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HOMESTEAD ON THE RANGE

THE EMERGENCE OF COMMUNITY IN EASTERN MONTANA, 1900-1925

REX C. MYERS

Mary Tanner saw homesteading as “a togetherness” learned from neighbors.¹ In 1915 she and thirty-two families shared that togetherness at Round Butte, Dawson County, Montana, clustered around a school and post office that bore the same name. Neighbors got together and threshed grain, raised barns, or brought in crops for neighbors “laid up” by accident or illness. That same cooperative effort extended to the formation of the Round Butte school and post office, to community social organizations, and ultimately to the creation of a new county, Garfield, in 1919.

From these activities, and like examples in hundreds of locations scattered across the plains of eastern Montana, emerge divergent perspectives on settlement of the West during the northern Great Plains land rush of the early twentieth century. On one hand, this home-

stead boom represented separate decisions by thousands of would-be farmers to take up individual plots of land and seek private fortunes. At the same time—and more important—a sense of “community” or cohesiveness quickly grew where these sodbusters took up residence. They formed groups spontaneously, from the grass-roots level up, and their actions demonstrated a putting aside or combining of private desires to achieve mutual benefit. This *gemeinschaft* characterized the reality of the movement—in contrast to pervasive ideologies and rhetorics of rugged individualism.

Cooperation took on measurable dimensions in four illustrative activities: formation of school districts, small fourth-class post offices, community clubs, and counties.² With each activity the progression from “convenience” to “community” is an important distinction in function. Like individualized decisions to homestead, a personal desire to have a school or post office close by (to minimize travel for children or families), to form a club (to dispel loneliness), or to create a county (for business or political spoils) often originated as matters of personal convenience. Yet however privatized in origin, success came only with cooperative action: one person could not form a school district or build

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its classroom; a dance or literary society meant group interaction; one voter did not create a new county. Equally important, a sense of mutuality quickly developed out of such actions. Settlers worked together toward common goals and saw themselves as a “community,” people in a specific geographic area with common needs—Round Butte, Garfield County.

As identifiable groups, or “communities” of like-minded people, these settlers accomplished together what they could not accomplish alone. Between 1900 and 1925, they replicated on the Montana plains the economic, social, and political units they had left behind. Such institutions met the collective needs of a new society they sought to build.

In 1900 Montana had 243,329 people, twenty-four counties, and 696 school districts. Two decades later the number of residents had more than doubled to 548,889; county numbers reflected a similar growth to fifty-four; school districts increased more than three-fold to 2,270. During that same twenty year period, 1,091 new post offices came into existence to serve a growing population. The dramatic increases between 1900 and 1920 resulted from a homestead “boom” primarily in the eastern two-thirds of the state—the population of eastern Montana grew from 93,000 (38 percent of the state’s total) to 314,000 (57 percent). Derisive and descriptive names characterized the new settlers—Honyockers, Scissorbills, Boomers, Sodbusters, Homesteaders. Collectively they claimed or reclaimed more than fifty-four million acres of public and railroad land during those twenty years and by 1925 had secured final title to nearly thirty-four million acres.³

Such dramatic statistics reflect significant settlement in Montana and the last major population movement to “free land” in the trans-Mississippi West. This homestead boom occurred so late (compared to America’s nineteenth-century westward expansion) because the region was marginal for agriculture. In 1900 the Northern Pacific and Great Northern railroads went through, not to, the region and no road network existed tying together the vast lands between transcontinental rails. For those who

left the well-developed agrarian Midwest or urban social infrastructures to settle eastern Montana, a profound sense of isolation existed, not as absolute as the nineteenth-century homesteader’s, but no less real in the perceptions of twentieth-century participants in the process. Indeed, isolation on the land represented the norm during each phase of the frontier experience.⁴

Homesteading “broke up” the northern Great Plains literally and figuratively. United States land policy fragmented settlement in quarter section multiples. The 1862 Homestead Act specified 160-acre plots and the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909 doubled that amount. Supportive federal legislation and increased farm mechanization allowed homestead farm size to grow at a steady pace from 1900 on. Montana homesteaders plowed farms that averaged 134 acres in 1901 and 265 acres in 1925.⁵

State historians have focused on the political fragmentation that resulted from this population movement, pointing to the proliferation of communities and counties. The economic bust of the 1920s and 1930s—drought, bank failures and out-migration—heightened historical scrutiny of the homesteading process and those who engaged in it. The positive efforts of Montana’s 1900-1925 homesteaders, who formed spontaneous communities of self-interest to meet their mutual needs as they settled the land, however, are just as important as the later failures.

James C. Malin noted a similar process in his 1947 study of pre- and post-Civil War settlement patterns in Kansas:

Settlers were scattered, acquaintances were wide, often as extensive as a conventional county, and there had not yet emerged any fixed centers of organization. Individual settlers felt free to meet at different places and to participate in activities that might bring them together. Later this larger area became more differentiated, centering around a local trading center for some activities, or a schoolhouse or other convenient place for union religious or social gatherings.⁶

Zoyd Money saw the process happening in the area around Geraldine during 1911. "In a new country," he said, "when it's first settled, there is more hospitality and everybody is more congenial toward each other than they are in an older country . . ." Geographer John C. Hudson noted in his study of North Dakota prairie development that this sense of hospitality transcended even ethnic lines. The "dissimilarity of origins was overshadowed by the conventions of neighborliness" as a "common enterprise" pulled together people who had come hundreds or thousands of miles to "adjoining homesteads."⁷

Historian Paula M. Nelson found a like pattern in western South Dakota during the decades before World War I. Most settlers had left behind well developed social institutions—schools, services, and civic activities. They thrust themselves suddenly and separately—often alone or with only immediate family—into the vastness of a prairie landscape that accentuated the potential for loneliness. "If they were to have the comforts of communality, they had to initiate the effort as individuals."⁸

FORMING SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Schools frequently focused the first collective activity in a region. Since achieving territorial status in 1864, Montana residents had formed an average of twenty school districts a year and established twenty-one post office locations annually, but between 1900 and 1920 formation of school districts and establishment of post office locations took place in almost direct relationship to the number of homestead entries in Montana. In 1901, settlers entered 357,000 acres of public domain and purchased 526,567 acres of Northern Pacific land. That same year, Montana established eighteen new school districts (of approximately seven hundred in the state) and thirty-eight new post offices.

During the first decade of the present century, the number of settlers entering land began to increase modestly from the 1901 level, peaking briefly in 1903 at 2.4 million acres, and dipping down to 553,000 acres in 1905. The

number of newly created school districts and post offices reflected the same general pattern, with modest peaks between 1903 and 1904 followed by 1906 lows of sixteen districts/twenty-three offices, respectively. In 1910, however, the pattern showed the dramatic impact of the 1909 Enlarged Homestead Act. Settlers withdrew more than 5.9 million acres from public domain and purchased another 300,000 acres from the Northern Pacific.⁹ In 1910, Montanans established fifty school districts.

"When you built a school the government didn't buy it for you," Mary Redfield and her neighbors around Opheim discovered. "You went around and solicited everybody. . . . Those who had kids got together and talked it over. We elected officers . . . [and] each one put in what was needed." Montana statute required a minimum of ten students to form a school district. Five families of children lived within a fifteen mile radius of the Redfields. They met the minimum and got the district.¹⁰

Nine miles north of Fort Benton, Pleasant Valley residents gathered at the home of Will Stellmon in late May 1911. They formed what became school district No. 63 and sent their petition to Helena for approval, citing the need for a building to serve as a school and for "public meetings and a community center." Eighteen people contributed a total of \$165 to erect the sixteen by twenty-eight foot structure. When completed, the building represented a true focal point for social life in Pleasant Valley. Sunday mornings the Presbyterians used it for services and church school; Sunday afternoons Methodists did likewise. A literary society met in the evening. Over time, Pleasant Valley residents built a baseball diamond and established a cemetery near the school to serve other needs of the community.¹¹

The Montana superintendent of public instruction approved 131 new school districts during 1911 and another 148 the next year. Each district illustrated the most basic political organization on the homestead frontier—a coming together more formal than card parties, taffy pulls, shivarees, or dances at someone's home. Buildings, like Pleasant Valley's, played host to

a wide variety of “community programs, social events and literaries . . .”¹² These structures helped hold together scattered homesteaders by focusing social life at a single point.

CREATION OF POST OFFICES

Post offices served as larger units of community organization. Although the United States Post Office Department initiated Rural Free Delivery in 1896, such service required a system of better roads than existed in rural eastern Montana. The Department thus continued to use fourth-class post offices to meet the need for service. A post office could be established with the filing of a two-page “Location of Proposed Post Office” form. Applicants had to demonstrate a need for service and an absence of a competing post office nearby. A map grid on the second page asked for geographic details in a nine township region—an area eighteen miles by eighteen miles square: “Plot showing the proposed location of the post office with the adjacent post offices, villages, roads, railroads, mail routes, rivers, and creeks.” Forms submitted to the Post Office Department in Washington, D.C., were approved almost automatically. Not until about 1919 did Rural Free Delivery become the Department’s delivery method of choice for eastern Montana.¹³

According to geographer John Hudson, the service area of a post office/store was larger than a school district, and the post office was usually the social focus for this larger region. As settlers scattered themselves across eastern Montana, they wanted to maintain communication with the more settled world they had left. When Jim Stephenson, Fred Scott, and Fred Lambie came from Minnesota in 1910, they founded the Redwater store and post office northeast of Circle, Montana. “[Homesteaders] used to come there for the mail,” Mary Stephenson remembered years later. “You’d be surprised, that post office, the people that would come there.”¹⁴

Most typically, the person who applied for and received a post office at a specific locale also operated the general store. Geographer and historian Richard W. Helbock observed that

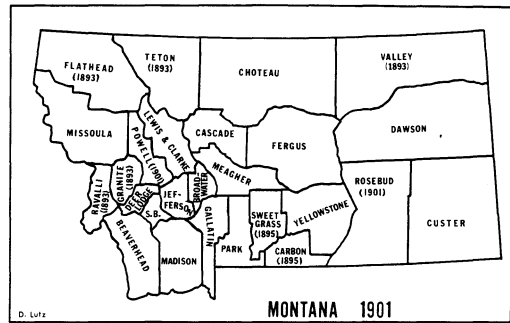


FIG. 1. *Montana Counties 1901*. Reprinted from *Montana Postal Cache*, February 1976, courtesy of Dennis J. Lutz.

applying for a post office was a business decision, not because the post office itself generated much revenue but because it drew people to the store. Another postal historian, Wayne E. Fuller, called the rural post office/store the “heart” of America’s rural mail system. “The very life of their communities pulsed beneath [local postmasters’] fingertips . . .”¹⁵

In the three years following enactment of the 1909 Enlarged Homestead Act, 224 new post offices came to life in Montana—eighty-eight in 1910 alone, more than in any previous year. As a postmistress from 1910-15, Pearl R. Reeves understood the fourth-class stations and the homesteaders they served north of Chinook at places like Cherry Ridge, Hydro, and Soma. Settlers came to the post office/store for their mail or supplies, “and those of neighbors, too, as long as someone was making the trip.”¹⁶

The peak in Montana homestead entry and resultant community activity took place during the years 1913-15 when settlers claimed approximately 14.4 million acres of land—5.3 in 1914, the most active year. During the same three year period, state residents created 528 school districts and 280 new post offices (114 in 1914). In land entry, school district formation, and the creation of post offices, these figures represent the highest levels of activity in the state’s history.

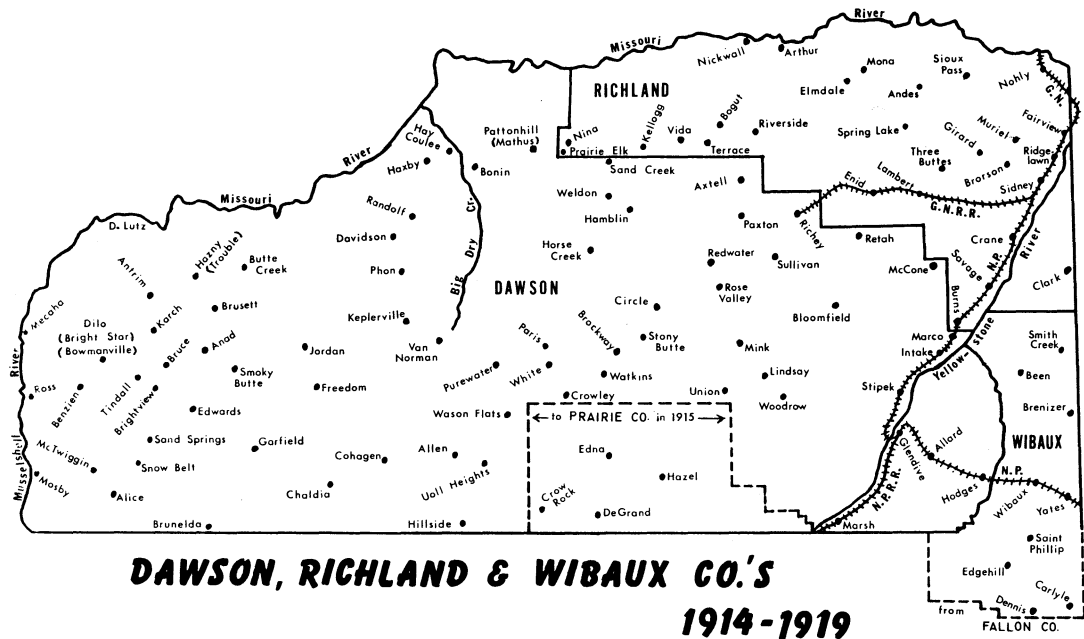


FIG. 2. Dawson, Richland, and Wibaux Counties, 1914-19. Reprinted from *Montana Postal Cache*, May 1976, courtesy of Dennis J. Lutz.

Clearly individual homesteaders came together to establish school districts and petition for post offices. In short order, they also came to identify themselves by those districts or service points—the Redwaters and Round Buttes and Pleasant Valleys of eastern Montana. Sand Creek residents twenty-five miles north of Circle secured their own school district and post office. Hobart McKean understood the need: “The people had the natural elements to combat and they . . . had to enlist the aid of their fellow man—any of them who were available—and we all lived together and worked together and we cooperated as people should.”¹⁷ Separately they could not meet their desire for schools and postal service.

FOUNDING OF COMMUNITY CLUBS

Rural community clubs in many ways provide the best example of cooperative effort because

their formation took place not only from the grass-roots level but also without specific external guidelines—neither school district requirements from Helena nor postal regulations from Washington, D.C. Form and format of the clubs as well as the physical structures they erected reflected local needs for “social enjoyment and literary advancement.”¹⁸

In the late 1920s, J. Wheeler Barger of the rural life studies program at Bozeman’s agricultural experiment station examined these groups and the facilities they built, analyzing the process as it developed in rural Montana after the turn of the century. Barger studied seventy-five community halls and 111 active or inactive community clubs. He defined a community hall as a structure other than a school or church “owned by the community as a whole or by some fairly inclusive organization within the community, which serves as a place where people commonly assemble for all types of meetings.”

Barger categorized community clubs as groups formed for social, economic, and general community betterment. He felt that such buildings and clubs had a “profound influence in promoting community solidarity, increasing neighborliness, providing recreation for young people, and giving rise to many worthwhile cooperative endeavors which otherwise would not be attempted.”¹⁹

Irene McManus and the women of Bole, near Choteau, needed a place to hold regular dances and house their small library. Through a series of bazaars, theatrical productions, and dances, they raised enough to purchase an unused store building and get started. For the club’s duration, social life at Bole centered there.²⁰

Many homesteaders felt the need for social intercourse as strongly as the need for schools to educate children and post offices to facilitate communication. Indeed, dances, picnics, and parties helped ameliorate the sense of isolation on the vastness of the plains. Community clubs and buildings appeared shortly after the first settlers. Of the 125 community buildings and clubs on which Barger secured detailed information, three came into existence before 1900 (the first in 1893); four between 1900 and 1910; fifty-eight during the peak decade for settlement; and another sixty between 1920 and 1928.²¹

Community club formation continued at a sustained level during the bust of the 1920s for the same reason it began in the first place—to secure cooperative activity under difficult conditions. Sue O. Hill remembered the process on Lonesome Prairie west of Big Sandy in 1913: “During all this [isolation] that sounds so bad we were all having the same problems, but all those years we enjoyed many things together and helping each other in the bad times.”²²

Barger examined club by-laws to detail their important purposes. Two-thirds of the groups focused on social, recreational, and community improvement. The remainder had principally economic functions. Statements of purpose often included phrases such as: “To promote prosperity through farm practices, to foster friendship among our members and to advance the

higher interests through literary and educational work.”²³

Choteau’s club founded a library; Baker’s built a school; community club members in Broadus established a park. The dozen or more members of Opheim’s Wild Rose Women’s Club quilted, made baby baskets for one another as the occasion arose, held demonstrations on various household topics, and made garments for soldiers during World War I. Mary Redfield fondly remembered the activities as outlets for the isolation of homesteading. Club activity, Choteau’s Dorothy Floerchinger recalled, provided an all-important opportunity for people “to come together.”²⁴

COUNTY BUSTING

Out of agricultural development in eastern Montana a sense of coming together also manifested itself in the political arena—“county busting” people called it. The increase in counties from twenty-four in 1900 to fifty-six in 1925 fragmented the Montana map—“busted up” massive counties and, hence, the name. Twenty-six of those counties appeared between 1910 and 1920—only four during the preceding decade and the last two in 1923 and 1925. The nomenclature focused on the geographic divisiveness of “busting,” but the seeds and the fruits of this political process were, at their core, cohesive.

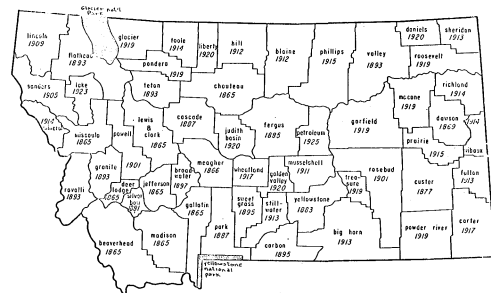


FIG. 3. Montana Counties, 1925, with dates of county creation. Courtesy of Dennis J. Lutz and Montana Historical Society.

Each new county represented a developed and developing sense of cooperation. A school district might serve five families—children within a half dozen miles of a central point like Pleasant Valley. A post office and store like Jim Stephenson's served a good part of the Redwater Creek drainage. Clubs and club houses helped cement the bond among aggregates of like-minded people who saw themselves as a "community" and mutually pledged themselves to breaking down prairie loneliness and isolation. The desire to form a new county constituted a logical continuation of "us"—a collection of school districts, post offices/towns, and interest groups—that had quickly formed a larger self-identity that extended individual social and economic needs to the collective political arena. The process took place quickly between the real start of the boom in 1910 and the onset of the bust following World War I. Forming a smaller, new county out of a portion of a larger, old county meant a group of recent settlers had also formed a new "community" with a common political identity.

Consummate county-buster Dan McKay recognized this in his rhetoric: bring government closer to the people, help "grass orphans" isolated from a distant county seat, combat legislative corporate domination from big cities and the west by adding eastern Montana legislators to the legislature—"us" in a new Garfield County and eastern Montana; "them" in older Dawson County or Helena or Butte. Newspaper man Daniel Whetstone, a Highline veteran of the homestead boom and bust, remembered how Dan McKay "used to barge into rural school-house gatherings, of a community nature, take the floor and let loose at the perfidious Anaconda Copper Mining Company, the railway robbers and the domineering haters of homesteaders . . ." ²⁵ McKay's oratory reminded settlers that old political structures had not adequately served the needs of a new pioneer generation. He spoke in favor of expanding governmental institutions—more counties for eastern Montana.

In 1911 the legislature facilitated new county formation by passing the Leighton Act, which

detailed a petition/election process whereby regions took county creation into their own hands. Here, too, as with school districts, post offices, and community groups, the period from 1913 to 1920 became significant. Twenty-three counties found their places on the map during those years—nine through the Leighton Act process and fourteen through statute rather than petition, seven in 1919 alone. ²⁶

Politically, eastern Montana received a more solid identity in 1917 when the legislature divided the state into separate congressional districts. The 1910 census had entitled the state to two representatives, but they were selected at large in the 1912, 1914, and 1916 general elections. That the 1917 legislature split political "East" and "West" acknowledged a sectionalism with geographical and chronological roots. Their elected representative to congress gave eastern Montanans a political identity as a community separate from the older, western part of the state. The political East-West division state legislators acknowledged in 1917 remains basically unchanged today. ²⁷

CONCLUSION

Agricultural depression and out-migration, which affected Montana in the 1920s and 1930s, provided a historic and, unfortunately, often negative postscript to the homestead boom. That the movement suffered such reverses is not the collective fault of those who settled the area. As Mary Hargreaves suggested, the bust came about because three fundamental premises, subscribed to by homesteaders, the federal government, and the public at large, were simply not true. Agricultural development of the semiarid region was *not* practicable as a normal expansion of the farming frontier. Such development did *not* serve the general good of the nation. Planned land utilization and the regulation of state, railroad, and other private promotional efforts were *not* unnecessary and undesirable. ²⁸

As the validity of those assumptions has come into question, so has the appropriateness of judging individual actions during the period "failures." A second dynamic that has affected

historians' evaluations of twentieth-century homesteading is the "progress" that had occurred since the beginning of Great Plains agricultural settlement. Isolation produced the natural sense of "community" Malin saw in Kansas, and despite technological advances, eastern Montana Honyockers felt the same isolation north of Circle. The lack of hard-surfaced roads and branch railroad lines forced homesteaders to focus on school districts and post offices not far from the family soddy or claim shanty. Although a late "frontier" in terms of chronology, eastern Montana was not an altogether different frontier from its historic antecedents in terms of perceived isolation and the felt needs for cooperative effort among its participants. Settlers viewed the condition as temporary and worked to establish institutions to mitigate loneliness and isolation, but after two and one half decades of settlement (1900-1925), "sparsity of population remained characteristic on the plains."²⁹

Furthermore, improved technology made sparsity a permanent condition. Technological improvements in farm machinery encouraged farming of ever larger land areas. More successful farmers bought out less successful neighbors; fewer people on the land needed fewer school houses and traveled farther on better roads to get mail and supplies or had Rural Free Delivery bring letters and mail-order catalog goods to their farms on the same improved roads.

These demographic and technological changes became apparent early in the 1920s. With most land previously claimed and the validity of dry farming in doubt after the 1917-19 drought, new homestead entries declined as previous homesteaders simply made final proof on existing farms and bought land forsaken or foreclosed. New post offices averaged fewer than nine a year during the 1920s. About thirty-five new school district applications a year arrived in Helena until 1924 when the Superintendent of Public Instruction tallied an all-time high of 2,384. In succeeding years, consolidation rather than creation became the norm as the improved roads that brought mail also removed children in buses to elementary and high schools in larger

communities. Today fewer than 500 school districts function in the state.³⁰

Community clubs continued to form during the 1920s as hardship provided an intensified need for sociability among those who stayed. Yet out-migration presaged failure for such clubs and after 1930 they began to disappear as did many of the homesteaders who had founded them. Irene McManus and surviving members of the Bole Women's Club eventually sold their clubhouse to the highest bidder for \$2,500, donating most of the proceeds to activities in neighboring Choteau and Fairfield.³¹

"The social instinct of people demands expression," J. Wheeler Barger observed in his study of Montana community clubs.³² In the more settled regions from which twentieth-century homesteaders came, a variety of groups and organizations existed to satisfy that instinct. Thrown together in the geographic and psychological isolation of the northern Great Plains, homesteading was "a togetherness" learned from and shared with neighbors. Settlers developed a sense of *gemeinschaft*, manifested first in cooperative acts such as threshing and barn raising, then continued in other activities designed to meet specific felt needs—school districts to educate children, post offices to maintain contact with the outside world, clubs for social contact and personal betterment, counties for greater political clout. Within those frameworks, the homestead period in Montana is a study of "community" action on the American frontier.

NOTES

1. Mary Tanner Oral History, Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena (MHS), OH 307.

2. I have not included churches in this study because extant records do not allow the researcher to distinguish between spontaneous efforts that fit my definition of "community" and sponsored or prompted church formation by missionary societies and itinerant preachers.

3. U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Census Reports*, Vol. 1, *Population*, Part 1 (Washington: GPO, 1901); U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States*, 1920, Vol. 1, *Population*, Number

and Distribution of Inhabitants (Washington: GPO, 1921). Information on school districts came from the Montana Superintendent of Public Instruction (MSPI) annual and biennial reports from *First Annual Report* (1890) through *Twenty-First Biennial Report* (1930) and from conversations with the MSPI staff. The completeness of published reports varies and some averaging was necessary for statistical comparisons. Information on establishment of Montana's post offices came from Dennis and Meryl Lutz, "Montana Post Offices: 1864-1974," in *Montana A Postal Cache* (February, May, August, November 1975): m-1 to m-103. The same data on Montana post offices is available in Dennis J. Lutz, *Montana Post Offices & Postmasters* (Minot: Privately printed, 1986). Statistics for initial amounts of land claimed by homesteaders came from compilations in Mary W. M. Hargreaves, *Dry Farming in the Northern Great Plains, 1900-1925* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), pp. 376-77, 408. These statistics include public land and land the Northern Pacific Railroad sold from its land grant holdings. U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, *Homesteads* (Washington: GPO, 1962) lists final homestead entries from 1868 through 1961. Conversations with James Muhn, land law historian for the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Billings, were helpful in clarifying homestead settlement patterns.

4. Mary W. M. Hargreaves, "Space: Its Institutional Impact in the Development of the Great Plains," in Brian W. Blouet and Frederick C. Leubke, eds., *The Great Plains, Environment and Culture* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), p. 207.

5. The Bureau of Land Management publication *Homesteads* and Hargreaves, *Dry Farming*, pp. 329-82, are useful in clarifying the history of federal homestead legislation.

6. James C. Malin, *The Grasslands of North America, Prolegomena To Its History with Addenda* (1947; rpt. Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1967), p. 316. See also Robert V. Hine, *Community on the American Frontier: Separate But Not Alone* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980) for community development throughout the American West; John C. Hudson, *Plains Country Towns* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985) for small town formation in North Dakota, principally associated with railroads; and Paula M. Nelson, *After the West Was Won: Homesteaders and Town-Builders in Western South Dakota, 1900-1917* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1986). Taken with Hargreaves's book and article, these last two works provide detailed studies of areas adjacent to eastern Montana that experienced the same twentieth-century land boom.

7. Zoyd Money Oral History, MHS, OH 188; Hudson, *Plains Country Towns*, p. 123.

8. Nelson, *After the West Was Won*, p. 62.

9. Hargreaves, *Dry Farming*, pp. 376-77, 408; Bureau of Land Management, *Homesteads*, p. 16; MSPI.

10. Mary Redfield Oral History, MHS, OH 291.

11. Frank Elliott, "Pleasant Valley School" in the Pleasant Valley Histories, MHS, Small Collection (SC) 647.

12. Maud Moody Luce, MHS, SC 647.

13. Richard W. Helbeck to Rex C. Myers, 6 July 1988 and Dennis J. Lutz to Rex C. Myers, 13 June 1988, in author's possession; Wayne E. Fuller, *The American Mail; Enlarger of the Common Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972); Wayne D. Fuller, RFD, *The Changing Face of Rural America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964).

14. Hudson, *Plains Country Towns*, p. 123; Mary Stephenson Oral History, MHS, OH 209.

15. Helbeck to Myers; Fuller, RFD, p. 84.

16. Lutz, "Montana Post Offices"; Pearl R. Reeves Oral History, MHS, OH 298.

17. Hobart McKean Oral History, MHS, OH 208.

18. The Women's Study Club movement was a national phenomenon by the turn of the century. Montana groups had joined the General Federation of Women's Clubs in 1904 and held their first statewide meeting in 1905. By 1908, eighteen Montana communities had Federated Women's Clubs including the eastern Montana communities of Forsyth, Harlem, Havre, and Malta. In all probability, many of the women who homesteaded in other eastern Montana communities had some familiarity with the movement and sought to replicate club social and literary activities in their new environment. *Montana State Federation of Women's Clubs, Annual Reports, 1904-1905, 1907-1908*; Judith Club, Lewistown, Montana, Minute Book, MHS, SC 1838 (quoted). The Judith Club incorporated 23 January 1905. See also Theodora Penny Martin, *The Sound of Our Own Voices: Women's Study Clubs, 1860-1910* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).

19. J. Wheeler Barger, *Rural Community Halls in Montana*, Montana Agricultural Experiment Station (MAES) Bulletin No. 221 (January 1929; quoted pp. 4, 43); J. Wheeler Barger, *The Rural Community Club In Montana*, MAES Bulletin No. 224 (January 1930; quoted, p. 6).

20. Irene J. D. McManus Oral History, MHS, OH 766.

21. Barger, Bulletin No. 221, p. 43.

22. Sue O. Hill Reminiscence, "Neighbors and Friends Who Homesteaded on Lonesome Prairie West of Big Sandy, Montana," MHS, SC 1256.

23. Barger, Bulletin No. 221, p. 6; Bulletin No. 224, pp. 6-7.

24. Emily S. Crary Oral History on Choteau, MHS, OH 754; Lorene Kirschten Oral History on Baker, MHS, OH 334; Edith B. McLain Oral History

on Broadus, MHS, OH 893; Redfield, Oral History; Dorothy B. Floerchinger Oral History, MHS, OH 673.

25. Daniel W. Whetstone, *Frontier Editor* (New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1956), p. 100.

26. Ellis Waldron and Paul B. Wilson, *Atlas of Montana Elections, 1889-1976* (Missoula: University of Montana Publications in History, 1978), pp. 72-73.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 73, 152-53. The authors use the phrase "Life Style Regions" to characterize the traits

and values that emerged out of the homestead period in eastern Montana when compared to the remainder of the state. Congressional redistricting following the 1990 U.S. Census may once again turn Montana into a single district.

28. Hargreaves, *Dry Farming*, p. 540.

29. Hargreaves, "Space," pp. 211-13.

30. Bureau of Land Management, *Homesteads*, pp. 18-20; MSPI; Lutz, "Montana Post Offices."

31. Irene McManus Oral History.

32. Barger, Bulletin No. 221, p. 3.