provided was the privilege of educational opportunities.

I brought in some of the aspects of the life of the school child that were not strictly part of classroom activity. The learning process though, is not made up merely of classroom activity, so I attempted to show what some of the extra activities were. The result showed, I think, that the school child of almost a hundred years ago had many of the same
activities that today's school child does. Both could be seen sleighing with friends, attending dances, going to a circus, etc.

There were unpleasant things in the life of the gold camps that were observed by the children. The sheriff of Virginia City was an outlaw. But then it is not unknown for a modern day law enforcement official to be a crook.

There were saloon fistfights. But one does not have to go back to those days to observe such a fight in certain bars in Helena. The Indian danger was very real, but then so is the Russian danger today.

Although there were external differences in life in pioneer days, life in its basic expressions was not drastically different from today.

Education of women was encouraged although they did not want them to become doctors or lawyers\(^1\), etc. But even today there are many who object to a woman entering these professions.

Even as early as 1864-1865 territorial officials and the territorial legislature were considering educational problems.\(^2\) And in 1865 the first territorial school law was passed.\(^3\)

It is very likely that in this work I have missed some

\(^1\)Montana Post, Virginia City, December 3, 1864.


\(^3\)Sasek, op. cit., p. 35.
of the educational efforts that were made, and that I have missed discovering some schools that operated. In fact, I am almost certain that there must have been more schools than have been mentioned. But if it were possible to discover information about them; it would require a much more intensive effort than was feasible here. Even with some of the schools I did mention very little information was available.

Although the fine system of state supported schools did not exist in early territorial days, teachers and schools were the best available. In fact, if a modern student knew all the subjects which were taught at various times and places in these early gold camps, he would not be considered ignorant. French, German, Latin, Greek, algebra, geometry, natural philosophy, etc., besides the regular reading, writing, and arithmetic were all available to the person willing to learn.
Governor's Mansion In Bannack Where School Was Held

Mrs. Lucia Darling Park, The First School Teacher In Bannack

First School House - Bannack - 1863
Thomas Dimadale

First School Teacher In Virginia City
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