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GHOST TOWN'S PAST REVEALED

MISSOULA--

History, to the average individual, means the Custer Battle or the retreat of Chief Joseph. But the man who writes history must either have witnessed the events or glean them from the writings of others. Documents, the minutes of a board meeting, ledgers and letters are his stock in trade.

Dr. Ross Toole, professor of western history at the University of Montana, along with his students - has been beating the bushes, looking for old records and documents. Through a tip from Hugh Galusha, President of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, Toole heard of a cache of records that tell the story of a ghost town and it's bank.

Toole sent UM Archivist Dale Johnson to evaluate the find. Two buildings remain of what was once downtown Gilman, Montana; a brick bank building and a lumber yard - where the records were stored.

Johnson looked at only a few of the ledgers and account books before realizing he was onto an excellent historical find.

In talking with old timers and using the records, Johnson was able to reconstruct the history of Gilman. The town was started by the Great Northern in 1911 or 12 and was intended to serve homesteaders - or honyakers -then moving west.

The town reached a peak in a few years and housed about 1400 souls. However, the economy wasn't the same as they had experienced in their homes in Indiana or Ohio. A quarter section of land refused to support a family in the west.
The bank at Gilman had been making loans to farmers who couldn't pay them back. It closed for Thanksgiving in 1923 and never reopened. At Augusta - a mile and a half away - the bank closed for good on Christmas of the same year. Other banks followed suit and the depression swept over the / years before it struck Wall Street in '29. Families moved away - leaving homes and businesses they had built. Many buildings were moved to the older town of Augusta and some of the sidewalks, too.

When Johnson returned to Missoula, he and Toole went over the documents in greater detail.

After a few days of work, Toole stated that the newly discovered papers represent the best historical record of a ghost town that he had ever seen.

Toole claims that history is being thrown away because of America's mobility. Individuals and families formerly lived and died in the same towns in which they were born. Today's citizen is at home in many cities and travels lightly, discarding memorabilia as he moves.

Toole derived a chuckle from the Gilman records. He said the town's newspaper was called "The Optimist."