The Golden "M" Project: History lost and found

Sandra Koppenberg Fisher

The University of Montana

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THE GOLDEN "M" PROJECT: HISTORY LOST AND FOUND

by

Sandra Koppenberg Fisher

B.A. The University of Montana, 1995

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Master of Arts

The University of Montana

1999

Approved by:

[Signature]

Chairperson

[Signature]

Dean, Graduate School

2 - 17 - 2000

Date
Rises now Missoula High School
Where the Indian pitched his wigwam,
In those years now gone forever.

Anonymous
Bitter Root 1930
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The purpose of this professional paper is to document The Golden “M” Project, an endeavor that began as a summer internship at the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula. The project was conceived in 1995 when members of the Golden “M” Club, a group of former Missoula County High School (MCHS) athletes became aware of a cache of trophies found in the basement of Missoula’s Sentinel High School. The trophies represented the academic and athletic history of their defunct alma mater (the predecessor to Missoula’s modern high schools, Hellgate, Sentinel, and Big Sky). Some of the trophies dated back to the turn of the century, including a large silver urn, the prize of Montana’s first interscholastic high school track meet held in 1904.

Although many of the trophies were unidentified and some in a state of disrepair, their significance was not lost to the former athletes. They organized the Golden “M” Trophy Committee and launched an effort to rescue the artifacts and have them moved to a more appropriate location. Negotiations between the trophy committee, Missoula School District #1, and the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula resulted in the transfer of the trophies’ guardianship to the museum where they were to be evaluated, stabilized, identified, and stored.

As a prerequisite, the Golden “M” Club contributed an initial $3,000 to offset museum costs and finance the hiring of a museum intern to implement
the project. Financed for only three months and staffed with one person, a task
began that would span two-and-a-half years and resurrect an interesting,
important, and sometimes amusing segment of Missoula's past. Plodding along
on a day-to-day, dollar-by-dollar existence, it lead to the discovery of historical
documents, photographs, and artifacts forgotten for decades, in vaults, archives,
and attics across the country. It involved hundreds of former Missoula County
High School students as well as government agencies, community organizations
and volunteers. It generated a collection of over 700 objects and raised over
$20,000 in donations. In the end it provided adequate resources for an annual
MCHS exhibit, a reference library, and a book (being written by this author)
approved and financed by the Friends of the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula.

Part I of this paper gives an overview of Missoula's early educational
history, focusing on the development of the community's high school system.
This section also attempts to explain why both students and school officials later
severed their emotional ties with the "old institution" along with the rich local
history that it represented. Part II outlines the evolution of the project,
addresses the difficulties encountered as the project developed and describes the
strategy and methodology used to overcome them.

Ultimately, the success of the Golden "M" Project came not from a single
effort, but from the cooperation of many. It grew out of the realization that the
loss of one's history is equivalent to losing a part of one's self. It is with this
conviction that I respectfully submit this paper.
PART I

MISSOULA COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL: THE ROOTS OF TRADITION,
AN EARLY HISTORY
CHAPTER TWO

Setting Up Shop

The first Montana territorial legislature authorized the establishment of a school system at Missoula Mills (later shortened to Missoula) in 1865 but it wasn't until 1869 that local residents finally organized a school board and made arrangements for educating their children. The chosen site for Missoula's first school was the Larabee building, a wood-frame structure on the corner of East Front Street and Higgins Avenue. Emma Slack, a thirty-one year-old resident of Baltimore, Maryland (later to become Mrs. William H.H. Dickinson) was appointed teacher by school superintendent, Judge Pomeroy. Her first class, a group of sixteen pupils of various ages, included students from Missoula, Frenchtown, Stevensville, and "the country" (Delta Kappa Gamma [DKG] 1947: 8).

Miss Slack's first school year, lasting only through the summer months of June, July, and August, must have been difficult at best. She lacked as much as a roll book for keeping attendance records (Koelbel 1972:33). The makeshift classroom consisted of an assortment of mismatched books, a small painted blackboard, a table, a teacher's chair, and some benches for the students to sit on. According to Miss Slack's journal, the Flathead Indians often peered through the windows while class was in session. She wrote that this practice made her nervous until she was convinced that the Indians were friendly and that their strange behavior emanated from curiosity rather than malice (Daily Missoulian 15
In 1870 the school moved to a log cabin owned by Christopher P. Higgins on the northwest corner of Higgins and Main; then in 1872 Missoula residents raised enough money to build a permanent school. Mr. J. Tasker was awarded the contract to construct a brick and stone building on the corner of Main Street and Adams. The structure, measuring twenty-four feet by thirty-six feet, cost local taxpayers $1,700. While the new building was under construction, Mrs. Jane Weeden taught twenty pupils, ages six through sixteen in the front room of an abandoned brewery. The back room served as her temporary living quarters (DKG 1947:16). One can only guess why the school board members approved of such an arrangement but it is likely that financial difficulties probably played a role in their decision. Mrs. Weeden's thoughts on the matter were never recorded.

When the new school was completed in 1874 all funds allocated for school expenditures had been depleted and there was no money left to employ a teacher. Miss C.P. Simms, new to Missoula from Philadelphia, opened a private school in the new building rent free. Notions of the school board charging her for the unused space were abandoned when citizens of Missoula realized that they might be left with no teacher at all. In 1875, E.A. Kenney was hired as a paid instructor and three years later, Miss Olive Pickering began the 1878-79 school year with a record sixty-three students in attendance. Miss Pickering
later married John Rankin, one of Missoula’s leading citizens and entrepreneurs. Their daughter, Jeanette would become the first woman to be elected to the United States House of Representatives (DKG 1947:16-17).

In 1887, a brick building (the old Central or Irving building) was erected at a cost of $17,500 (Brown 1977:1). Serving as both a grade school and a high school, the newly completed eight-room structure barely accommodated that year’s attendance roster of one hundred and forty students. Subjects such as advanced arithmetic, physics, political geography, and algebra were offered to upper-class Missoula students for the first time. In the spring of 1886, the community attended Missoula’s first high school graduation. In full evening dress, the audience watched the two lone graduates, Mattie Landers and Rowina Price, receive their diplomas (Daily Missoulian 15 April 1956).

By the fall of 1890, the small eight-room school accommodated one hundred fifty pupils in grades one through eight and fifteen students in three grades of high school. Later that year, the commencement program would list four graduates: Marcia Hurd, Mary Sloan, Minnie Spurgin, and Henry Amireaux. Newspaper accounts of the time recorded the event as a “gala celebration” held at the Bennett Opera House (Daily Missoulian 15 April, 1956).

As was typical of the times, the County School Superintendent, Frederick Gilbert, was required to “make rounds” several times a year to every district within the county. This was a formidable undertaking considering that Missoula
City School was just one of fifty-six on the 1890 circuit. An entry from his journal dated October 21, recorded one of these stops, lending vague documentation to Missoula’s early school environment. “Visited the eight rooms of Missoula public schools. Principal J.M. Hamilton, assistants, Miss Tufell, Mrs. Leavett, Miss Witham, Miss Evans, Mrs. Woodward, Miss Wood and Mrs. Anderson” (Missoula County Superintendent’s Ledger 1890). In addition to his duties as principal, James M. Hamilton was the sole person responsible for educating Missoula’s fifteen high school students (*Daily Missoulian* 15 April 1956). Presumably, this left seven “assistants” in as many classrooms to teach the remaining one hundred fifty pupils of various ages and academic levels. Again, the continuing problem of overcrowding had to be addressed. Once more, the community responded and in 1891 construction began on two new brick buildings: the North Side School (Whittier) and the South Side School (Willard) (*Daily Missoulian* 15 April 1956).

With the opening of the 1894 school year, the Missoula City School faculty had gained three new teachers. One year later, a truant officer was authorized, a sign that Missoula residents’ attitude about education had come a long way since the short summer session of 1869. By 1896, $3,000 had been allocated for the addition of two upper floors to the Willard building to accommodate the ever growing high school population (*Daily Missoulian* 15 April 1956). Missoula teens immediately dubbed their new quarters “the attic compartment” while the city
preferred to designate it as Missoula's first official high school. In 1895 the University of Montana opened its doors in the same building. The fledgling university remained at this site, offering college preparatory classes to Missoula high schools students until it moved to its present campus in 1899. Thereafter, the preparatory program continued on a limited basis at the University until 1908 when the practice was discontinued altogether (Konah 30 April 1914:3).

By the fall of 1898 Mr. Hamilton's high school class had grown to twenty-four students. His attendance records dating from September when the semester began, to November when the term ended (a total of 43½ days), reveal some interesting facts. Only one student, Fred Tietzen managed a perfect attendance record. Three of the twenty-four students enrolled attended school fifteen days or less. Ironically, Lulu White attended the least number of days (14), yet achieved the highest grade-point average of the class, an impressive 97% (MCS attendance records, 1898).

Four years later, thirty-six high school students assembled in the then familiar "attic compartment" of the Willard building to begin the new school year in what was now an official three year high school. According to an article in the 1905 Bitter Root:

Then and there under the direction of Superintendent McKay, with Miss Evens and Mr. Beighle as instructors, was organized a three year high school. During the second semester Miss Bellew was placed in charge of the history department. The second year, Mr. Daniels of Billings, accepted the principalship and Miss Ames took charge of the
Science department. Physical apparatus was procured and Laboratory [sic] work provided in compliance with the University requirements (Dwyer, 1905).

While academic conditions continued to improve, the physical environment at the Willard building was deteriorating. Overcrowding and sanitation problems caused the City Health Officer to close part of the structure in 1902 until emergency repairs could be made. It seemed that no sooner had Missoula taxpayers emptied their pocketbooks to alleviate one crisis, another followed in quick succession. School enrollment was increasing at an alarming rate; by January, 1904, the combined elementary/secondary enrollment had reached an unprecedented 1,428 pupils. The North Side school and the remodeled South Side school were no match for the exploding student population. By the end of the year a new sixteen room elementary/high school building had been erected on sixth street to accommodate the increasing volume of students (Brown 1970: 8-11). The new school, known today as the Old Roosevelt School, currently houses the District One Administrative Offices.

In the fall of 1905 the first Bitter Root was published. Beginning as a quarterly literary magazine, the publication eventually evolved into the annual high school yearbook. In the 1905 Thanksgiving issue, an anonymous author explained the significance of the magazine’s namesake to Montana history:

Montana’s most noted flower, the Bitter Root is the state floral emblem. It was chosen in 1894 by the state Floral Emblem Society, and legalized in 1895 by the Fourth Legislature Assembly without a dissenting
vote. Its generic name is Lewisia in honor of Captain
Lewis, and its specific name "Rediviva" indicates
tenacity of the life of its roots (*Bitter Root* 1905).

The school's first formal publication was only one of many signs that an
organized high school was taking root. The first debate team, represented by
Margaret Noeth, Edith Schull and Fred Angevine, was established in 1906 and
took second place at the Montana State Interscholastic Meet. Two more
teachers were hired and a fully accredited four year curriculum was offered that
included advanced classes in Latin, German, Caesar, Cicero, geometry, medieval
history, and science. The biological laboratory was "filled with tables,
microtomes, stains, reagents, schofels, presses, glassware and all the apparatus
to do first class work; the chemistry laboratory with chemical desks sufficient for
twenty-five students to work at one time [sic]" (Brown 1970: 6). Missoula high
school students, were optimistic indeed. As one unidentified student
enthusiastically reported:

> We find ourselves in a new building, we have our new piano, our silk flag, over two hundred dollars in the treasury... and our new *Bitter Root*. Surely no school has a brighter outlook for the future than has the Missoula High School (*Bitter Root* 1906).
CHAPTER THREE

The Early Athletes

Football

Prior to the fall of 1903, there were no organized sports offered at Missoula High School. That year however, newly appointed Principal R.G. Daniels, a former University of Michigan hurdler, established the school’s first football team. Although the athletes played only one game, losing to Helena by a score of 38 to 0, the seeds of a sports program had taken root (Bitter Root 1906).

In the fall of 1905, MCHS’s two-year-old football team won its first interscholastic game. Under the direction of Coach Louis H. Battersby, a former national all-star football player, they beat Anaconda 47 to 0 and went on to play against Butte in the state championship. Butte defeated the young upstarts 24-5 (Bitter Root 1906), beginning a fierce and sometimes bitter rivalry that continued for several decades.

When the Missoula team played Butte in the state championship for the second time in 1910, Butte defeated them by the identical score... 24 to 5 (Konah 30 April 1914:3). The next year, in a non-championship game, Butte outplayed Missoula again. Finally, on Butte’s home field on October 26, 1912, the “purple and gold” got their revenge by shutting out the “copper-town” team 31 to 0. Listed on the roster that day was right guard, Conrad “Connie” Orr, who would distinguish himself as a winning MCHS athletic coach in the 1920s and a
major contributor to Missoula’s revised sports program in the mid-1930s (*Bitter Root* 1913:44).

During the 1917 football season Missoula lost two of their four games, one of which was with Butte on Missoula’s home field. One unidentified team member from Missoula gave a simple explanation for the loss, “On account of several inches of snow, and a strong wind, we were not able to win” (*Bitter Root* 1919:82).

As time passed, the rivalry between the two teams intensified. During the 1919 season, the Missoula team played Butte in ankle-deep mud on Butte’s home field. Although the final numbers on the scoreboard read 6 to 0 in Missoula’s favor, a decision as to who had actually won the game was still pending a week later because of a disputed penalty. An anonymous person from the home team stated that “Missoula was penalized for slugging, off sides and other imaginary offenses, bringing the total amount of penalties to seventy yards” (*Konah* 30 November 1919:1). Later, Missoula was credited with the win but the altercation escalated the growing friction between the two teams.

Missoula’s distaste for Butte schools wasn’t just limited to this particular team. When Butte Central came to Missoula the same year for the state football championship, Missoula won the game by default when Butte Central walked off the field in a huff. The dispute began over a fumbled football and accelerated when a referee nullified a Butte touchdown. A scuffle ensued and Butte Central was penalized fifteen yards for slugging, provoking the team to leave the game.
and forfeit the championship. An anonymous writer in the annual *Bitter Root* captured Principal G.A. Ketcham's sentiments on the game: "Mr. Ketcham stated that so long as he is principal here Missoula will have no further athletic relations with Butte Central" (*Bitter Root* 1927:61). Mr. Ketcham remained at MCHS until 1945; there seems to be no record of any further competition between the two schools during that period or anytime after.

Although Missoula lost its first championship football game with Butte in 1905, a hopeful student named Cecil Dwyer expressed his confidence in the team in an early *Bitter Root* article: "Athletics has grown to such an extent that we now put up a football team that compares favorably with that of any High School [sic] in the state" (Dwyer 1905).

Dwyer's prediction was optimistic at best. The next two decades proved to be a rocky road for Missoula's football team. Little was mentioned about the 1906 season and the 1907 season was summed up in one statement: "the school did little to distinguish itself in football" (*Konah* 30 April 1914).

One of the reasons for the team's difficulties may have been directly related to scheduling (or the lack of it). Games were often postponed or canceled altogether. In its infancy, the Missoula High School team often played college or out of state teams rather than other Montana high school teams. In the fall of 1909 for example, the Missoula team was said to have had "first-rate material," but played only one game the entire season. The single effort was against Mullan High School, where the "purple and gold" defeated the
“Champions of Idaho” 16 to 0 (Konah 30 April 1914). On October 17, 1914, MCHS set a scoring record when it defeated the College of Montana from Deerlodge 115 to 0. “Touchdowns came so frequent (that a) student of the commercial department of the ‘U’ with an adding machine lost track of the score” (Konah 22 October 1914:6). The following year, the high school’s football season was canceled after its first game when the parents of the team’s “mainstay,” Captain Lansing, forced him to quit. The season had been in doubt from the onset when a number of potential players had been declared ineligible for failing classes the year before. “Nothing else seemed plausible to do except disband . . . we bid farewell to football this fall” (Konah 4 November 1915:1).

Outbreaks of various diseases also played a part in disrupting athletic schedules. When an epidemic of Spanish Influenza caused the high school to close in October of 1918, the entire football season was canceled. “Our first game was to have been with Hamilton, October 12. Then along came the ‘flu’ and we fled” (Bitter Root 1919:7). The next year, Missoula’s game with Stevensville was postponed when the opponent’s hometown was quarantined for Scarlet Fever (Konah 30 November 1919:1). Another scarlet fever outbreak in 1927 caused Missoula’s basketball team to be quarantined and sent home, robbing the athletes of the opportunity to compete for the state championship (Bitter Root 1927:116).

It wasn’t until the 1920s that Missoula’s football operation finally got off the ground. In 1921, under the direction of Coach Conrad “Connie” Ore,
Missoula won the state championship for the first time. That year, team members Ted Illman, Tor Seadin, and William “Wild Bill” Kelly, were named to the Montana All-State Team. Kelly went on to play football for the University of Montana where he was named to the College All-Star Team and played for the West in the Shrine game on New Years day, 1927. After graduation he played professional football for both the New York Yankees and the Brooklyn Dodgers (Pro Football Hall of Fame. Internet accessed 9 November 1999). William “Wild Bill” Kelly died in New York on November 13, 1931 of acute indigestion (Konah 25 November 1931:1, 2).

Hired to replace Connie Orr in 1926, athletic Coach Guy Stegner led the Missoula football team to a second state championship in 1926, and a third in 1930. That year for the second time, Missoula athletes were named to the Montana All-State team. They were quarterback Rudy Sayler and end Arthur Jacobson (Bitter Root 1931:50).

It took MCHS nearly three decades to build a consistent and successful football team. Regular playing schedules and the hiring of specialized coaches for individual athletic programs in the mid-1930s likely influenced the transition. Once on task, the “purple and gold” football team gained a reputation for excellence that would stand until the school’s dissolution in 1965.

Track

In the spring of 1904, The State University at Missoula hosted Montana’s first high school interscholastic track meet. Months of preparation and training
preceded the event. With no regular track or training equipment, Missoula hopefuls practiced on a bicycle track near the high school, using sticks and ropes in place of hurdles. On the day of the tournament, much of the community turned out to see “the Missoula boys” compete against athletes from eighteen other Montana schools. In spite of its makeshift training program, the Missoula team took first place with twenty-three points over second place Butte’s eighteen (Konah 30 April 1914).

The traditional colors long associated with Missoula County High School had apparently been established by this time, as reporters referred to the victorious team as “the purple and yellow (gold).” There were however, no regulation uniforms; one athlete was reported to have competed all three days in his long underwear (Montana Daily Record 21 May 1904). The excitement that the victory generated locally is reflected in the next day’s edition of both the Montana Daily Record (published in Helena) and the Daily Missoulian:

The successful Missoula athletes were given an ovation at the close of the day’s program. An open hack, buried in purple and yellow ribbons and carrying the proud youngsters, was hauled through the principal streets of the city by a hundred of the enthusiastic Missoula school boys and girls, yelling "Rah! Rah! Rah!" (Montana Daily Record 21 May 1904)

This is not vain crowing: it is the laurel wreath of victory which comes after hard work and consistent practice . . . Dinsmore, Demers, Forbis, Jones and Ambrose. Those are the names, and it is safe to say that no Missoula school boy will ever forget them. They did noble work; they brought honor to their
school; they won (Daily Missoulian 21 May 1904).

The full names of these athletes were Samuel Dinsmore, Hugh Forbis, Warren Jones, and Keith Ambros. Mr. Demer's first name was not recorded. The large silver trophy awarded to them that day is one of the trophies found in the Sentinel High School basement in 1995 and is now part of the Golden "M" Collection at the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula.

The track teams of 1905, 1906, and 1907 didn't fare so well. One of the reasons may have been the problem of irregular high school attendance by some of its potential athletes. In anticipation of the upcoming 1906 meet, the following "want-ad" appeared in the winter edition of the Bitter Root: "Jones! Sticht! Johnson! Do you realize that track work is coming soon? Don't you think that you might come back to school? We need you!" (Bitter Root February, 1906). Other than the absence of their names on the program roster, there is little evidence to suggest whether or not the three athletes returned to school. What is certain however, is the outcome of that year's meet. Flathead High School out-scored the "purple and gold" and took home the coveted trophy (Konah 30 April 1914: 4).

On a muddy university field in 1908 (three weeks before the infamous Missoula flood) members of MCHS's track team gathered for the fifth annual interscholastic meet. Photographs taken at the time confirm that regulation uniforms had finally been established. Large MHS monograms now appeared on
their uniforms, identifying each of them as Missoula High School athletes. The newly adorned “purple and gold” captured first place with 50½ points, the largest total ever amassed in the five year history of the event. There were 148 entries from twenty Montana Schools with an estimated 800 visitors on hand (Daily Missoulian 16 April 1908:1).

On the eve of the competition, a statement appeared in the Daily Missoulian suggesting that “it would be only proper recognition on the part of the city . . . and its people to suspend so far as possible, all business upon one afternoon of the event” (Daily Missoulian 14 April 1908). Business leaders complied and abandoned their shops for the oval cinders at 12:30 P.M. the next afternoon (Daily Missoulian 16 April 1908). The event along with the “business holiday” became a community tradition that continued into the early 1970s.

Basketball

The first mention of Missoula High School students playing basketball appears in the January 1906 edition of the Bitter Root. Missoula lost to the YMCA second team 30 to 24. The lineup was listed as follows: “YMCA - Grady, center; Vassar, Ambrose, forwards; Graver, Hoskins, guards. M.H.S. - Dorman, center; C. Forbis, Little, forwards; Cys, Dinsmore, guards” (Bitter Root 1906). It is interesting to note that Y.M.C.A. forward Ambrose, M.H.S. guard Dinsmore, and M.H.S. forward Forbis are the same names credited by the Daily Missoulian as heroes of the 1904 interscholastic track meet. Whether or not they are the same individuals is something that may never be determined with certainty.
because the first names of these players were omitted in the *Bitter Root* article. Since the high school had neither a gymnasium nor an official basketball team it is likely that the MHS athletes not already playing for the YMCA, organized themselves into a team to take advantage of the only available gymnasium equipped with a basketball court. Moreover, it is probably not coincidental that high school athletic coach, Louis Battersby was also physical director for the YMCA (*Konah* 30 April 1914:3).

An official MCHS interscholastic basketball team was finally organized during the 1910-11 school year. Because the high school had no gymnasium of its own, games were difficult to schedule. Games were played on an outdoor court (weather permitting) or in the University of Montana gymnasium when it was available. The athletes practiced in a second story hallway of the Bennett Building which was located behind the First National Bank. During the next year, despite the rudimentary circumstances, the infant but resourceful team managed to win most of their games including the confrontation with their ardent rival, Butte (*Konah* 30 April 1914:4).

In 1913, athletic coach John McGough, a graduate of Colgate College, was credited for helping to transform the old Hollenbeck garage into a make-shift gymnasium equipped with hardwood floors, showers, lockers, and a basketball court (*Bitter Root* 1913). The small facility, although welcomed by the athletes, was for all intensive purposes, still a garage. George Croonenberghs, a 1937 graduate of MCHS remembers practicing basketball in the old gym: "(it) was
horrible to play in! We had no room on the back courts under the baskets. They had to pad the walls. Every time you shot a basket, you worried about hitting it” (G. Croonenberghs, interview by author 13 August 1997).

In 1921, along with the addition of the north wing, MCHS finally got its new gymnasium. The following year, for the first time in history, the Mining District Basketball Tournament was held in Missoula. The high school’s lack of facilities had postponed until now, the opportunity to host a championship game on its own court. That year, with hundreds of local spectators cheering them on, the “purple and gold” took the series, defeating Dillon 23-15. A few weeks later the team won the State Championship and was invited to the National Basketball Tournament in Chicago where it lost to Rockford, Illinois, 46 to 19 (Bitter Root 1922: 76-77).

The Spartans

Beginning in the early 1930s, high schools throughout the state of Montana began adopting team mascots. It was during this period that Konah sportswriters began using the pseudonym “Spartans” in place of “the purple and gold” when referring to MCHS athletes. Appearing sporadically at first, the term was well in place by the end of the decade. How the mascot was chosen or when it became official remains a mystery. There appears to be no documentation of its origin in either the Konah or the Bitter Root, nor is there reference to it in the Daily Missoulian. Moreover, none of the individuals who attended high school during that era and who were interviewed for this project
remembers when the transition occurred. The image of the Greek Spartan however, became embedded in the school’s culture as well as in the history of Montana high school sports.

***

The early years were times of uncertainty as well as opportunity for MCHS’s struggling athletic program. The teams’ resourcefulness and tenacity captured the attention of both its own community and those of its competitors. Right from the start, Missoula’s athletes were recognized across the state as a group to be reckoned with. Whether in defeat or triumph, MCHS sports would become a focal point for community activities and a rich source of civic pride for decades to come.
CHAPTER FOUR

Going Home: The Higgins Plant

Excited about the new improvements to their high school, Missoula students and teachers had welcomed the 1905-06 school year with enthusiasm. Behind the scenes however, a shortage of public funds was plaguing school administrators. With a record 180 secondary students enrolled and an excess of 200 projected for the next year, it became evident that the city of Missoula could no longer support a high school without additional revenues. The solution included two possible alternatives; either the school would be forced to charge tuition, or the responsibility for maintaining the institution would have to fall to the wider tax base of the county. After much debate among themselves and considerable pressure from the voters, the school board opted for the free county high school system and counted on a public election to ratify their decision (Brown 1970: 16).

On April 4, 1906, much to the relief of the board, concerned parents, teachers and students, authorization for a free county high school carried 753 to 486. Two and a half weeks later, on Tuesday, April 24, 1906, the School Board technically, if not physically, separated Missoula High School from the city school system. On that day, the Missoula County High School (MCHS) was born (Brown 1970: 21).

The following September, secondary school children poured in to Missoula from all parts of the county which at the time included the present counties of
Missoula, Lake, Mineral, Sanders, and a part of Granite. High school enrollment increased to two hundred and twenty-seven students. Overcrowding in several elementary schools added to the problem by forcing additional city grade school pupils to share limited high school space at Roosevelt (Brown 1970:14). It had become painfully obvious that the time had come to turn the paper proclamation of a separate high school into a physical reality. An article in the 1906 *Bitter Root* illustrates the problem from a student’s point of view:

. . . What’s to be done with all of the new students? was heard on every hand, as over two hundred people swarmed into the assembly Monday morning. To seat two hundred students comfortably in a room with a seating capacity for one hundred fifty was indeed a question to puzzle even the most mathematical head.

. . . The overcrowded condition tells but one story, that the growth of the Missoula High School has surpassed the most sanguine hopes of the board of education when the plans for the new high school building were laid little more than a year ago (*Bitter Root* 1906).

On June 2, 1907, seven hundred electors of Missoula County gathered to vote on a bond issue that if passed, would allocate $75,000 for the construction of the first independent high school in Missoula County (Brown 1970: 29). Women, still unable to vote, turned out to let their views be known: “The school election developed into a merry fight from the time that the polls opened at 2 o’clock until 6, and almost every rig in the city was used and women on all sides were busy taking a hand in the fight” (Brown 1970:19).
With a two to one majority, the fate of Missoula County High School was determined. The Kenneth Ross lots between Eddy and Connell Avenues on Higgins were purchased for $8,500 and designated as the site for the new high school. A. J. Gibson was chosen as architect for the project with the general contract being awarded to David W. Erickson of Missoula (Brown 1970: 29). The new Higgins Avenue "plant" was scheduled to open on the first day of school in September, 1908.

On or around May 4, 1908, it began to rain in the northwest. It was still raining when competitors met for the annual interscholastic meet in Missoula ten days later. It continued to rain every day in Missoula throughout May and into June, a total of thirty-three days in all. The water level of the Missoula River (later renamed the Clark Fork) was rising at an alarming rate. On June 5, the water level rose two feet in nine hours, flooding the downtown business district and bringing commerce to a halt. At 10 PM, City Engineer Mayo sent curiosity seekers to higher ground and closed the Higgins bridge, the only traffic access between the north and south sides of town. One hour later a 275 foot span at the center of the bridge was torn away by the raging current, cutting the city in half (Missoulian 12 February, 1987).

Electricity, telephone, and telegraph services were interrupted and not restored until June 11. Several railroad bridges, including the Northern Pacific bridge in Missoula were damaged or destroyed, stranding individuals and impeding commercial transportation across the entire northwest. A temporary
suspension foot bridge was built across the Missoula river at a cost of $9,000. Completed in October, it was nicknamed the "bounding bridge," an appropriate description for a structure that swung wildly back and forth as people walked from one end of the bridge to the other (Koelbel 1972: 98).

For Missoula County High School students, this disaster was more than just an inconvenience. Shipping delays of building materials and inefficient access to the building site caused the opening of the new high school to be postponed for almost two months. This meant that a record two hundred and forty students began the new school year right back where most of them had started a year before... in the overcrowded halls of Roosevelt. Initially disappointed by the delay, an unidentified student recalls his/her change of heart in the 1910 edition of the *Bitter Root*:

...we were not left without a school home. The city schools allowed us to occupy our former rooms, forenoons one week and afternoons the next. This was rather a novelty, as we had never tried the one session method before. We were allowed to enjoy this method about six weeks, to our great disappointment, because by that time our new building was completed and the whole day session re-established, as the other was not found to be so conducive to study (*Bitter Root* 1910:7).

On November 16, 1908, the new high school building finally opened its doors to a barrage of apprehensive young men and women. Having recently adjusted to the freedom of flexible hours, many students were reluctant to return to the constraints of a regular school-day schedule. The unidentified student
above continues his/her evaluation of the transition:

... we soon forgot our disappointment ... The hallways are large and roomy; the stairways not at all easy to fall down. The recitation rooms are nicely furnished and well lighted and the assembly room is really a work of art. This room is large and has an excellent platform. It is well lighted with windows as well as with electrical fixtures and is especially well ventilated. The laboratories are spacious and well equipped and are enjoyable places to work.

... Viewing the building from a distance, it is really a handsome structure ... surrounded by a beautiful sloping lawn and large shade trees. It is a great pleasure to the students to sit under these trees on warm days and feel at home (Bitter Root 1910: 7).

The following spring, the first class graduated from the new high school on Higgins Avenue, marking the onset of a new era that would continue for another fifty-six years. The class of 1909 included sixteen girls and three boys. (Daily Missoulian 7 April 1957).

Over the next twenty years, Missoula County High School continued to thrive and diversify. In 1912, Gilbert A. Ketcham, former Deputy of State Superintendent of Schools, was hired as Principal (Brown 1972:42). He remained in that position for thirty-three years, becoming a major factor in the evolution of high school policy. Clubs and organizations were established to help promote academic, athletic, and social participation. A school band and orchestra were organized; the sports program continued to expand and set new records; and on December 18, 1913 the first issue of the school’s newspaper, the Konah, was published.
The problem of overcrowded classrooms however, continued to be a thorn in the side of school administrators. Although a north wing had been completed in 1921 increasing the building’s capacity to 800 students, the school was again bulging at the seams by end of the decade. In the fall of 1929, enrollment numbers totaled more than 1,100 students. During the summer of 1930 a record number of civic organizations, leading business people, and private citizens launched a campaign for the passage of a bond issue to finance the addition of a new south wing. On July 3, 1930, voters approved the measure by an overwhelming majority. Construction on the new addition began almost immediately with the completion date set for August 15, 1931 (Brown 1970:70).

On the first day of registration and orientation, the week that preceded the official beginning of the new school year, the *Daily Missoulian* celebrated the opening of the remodeled structure with its leading headline, “Students Entering MCHS This Fall Will Find One of the Most Complete Educational Plants in the Northwest!” (Brown 1970:71). Much attention was given to the modern safety innovations in the new wing as well as the elimination of fire hazards in the older section of the building.

On September 14, on what would have been the second day of classes, Missoula County High School lay in ashes. The fire, discovered by city policeman “Curly” Kohn at 2:45 in the morning, spread quickly through the old building and into the new addition. Although the community’s entire store of firefighting
equipment was brought into service, the expanded half-million dollar structure was completely destroyed. Lost, were the school’s entire library collection; student, Konah, and Bitter Root records; nearly all educational equipment and supplies; personal possessions belonging to students and faculty; and many works of art including three original Paxon paintings and a life-size bronze statue of Theodore Roosevelt (Brown 1970:73-75). Remarkably however, the tunnels beneath the building that housed the school’s heating facilities and served as a storage facility for maintenance equipment, escaped the holocaust. Many historical artifacts directly related to the school’s history were also stored in the tunnels. Among them were the school’s academic and athletic trophies including the elaborate silver urn representing Montana’s first interscholastic track meet.

Meanwhile, students mourned the loss of their school. A poem appearing in that year’s Bitter Root reflected both the despair and hope of one student who witnessed the devastation:

A blaze of red against a darkened sky,
A million angry flames give fitful flight,
To add ghostly spender to the night.
A rafter falls exhaling sparks that fly
Destroying hope of those who watch and sigh,
Then gaze with horror on the flaming sight
That puts all sane rememberings to flight
As hope and strong traditions fall and die.
The ruins now are cold and sadly bare,
But staunchly stand defying all despair,
A challenge to rebuild with greater care,
Reclaiming loss, and echoing to the sound
Of glad rejoicing in the newly found
True meaning of the purple and the gold (Eugene Davis, ‘32 Bitter Root 1932:4).
Four days following the fire, on September 18, 1931, Principal G.A. Ketcham’s address to the student body appeared on the front page of the *Daily Missoulian*. It read in part, “Let us hold our loyalty and our school spirit high even if we can seldom get together . . . Let’s not be licked. Let’s carry on” (Brown 1970:76). During the remainder of the school year MCHS students attended school at numerous locations throughout the city. Though separated from one another and under a considerable amount of duress, the students endured, as did most of the old traditions. MCHS athletes managed to unite and win that year’s interscholastic meet; the school newspaper continued to be published on a regular basis; and the annual yearbook was produced as if nothing had happened. Meanwhile, the charred remnants of the old high school were removed and construction of the new school preceded on schedule. The new structure, similar in design to the original building, was completed in time for the start of the new 1932-1933 school year.

In years to come, some old traditions would disappear without fanfare and new ones would replace them, weaving their threads into the diverse tapestry of the old school. The institution survived the financial difficulties of the depression, the sacrifices demanded by World War II, and the loss in 1945 of G.A. Ketcham, its principal of thirty-three years. By the end of the 1940s, Missoula’s postwar population explosion set into motion a change that would eventually bring an end to an era.
CHAPTER FIVE

Division and the Loss of Identity

With the onset of World War II, many young men who met the age criteria abandoned their high school classes to enlist in the armed forces. At the same time a number of Missoula families were lured to the West Coast or cities such as Denver by offers of well-paying jobs in war plants. Enrollment at MCHS decreased for the first time in history, dropping from 1,492 in 1940 (Daily Missoulian 16 September 1952) to 1,100 in 1942 (MCHS Dedication Program 1957:2). For a moment in time, the historic problem of overcrowding ceased to exist.

The bulk of high school students remaining on the home front contributed their share of time and energy to the war effort by promoting the sale of war bonds, collecting recyclable scraps, canning homegrown produce, knitting, or volunteering at the Red Cross (Brown 1970:91). But when “Johnny” came marching home again at the end of 1945, enrollment at MCHS began a sharp upward trend that was typical for postwar cities across the nation.

Early in 1950, Missoula’s School Board addressed the concept of advanced planning for the first time. With record enrollment, the problem of overcrowding was haunting them again. Threatened with loss of accreditation, the Board of Trustees concluded that a professional survey of the district would be needed to accurately forecast the educational needs of the community. In April of 1951, a survey was initiated that would determine the future of Missoula’s high school.
system. The purpose of the survey, conducted by Stanford University, was to create a master building plan that would meet the requirements of the county's projected population growth through the year 1965 (Brown 1970:117).

The survey's final report recognized that the Higgins Plant was already filled to capacity with no room for further expansion. The report recommended that a second high school, large enough to accommodate 1,200 to 1,500 students should be constructed at a location outside the city limits. It proposed that the fifty acres of county-owned property at Hale Air Field on South Avenue be secured as the future site (Brown 1970:118-119).

After a bond issue to finance the project failed to pass in 1952, a Citizen's Committee was organized to publicize the enrollment crisis and explore ways to implement the survey's recommendations. The committee concurred with the survey, suggesting that Hale Field would be an ideal location for the new high school. The proposed site was economically feasible, large enough to accommodate the necessary physical education facilities, and was located where the population growth was the greatest. Rejecting the concept of a junior high school, the group emphasized that the two high schools, although existing at separate locations, should operate as a single unit under the same administration, thereby preserving the integrity of MCHS (Brown 1979:123).

With support from the Chamber of Commerce, student organizations, and the PTA, the high school issue was again put before the voters on May 8, 1954. It passed with an overwhelming majority: 6,336 for; 2,580 against (Brown
1970:126). Nearly three million dollars was allocated for the purchase of the site, equipment, and the construction of the new high school (MCHS Dedication Program: 26 May 1957:2).

At 10:30 AM on May 21, 1955, John Schroeder, member of the Board of Trustees broke ground for the new South Avenue Plant. Witnessing the ceremony were James Hart, Mayor; John Toole, president of the Missoula Chamber of Commerce; and several other dignitaries credited for the success of the project (Daily Missoulian - Sentinel 22 March 1955). Less than two years later on January 28, 1957, the fifty-two acre campus opened its doors to a total of 1,250 sophomores, juniors, and seniors. With 500 freshman attending classes at the Higgins Plant, the total enrollment at MCHS had reached an all time record of 1,750 students (Daily Missoulian 29 January 1957).

Over the next two years high school enrollment continued to increase at a sharper rate than what the Stanford Report had predicted. By September 1959, 2,042 students were attending classes in the two buildings including 1,400 in the South Plant which was rapidly approaching its capacity of 1,500 (Daily Missoulian 14 October1959). It is likely that this is what instigated Board members later that year to consider for the first time, the possibility of dividing MCHS into two separate schools.

Except for the short seven-year span between 1957 and 1964, MCHS had been associated with the site on Higgins Avenue where the original building was constructed in 1908. This is where the old traditions had taken root and where
most of its history had been established.

Based on the Board's 1952 decision to maintain the integrity of MCHS, it is doubtful that the students who first attended the new South Plant considered the possibility of separation. It is likely though, that they viewed the new structure as a great improvement over the outdated, overcrowded Higgins plant. . . After all, much ado had been made over the modern virtues of the new facility. The fact that the "lowly" freshmen had been left behind in the old building and the upperclass students had been allowed to consummate the new one, gave credence to the idea that the South Plant would become the new focal point for the future of MCHS. While freshmen looked forward to the day when they too could participate in the traditions that had accompanied their older peers to the new facility, the sophomores, juniors, and seniors settled comfortably into their new environment.

Meanwhile, the Trustees struggled with the separation issue for two more years before coming to a decision. In April of 1961, the Board announced that MCHS would be split into two separate entities, the transition occurring in stages beginning with the following school year and ending in the fall of 1965 (Daily Missoulian 23 April 1961).

In May of 1964, the Trustees reported that names had been chosen for the two high schools. The seven-year-old South Plant would be called Sentinel while the old institution on Higgins Avenue would be named Hellgate. Initially, two unidentified Board members were concerned about the latter, arguing that
"students of the school and other schools might use the first four letters of the name in ways which might not meet the approval of everyone. Students might develop ‘liberal’ yells and ‘peculiar’ expressions” (Forssen 13 May 1964). After considering alternative names such as Clark Fork, Bitter Root, and Ketcham, a sudden motion by one of the Trustees for naming the school Hellgate (spelled as one word) passed, ending the debate (Forssen 13 May 1964).

While administrators worked out the logistics and decided how to divvy up equipment and facilities, those not officially involved considered a more sensitive side to the predicament. Which school would inherit the old traditions? How would sixty years of shared history be divided between two separate commodities? An article in the Daily Missoulian expressed the same concern:

. . . Which of the two schools will retain the school name of Spartans, which dates back to the 1930s, and the traditional purple and gold colors, established far longer ago. Which school will call its paper the Konah? Not so old is the name of the school literary magazine, the Kopee. (Excluded in the article was mention of the school annual, the Bitter Root, established in 1905.)

Two new (football) teams will have to be outfitted . . . two schools couldn’t continue to field one set of teams as is done now . . . Abandon football entirely? What a howl would be raised . . . Substitute a strictly intramural program? Still more howls! (Daily Missoulian 23 April 1961).

In the end, the board decided that the Bitter Root, Konah, Kopee, the purple and gold school colors, the school mascot, the Spartan, and all other MCHS amenities would remain permanently at Sentinel while entirely new traditions
would be established for Hellgate (Forssen 13 May 1964). Soon the purple and
gold Spartan would be disappear on Higgins Avenue and a scarlet and gold
Knight would adorn the face of the old institution.

Meanwhile, the class of 1965 was given the option of being the first class
to graduate from Sentinel or the last class to graduate from Missoula County High
School. The members of the senior class chose to go out with the same name
they had inherited as freshman in the old building. On May 1, with K. Ross Toole
as the keynote speaker, a record 609 students received their diplomas and ended
an era (Missoulian 27 May 1965:8).

A new age began the following September when one group of students
entered a new school shrouded in another’s traditions, while a second group
attended an old school with traditions yet to be consummated. For this reason in
part, sentiments representing their shared sixty-year history were quickly
abandoned by both. Missoula County High School was dead and only those who
had been an intimate part of her past, however so briefly, would mourn her
demise.
PART II

THE EVOLUTION OF A PROJECT
During the summer of 1995, custodian Charles "Chuck" Martin was sorting through discarded textbooks, outdated civil defense rations, and other forgotten relics that had accumulated over the years in the basement of Sentinel High School. Among the debris was a large number of abandoned trophies stored in an adjacent alcove. Representing the era of the old Missoula County High School, the trophies were falling prey to dust, neglect, and water leaking into the basement from the central sprinkling system. Aware that the trophies might have sentimental or historical value, he called his friend and neighbor, Albert "Babe" Belusci, a 1946 graduate of MCHS (A. Belusci, interview by author 3 November 1999).

Mr. Bulucsi, is a member of the Golden "M" Club, a group of over a hundred former athletes who gather annually from locations around the world to celebrate MCHS sports letters earned fifty or more years ago. After viewing the trophies, Mr. Belusci and four other local members of the club (Roy Malcolm, Don Gray, Jack Jourdonnais, and George Caras) organized themselves into a committee to salvage sixty-five of the abandoned trophies they had designated as most representative of MCHS's athletic history. The newly founded Golden "M" Trophy Committee began efforts to have the collection moved where it could be publicly displayed and preserved for future generations. After encountering little
enthusiasm from officials at Sentinel and Hellgate High Schools, they contacted Geoffrey Sutton, then Chairman of the Missoula County Board of Trustees for the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula. Concerned about the deteriorating condition of the trophies, Mr. Sutton arranged an informal meeting with Museum Executive Director, Dr. Robert Brown and Senior Curator L. J. "Jane" Richards to discuss the possibility of transferring the collection to the museum (R. Brown, interview by author 12 November 1999).

At a formal Museum Board Meeting On July 29, 1995, members of The Golden "M" Trophy Committee addressed the Trustees, emphasizing the historical significance of the trophies to the Missoula Community. Also discussed were the possible legal ramifications that might ensue by transferring the trophies in the custody of Missoula County School District #1 to another county medium, the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula (Board Minutes 20 July 1995). Later, county attorneys determined that an exchange could be implemented without difficulty since it would occur within the confines of the same government entity (R. Brown, interview by author 12 November 1999).

In a letter to Mary Vagner, Superintendent of Missoula County School District 1, dated September 21, 1995, Dr. Brown suggested that the museum would be an appropriate depository for the trophy collection:

Since the Historical Museum was founded to collect, preserve, and interpret the history of Missoula; and the objects in question are a significant aspect of that history; and the objects are currently stored in an inadequate and hazardous location at Sentinel High
School; and the staff at the Museum is trained in the proper techniques of preservation and interpretation; it therefore seems natural that the objects be transferred to the Historical Museum (letter by R. Brown 21 September 1995).

While enthusiastic about the prospect of acquiring the trophies, Dr. Brown and Ms. Richards expressed concerns about how the acquisition would affect existing museum resources. Included in the proposed agreement between the two parties was a stipulation that required the museum to exhibit the trophies each summer to coincide with Golden "M" and MCHS reunions. It was evident to both Dr. Brown and Ms. Richards from the onset that the trophies by themselves were not enough to support an exhibit. In order that the significance of the trophies be properly interpreted, they would have to be exhibited in the context of other MCHS objects. At the time, the museum archives held only two MCHS related items, a Bitter Root yearbook dated 1913 and another dated 1916, hardly enough to support a first exhibit. It was clear that an all out effort was needed to procure additional MCHS memorabilia.

Second, there was the matter of cleaning, stabilizing, cataloging, researching, and storing the objects. Some of the trophies were broken; others were water damaged, and many were unidentified, lacking names of specific events and/or dates. A considerable investment of staff time and museum space would be required to adequately care for, research, and preserve the collection.

Then there was the problem of funding which was also addressed in the letter of September 21:
... the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula is not in a position to accept them (the trophies) at the expense of the rest of the collections. Ethically the Museum cannot accept any object that it cannot care for properly and professionally. An amount of $10,000 to $15,000 is probably an appropriate amount; we are currently working out a true estimate of costs that will follow (letter by R. Brown, 21 September 1995).

Almost a year passed before further action was taken by either of the two parties. Then on August 8, 1996, Dr. Brown notified Mary Vagner that the Golden "M" Club had raised almost $3,000 to finance the first phase of the project (letter by R. Brown, 8 November 1996). With initial financing in place, a contract transferring custody of the trophies was signed on August 19, 1996. Two months later on Saturday, October 26, the five members of The Golden "M" Trophy Committee delivered the rescued artifacts to the safety and care of the Historical Museum.

The Internship

Over the next few months a decision was made to allocate a stipend of $2,500 from the Golden "M" account to hire an intern to implement the project. Planned for the summer months of June through August, 1997, the temporary position required a university student or recent graduate with an expertise in museum or conservation studies. Duties would include cataloging, tagging, and photographing the objects; preparing condition reports and listing stabilization techniques; developing a storage plan; listing supplies; and writing a final report.

In May, Ms. Richards hired Sandra Fisher, a University of Montana
graduate student, former museum Broman Fellow and volunteer, to begin work on the project. A section of the collections depository on the lower level of the museum was chosen as the work area. Tables were set up; supplies and tools were assembled; and a computer was activated for cataloging the objects, creating forms, and handling correspondence.

The first objective was to clean and stabilize the collection. Many of the early trophies (1904 to 1920) were in excellent condition. The majority were large sturdy urns consisting mostly of silver and/or brass. The trophies manufactured during the 1920s were similar in design but significantly smaller. By the end of the decade early forms of plastic were being incorporated into the bases (object #s 1997.06.59, 1927; 1997.06.57, 1929). Although a few of the trophies representing the 1930s were urn shaped, most were plaque-type awards made of wood with metal faces. It is conceivable that these changes reflected the lack of funds available for such items during the depression years.

Beginning in the 1940s, another change in design was evident. The urns and plaques were being replaced with vertical human forms made of breakable pot metal, secured to large wooden bases. Although some of the wooden plaques of the 1930s had been damaged by water, it was the pot metal group that had fallen most vulnerable to the elements. In addition to the water damage to their wooden bases, the simulated gold paint covering the pot metal was peeling off on several of the objects. Other statuettes had missing parts, likely broken off in storage or damaged in the process of their numerous moves during
the school's transition periods. Telephone calls to trophy manufacturers and to sports museums such as the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, confirmed that little could be done to repair such artifacts. Re-bonding of the pot metal items will have to wait for improved technology. The same problem was encountered with trophies of the 1950s since most of them too, shared the same design and material composition.

Other than the trophies made of wood or pot metal, only minor repairs were necessary to ready the remainder of the collection for exhibit purposes. A few weeks after the project began, the objects had been cleaned, stabilized, cataloged, labeled, and photographed. The most difficult task however, was attempting to identify the sixty-five trophies. Many of them, especially earlier ones, lacked important information in their inscriptions. A trophy dated 1915 for example, was inscribed only with the words, “University of Montana; Interscholastic meet; 1915.” What did the University of Montana have to do with MCHS and what event did this object represent? The earliest trophy in the collection, dated 1904, was engraved with, “Spalding Trophy presented by A.G. Spalding and Bros. to the NIAA; May 1904; Missoula County High School, '04, 23 points; Butte High School, '05, 27 points; Anaconda High School '06, 33 points; Flathead High School, '07, 26 points.” Another was engraved with, “U of M Interscholastic Meet; 1916; Won by (name of school and event omitted).” A heavy silver urn dated 1912, was inscribed with, “Debate; Won by Missoula High School; April 13, 1912; Lulu Wright, Clarence Streit, Percy Stone.” A second
silver cup dated 1926 read, "Montana Interscholastic Music Meet; Presented by Community Singing Club; Kalispell; Mixed (male/female) Glee Club; 2nd Place."

As more of the trophies were evaluated, it became evident that the Interscholastic Meet, whatever it had been, had not been exclusively athletic nor had it been exclusively male. It was now apparent that the five former athletes had inadvertently chosen a cross-section of both sports oriented and academically significant artifacts. This was indeed fortunate for the museum, because it widened the exhibit potential from just an athletic entity to an academic and social one as well. Now came the problem of determining their place in the history of Missoula County High School.

With only a month remaining of the internship, the time for research and identification was limited. Initially, officials contacted at Sentinel and Hellgate High Schools could shed little light on the years prior to the inception of the two new high schools in 1965. Moreover, there were no existing high school yearbooks or school newspapers dating back to the time of the 1904 trophy (the *Bitter Root* and *Konah* did not begin publication until 1905 and 1913, respectively) An article in the the city's newspaper, *The Daily Missoulian* however, helped solve the mystery of the Spalding trophy. The headline on the front page dated May 21, 1904 read: "Missoula High School Wins the Laurel Wreath." The ensuing article explained the significance of object #1997.06.25:

Missoula High school [sic] won the first interscholastic meet ever held in Montana . . . In fourteen sports on track and field and out of a possible
126 points, the Missoula boys won 23 . . . When Missoula shall have grown into a great city and the successful candidates of the local athletic team which snatched a hard fought victory from this Montana classic yesterday have grown into active and useful business men, the names of Dinsmore, Demers, Forbis, Jones and Ambrose will be something to impel the high school athletes of that day to newer laurels . . . it is safe to say that no Missoula school boy will ever forget them (Daily Missoulian 21 May 1904:1).

Further research determined that the remaining dates and names (Butte High School, '05, 27 points, [etc.]) engraved on the trophy represented subsequent track meets held in 1905, 1906, and 1907. According to the event's 55th souvenir program of May, 1961, the competition was held in May of each year on the University of Montana Campus. "A board walk ran from the east end of the 300 block on South Fifth St. East directly to the campus . . . Most of the crowd was scattered on the sides of Mount Sentinel at those first meets" (55th Annual Interscholastic Official Souvenir Program, May 1961:3). A photograph of Missoula High School's first track team also appeared in the program. It is unfortunate however, that the original photograph did not identify specific team members by name. It is doubtful that the rightful names of these athletes will ever be matched with their faces. One problem encountered in researching early articles in all forms of the media (city newspapers, school newspapers and school yearbooks) was the failure of the authors to record full names, and in some cases, failing to record individual names at all (especially in the case of photographs).
Nearly all of the track team members mentioned in the 1904 *Daily Missoulian* article had male siblings close to them in age (Missoula County High School Attendance Records, 1903-1904). Since only their last names were reported, it was initially impossible to determine which siblings were represented in the story. This is ironic considering that the excited 1904 reporter from the *Daily Missoulian* promised that, “no Missoula school boy will ever forget them.” It is likely that he/she failed to realize the impact of time on a community’s memory.

By 1906, the interscholastic meet had begun to incorporate academic categories into the competition. These contests were held just prior to the athletic events and increased in diversity over the years. Missoula High School entered its first debate team in the 1906 meet and took second place (*Bitter Root* 1906). Although there is no trophy to signify the event, this and the knowledge that the interscholastic meets were held exclusively in the spring and consisted only of track/field and academic events led to the identification of other trophies in the collection. Resources would later become available that would eventually lead to the identification of all sixty-five of the original trophies and give more insight into the history of the school.

By the end of August however, any hope of expanding the Golden “M” Project seemed dismal at best. The internship had officially ended and although members of the Golden “M” Club had personally donated additional funds and a few pieces of memorabilia, the anticipated monies required to support the project had not yet materialized. The attempt to collect MCHS objects to supplement the
trophy collection was a slow process as well. It was beginning to look as if the project was as dead as the old school itself.
CHAPTER SEVEN

History Found

High Hopes

Although a solution to the fund-raising problem was as elusive as ever, the Golden “M” Internship was reorganized into the MCHS Preservation Project with Sandra Fisher as its Project Coordinator when the internship expired in August of 1997. Accordingly, the quest for information and memorabilia continued into September, in hopes that a plan might be developed to secure additional monies. In the process, several new resources emerged that shed new light on MCHS’s athletic past. One of those was the acquisition of twenty-seven copies of original sports photographs hanging on the walls of the Missoula Club, one of Missoula’s oldest downtown pubs. These pictures represent MCHS sports events from 1921 to 1955 and were instrumental in identifying several more of the trophies. On the downside, a custodian employed at Sentinel High School came forward and recounted his experience of removing some “very old” uniforms and sports equipment from the tunnels beneath the Hellgate building and discarding them in the fall of 1972. This was a setback for the museum because the procurement of these items had been considered important in helping to interpret the trophy collection.

Meanwhile, early issues of the Daily Missoulian revealed that the Golden “M” members had inadvertently assumed that the history of MCHS had ended in 1956 with the erection of the South Plant, while in actuality it had continued until
1965. Later a meeting with Dave Severson, Sentinel High School's current Journalism instructor, resulted in the acquisition of several duplicate editions of MCHS *Bitter Root* yearbooks and *Konah* newspapers, including the first edition of the *Konah* published in 1913. Used as teaching aids, these old publications took on new importance in the attempt to unravel the school's past.

A book chronicling the administrative history of the high school written in 1957 by former MCHS English teacher Agnes Brown, answered many questions relating to the physical development of the school and defined the close relationship that existed between the institution and the community that supported it. Based almost entirely upon school board minutes and other official documents (some of which could not be located by present high school officials), the hand-typed book describes the early development of the school, its reconstruction after the 1931 fire, and the decision process involved in the building of the new South Plant in 1956. Other resources recounted the "split," the renaming of the two plants, and the ensuing resentment felt by many MCHS graduates.

Although research on the history of MCHS continued, time was set aside to prepare for the first annual MCHS exhibit. Finished in time to coincide with the Golden "M" Club reunion as required in the Deed of Ownership Agreement, the meager exhibit made its debut during the first week of September, 1997. Trophies representing both athletic and academic achievements dominated the glass cases located just inside the entrance to the museum. In lieu of other...
authentic MCHS memorabilia, makeshift artifacts were used to depict significant eras in the school's history. A pair of "long johns" hung above the Spalding trophy honoring the 1904 athlete who competed in similar attire at Montana's first interscholastic meet. An old typewriter was incorporated to represent Clarence Streit's first edition of the *Konah*; a World War I army helmet and uniform symbolized the classes of 1917 and 1918; a coke bottle, a checked tablecloth, and a borrowed poodle skirt reconstructed the malt shop generation of the 1950s. In retrospect, the first MCHS exhibit was a success, but not without a considerable amount of last-minute resourcefulness on the part of everyone involved.

**All Work, No Pay**

On Friday, September 19, 1997, a feature article appeared in the *Missoulian* that would give new life to the project's search for MCHS memorabilia. Having already publicized the discovery of the trophies a year before, this new *Missoulian* article focused on the effort of the museum to incorporate the trophy collection into the academic and social properties of the school's legacy. The story stressed the importance of MCHS to Missoula's past and emphasized that until now, no individual or agency had preserved the school's history. A side-bar listing the museum's telephone number, called for cash contributions and cited the memorabilia items needed to complete the collection. (*Missoulian* 19 September 1997:B1,2). The following Monday morning, museum telephone lines were clogged with calls from individuals responding to the *Missoulian* article. Most were former MCHS students wanting to contribute one or more of the items
mentioned in the story. It was the beginning of a deluge of MCHS related items that would come into the museum over the next two years. Unfortunately however, the article generated little financial support, a reality that soon settled in as the excitement over the sudden publicity abated. Each artifact accepted by the museum created a paper trail of files, correspondence, and accession records. Moreover, each object had to be evaluated, cataloged, labeled, stabilized, and stored.

Complicating the situation was the earlier discovery that the school’s demise occurred in 1965, not in 1956 as originally believed. No one, including the Missoula County School officials who had agreed to transfer ownership of the trophies, had caught the mistake. Clearly, there were more MCHS trophies and artifacts still awaiting rescue in the basement of Sentinel High School. In order to equally represent the remaining nine years, the existence of those objects had to be addressed. In October, with cooperation from both the Golden “M” Trophy Committee and Missoula School District #1, the museum took possession of an additional eighty-two trophies and related objects (accession #1998.01).

As important as these new items were to the project, it was clear that a crisis was developing. Although efforts by members of the Trophy Committee had resulted in the collection of another $5,000 since the original commitment of $3,000 the year before, total contributions had not reached the projected $10,000 to $15,000 necessary to research, preserve and exhibit the original sixty-five trophies. With the Golden “M” Trophy Committee “tapped out,” where would the
money come from to process an additional eighty-two plus the growing number of memorabilia items?

During the first two weeks of September an unsuccessful attempt was made to generate funds by addressing local business groups and various civic organizations. A sense of detachment from an estranged era, combined with requests from other charitable enterprises likely had much to do with their lack of interest. Subsequent speeches to former students at MCHS class reunions had a different effect. Although the effort hardly made a dent in the funding impasse, it did result in the acquisition of more artifacts, including two rare editions of the *Bitter Root* yearbook. The publicity created by the *Missoulian* article had virtually the same effect. Perhaps too much energy had been spent emphasizing the need for objects and too little on the need for cash contributions. It became obvious that given the choice of the two, most contributors chose to donate objects. A larger audience would have to be found and a new plan initiated if the fledgling project was going to survive.

*Eureka!* Soon an idea emerged that would target a group of people not previously included in the effort to publicize the project. Other than the members of the Golden “M” Trophy Committee and their local constituents, few Golden “M” Club individuals knew little about the project or what it was trying to accomplish. The same was true for the majority of non-athletic MCHS students, many of whom over the years, had relocated to other areas. If not asked to contribute
memorabilia, this population might be persuaded to financially support a project whose goal was to resurrect the history of their alma mater. Gaining access to the names and addresses of these individuals would be a simple matter of contacting the reunion organizers for each graduating class and obtaining their most recent mailing lists.

The fund-raising plan, a gamble at best, was designed to be carried out in four stages so as not to entirely deplete what was left in the dwindling "M" account. As money came in to the museum from one phase, the proceeds could then be used to fund the next phase and so on. If the first attempt was unsuccessful, than the operation could be abandoned without further sacrifice of existing funds.

The letters, including inserts, could be sent at a bulk mail rate of approximately twelve cents apiece. Denny's Copy Stop, a local printing company, had already agreed to discount the printing costs by twenty-five percent. The actual stamping and mailing of the letters would be done by an outside contractor, while all other work would be executed by the project coordinator and museum volunteers. This included typing mailing label for every former student on the various lists (a total of 7,000), stamping envelopes with return addresses, assembling the letter packets, stuffing the primary envelopes and sorting them by zip codes. Immediately upon the approval of museum director Dr. Brown, work on the first phase got underway.

Each mailing packet included: (1) a cover letter written on museum
letterhead explaining the purpose of the project, how it was conceived, what the goals were, the accomplishments to date, and the critical need for financial support (the museum’s solicitation for memorabilia was not included in the text); (2) a 2"x8" slip of paper to be returned with the donation, designating a choice of options for contribution amounts from $25 to $500 with a last box reserved for "other"; (3) a four page historical time-line depicting the school’s history from its conception in the 1880s to its reconstruction following the 1931 fire; (4) a self addressed return envelope.

With help from museum volunteers, four hundred seventy-six packets were mailed out on Wednesday, November 26, 1997 to members of the Golden "M" Club along with students from the classes of 1937, 1942, 1943, and 1946. On Monday, December 1, the first working day after the Thanksgiving holiday, donations to the MCHS Preservation Project began arriving in the mail. By the end of December over $3,000 had been collected and by the time donations tapered off during the first week of February, 1998, more than $4,000 supplemented the Golden "M" account. The average response rate per class (including the Golden "M" Club) was an impressive 18.86% (statistics provided by author).

The three subsequent fund-raising drives were also successful. The second, launched on March 11, 1998, netted over $4,000; the third, mailed on July 7, 1998 brought in over $5,000; and the last, sent on June 28, 1999 added an additional $2,700 to the preservation account. Ultimately, these amounts,
along with the previous $8,000 collected by the Golden "M" Trophy Committee, brought the total MCHS budget to almost $23,000. With enough revenue to see the project through to its end, the future of the preservation project was finally secure.

Along with cash donations came letters of appreciation, some with suggestions from former students on how to take back their old high school. One former student now residing in New York (wishing to remain anonymous), called the museum and proposed a petition to change the name of Hellgate back to Missoula County High School. Another wanted the the *Konah*, the *Bitter Root* and the *Spartan* names returned to "that old building on Higgins Avenue". It became clear that the former students of MCHS were enthusiastic about the museum's struggle to preserve their history.

**Back in Business**

With sufficient funds available and the next fund-raising drive not scheduled until March, emphasis now returned to the business of research, accessioning objects, and answering correspondence. In January an intern was hired to process the additional eighty-two trophies and help with the mounting correspondence that resulted from the November fund-raising effort.

Meanwhile, as word of the project spread, items of memorabilia continued to accumulate and diversify. Soon the museum had a complete set of *Bitter Root* yearbooks dating from the first edition in 1905 to the last one published under the MCHS name in 1965. Eventually there would be sufficient numbers to begin a
MCHS library that the general public could access. The collection of Konah newspapers was also growing. These resources proved invaluable in both understanding the schools history and providing information for future exhibits. Scrapbooks, letter sweaters, megaphones, cheerleading outfits, dance programs, report cards, journals, textbooks, thespian posters, and a pair of track shoes worn by a record breaking athlete were just a few of the items that supplemented the original collection.

While this and other aspects of the project were progressing well, research on the school's chronological history had reached an impasse. Donations of student publications, beginning with the 1905 Bitter Root and the 1913 Konah, in addition to the book by Agnes Brown, helped to simplify the process of documenting the years after 1905. School related records prior to that year however, are vague and difficult to locate. Articles printed in the Daily Missoulian during this period were often limited to special events, leaving out many of the subtle changes that were occurring behind the headlines.

With few resources at hand, the search for official school records became both a priority and the source of another problem. Although individual student transcripts are kept alphabetically at Sentinel High School, other documentation including nineteenth-century superintendents' journals, ledgers containing early attendance and enrollment data are scattered randomly throughout the city of Missoula. Some were uncovered in two separate vaults at the Roosevelt Administration Building, some were located on shelves at the county courthouse,
and still others were found abandoned in cardboard boxes at the Superintendent's office on West Spruce Street. Complicating the search, was the order in which these records were organized, or more accurately, disorganized. Ledgers from the first semester of 1888 for example, might be stored in the Roosevelt building, while records from the second half of the year might be found on West Spruce Street. How these documents came to be stored in such a haphazard fashion is unknown. Ultimately however, their discovery gave some insight into the lives of Missoula's early secondary students and helped to define the nature of the high school's early development. With this, the last segment of the school's history finally completed, another endeavor was about to begin.
CHAPTER EIGHT

Voices from the Past

During the last few weeks of the original internship, the first personal interviews were held with former MCHS students. The tape-recorded sessions were initially conceived as a means to gain information on unidentified trophies, fill in gaps in the school's chronological record, and persuade individuals to support the museum's effort to preserve MCHS's history. After several of these interviews, it became conceivable that they could play another role as well. The subjects, although willing to answer questions on other topics, were more anxious to recount their own high school age experiences. In the process, they revealed much about the community and the historical times they lived in. Intimate details about the old institution and coming of age stories filled the historical gaps with humor, emotion, and honesty.

The oldest interviewee, a 1923 MCHS graduate, recalled the election of 1920 as well as her memories of the "hello girls":

I remember going uptown to listen when the election (results) came in . . . when Harding was elected president. Dixon was governor then. His daughter went to MCHS sometime, but she went away to a boarding school. I remember that all we peons were against Dixon when he was running because he was running as a republican . . . we were good democrats . . . or good something else, or so I thought. I wasn't voting of course. The first thing he (Dixon) did when he got in as governor was put in the mine-tax bill. You see, there was no tax on those mines in Butte and all around. That changed everything . . . Dixon was our man.
"I shocked my mother in everything I did. I had to break the ice! I had two younger sisters. I used slang . . . We were supposed to say “how-do-you-do.” I remember my art teacher. She never did say “how-do-you-do, Irma.” My art teacher was always so sophisticated. We said hello but “hi” came in a little later. It might have come in by the time I was a senior. I think “hello” came in with the use of the telephone. When we picked up the receiver, they would say “hello, number please” . . . we called them the “hello-girls” (I. Isaacs, interview by author 10 March 1998).

Helen Putney Helms, a member of the class of 1928, remembered a hanging in downtown Missoula:

. . . (There) was a man whose name was Vukavich or something like that and he was hanged down in the jail yard and people went down there and sat around and watched it. My mother wouldn’t let me go down to the gallows. “People didn’t do that.” She didn’t think that I should see it but I heard all about it (H. P. Helms, interview by author 12 May 1999).

In a colorful portrayal of pre-depression times, 1931 graduate Dorcus Keach Northey described the activities that she and her peers enjoyed in and around the city of Missoula during her high school years:

We went to movies when we could afford it. We played a lot of baseball and we went swimming in the irrigation ditch in the summer. When we were younger, we had to go down to the city swimming pool if we wanted to swim. It was down where the Holiday Inn is now on, Pattee Street. I’m sure that swimming pool was a third urine. I think that there was just one
outhouse that you could go to. As soon as we got older we could go swimming in the ditch and that might have oranges and dead chickens floating in it but it was more sanitary than the swimming pool!

Down at the Blue Bird Theater they used to have . . . I don’t know what the shows were, but every Saturday you’d go to hear the next chapter of the serial. The gal was left on the railroad tracks and the train was coming; then they’d stop it and next week you’d have to go back.

We danced waltzes, foxtrots and a little jitterbug. We had a phonograph at home and we used to get those “hit of the week” records. They had them down at the Office Supply . . . I think they happened to get the franchise for Missoula. Every Friday or something, they’d have those in and you would go down and get those and be the hit of the week. They cost twenty-five cents. We were crazy about them but it drove our parents nuts. We played them ‘til they wore out . . . Rudy Valee, he was one of our favorites. We’d go home and play those and my mother would get so tired of hearing them over and over and over again. She threatened to throw them away but I don’t think she ever did (D. D. Northey, interview by author, 13 May 1999).

As they do for teenagers today, clothes played an important role in the lives of yesterday’s adolescents as well. One student described her early 1920s gym wear while two other students recalled high school fashion fads of the 1940s:

. . . When I was a senior, we had gym and I liked it very much. We wore black bloomers and white middies. The bloomers came down below our knees and bagged out. They looked almost like a skirt; they were pleated and really full (I. Isaacs, interview by author 10 March 1988).

. . . Our style in our day in high school was saddle shoes. You never polished them except when you
were going to the dance. We had white cords that were terrible. I can remember when Joe Small got his new cords. We had coal bins in those days. He took his brand new white pants down there and roughed them all up with coal to make them look dirty. You never washed your pants. We would write with ink...the name of somebody or whatever was clever. If you got them ripped, you would take white tape and go over that so they wouldn't get ripped anymore. Oh, we were a terrible bunch. We weren't very sophisticated but we had fun (R. Malcolm, interview by author 26 April 1999).

...There were no nylons. That was terrible. We drew “seams” down the back of our legs because we had no hose. The ones that you could get were awful rayon, terrible things. When anyone did get nylons, and got a run, she sent it away to be mended. There were a lot of things that you couldn't get. I think that's what started us (the girls) wearing jeans and borrowing our dads' white shirts. We wore those on the weekends and after school. We wore saddle shoes and bobby-sox, skirts and sweaters to school. That was our uniform, kind of (B. A. B. Malcolm, interview by author 23 April 1999).

Nearly every generation of school children had to cope with some kind of major event that affected their lives in one way or the other. The students in the decade before the 1920s dealt with the consequences of WWI and the Spanish influenza; for the children of the 1930s, there was the depression; and for the next decade of students, WWII. While most students came to terms with the changes that these events produced, the anxiety they felt at the time is still with them today. The following memories of WWII are especially poignant:

...The bombing (Pearl Harbor), that was the thing that energized everybody; it was such a terrible thing.
They said that we were at war, the day of infamy. Joe Small . . . he went into the service. He was older; he was a senior when I was a sophomore. And Mike Nash, another one of our buddies . . . They all started to leave . . . they were there and then all of a sudden they were gone . . . There was so much uncertainty with it. My little brother went into the service and I worried about him (R. Malcolm, interview by author 26 April 1999).

The war was so intertwined in our lives that you really didn't think past that very much except when the guys got old enough to go to war. My brother was in and my brother-in-law was killed on D-Day. That was hard for all of us. A lot of friends and all of their friends . . . everybody was affected. It was a national thing, it wasn't just local. We sold stamps and bonds in school; we had paper and metal drives . . . It was awful, but you coped. You didn't have anyone coming to help you through it. You just faced it and went on. There was a list in the paper every day. It was really a sad time for a lot of people. I think that it touched everybody (B. A. B. Malcolm, interview by author 23 April 1999).

Realizing the potential significance of these and other exchanges, specific questions were developed to help organize the dialogue and keep the focus of the interviews on task. Gradually the hit and miss question and answer sessions developed into a sophisticated means of documenting individual perceptions of growing up in Missoula over several generations. Exerts from these conversations were included in both the 1998 and 1999 MCHS exhibits.

Although oral history interviews are being used extensively to record the memories and experiences of surviving students, there is much to be discovered in the documents left behind by their predecessors. The Bitter Root, first
published as a quarterly literary magazine in 1905, initially consisted of original fiction, poetry, and essays submitted by MCHS students. Based on this format, it also served as a vehicle for reporting school news, expressing personal opinions, and addressing current events. Later, as the Bitter Root evolved into a style more readily identified with traditional yearbooks, the school newspaper, The Konah, became the principle medium for printing editorials, reporting school events and interpreting the news. It is through these and other documents such as city newspaper accounts and personal journals, that the late students of MCHS are reemerging as legitimate witnesses to history. Their words, though less contextual and not as deliberately focused as those of their interviewed counterparts, can be used to reflect how they coped with the historical events of their times as well.

Both are being incorporated into a book being written by this author with the support and cooperation of the Friends of the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula and The Golden “M” Club. An historical overview will introduce the various eras represented in the book. Photographs, donated by the interviewees along with those collected from other sources will be liberally distributed throughout the text to visually accentuate the changes that occurred from one decade to another. Using the high school as a backdrop, the book will interpret how life was perceived by the many generations of young Missoulians who attended classes there. Ultimately, it is their story, and to whom the book is dedicated.
The Golden "M"/MCHS Preservation Project, a tenuous enterprise at the start, eventually succeeded in resurrecting and preserving the lost history of MCHS. Whether remembered as a sanctuary, a social hub, a vehicle for athletic success, or the learning establishment for which it was intended, the old institution became irrevocably entwined with the lives of its students and with the community they had both grown up in. It is hoped that the book, along with future exhibits will help to reestablish its rightful place in Missoula's historical record.
APPENDIX ONE

Oral History Bibliography

The following titles were useful in establishing a format for the oral history interviews cited in this paper. Two books written by Willa K. Baum, From Memory to History: Using Oral History Sources in Local Historical Research and Oral History for the Local Historical Society were especially helpful. Both are clearly written, well organized, and provide a good point of reference for beginners.


APPENDIX TWO

Fund-raising Packet

Cover Letter, Phase I
(all cover letters printed on museum letterhead)

November 26, 1997

Dear former student of Missoula County H.S.,

In 1995, The Golden "M" Club (MCHS alumni lettermen) unearthed a cache of athletic and academic trophies in the basement of Sentinel High School dating back to 1904. In an effort to "rescue" these old and dusty trophies, the Golden "M" Club provided a $3600 grant to the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula to catalog, restore, and preserve them.

While attempting to identify the trophies, we discovered that when the county high school system was abandoned in 1965, no individual or agency had taken responsibility for preserving school records, the Bitter Root yearbooks, the Konah and other related memorabilia. Any evidence of Missoula County High School's contribution to the community was rapidly slipping away. The Golden "M" trophy committee and The Historical Museum at Fort Missoula made a commitment to expand the trophy project to include MCHS social and academic history as well. In August of this year, the Golden "M" and MCHS Historical Preservation Project was born.

Since that time, we have collected over four hundred "lost" objects associated with MCHS history. Among them are rare copies of the 1932 and 1942 Bitter Root yearbooks, the Konah and other related memorabilia. We have located handwritten ledgers containing the original minutes of the Pep Club and senior class meetings from the early 1940s to the 1950s; a pull-over letterman's sweater belonging to Roy Anderson, teammate of MCHS football great, "Wild Bill" Kelly, class of 1923; and the first issue of the Konah dated December 18, 1913. Its original editor, Clarence K. Streit, became a New York Times foreign correspondent. He entered his report on the League of Nations into the Congressional Record and was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

We located more missing trophies in October, including an early silver scholarship cup, the largest in the collection, and a handsome silver music trophy presented by the Baldwin Piano Company in 1928. So that former MCHS students can understand the full scope of this project, we have enclosed a chronological history of Missoula County High School's early years developed from months of archival research.

Among our goals is to establish a library of yearbooks, school newspapers, oral history transcripts, photographs, and other resources that former MCHS students and the general public can access for the first time.

On September 12, the first annual MCHS exhibit opened in the main foyer of the Historical Museum where it will remain through the first of the year. The diversity and number of
memorabilia donations received since the initial opening will guarantee an even broader representation of MCHS academic, social, and athletic history in future exhibits.

Monetary contributions are desperately needed to fund the additional costs of completing the expanded project. Without financial support, the Golden "M" and MCHS Preservation project will be terminated as of January 1st. Once this project is concluded, it will be self-supporting, but an additional $5000 is required to accession, research, organize and preserve the hundreds of additional objects that former MCHS students have so generously donated. Completion of this project will ensure that future generations will appreciate the role that MCHS played in the history of the Missoula community.

Your contribution will help preserve this history. Please fill out the attached (purple) form and enclose it in the self-addressed envelope with your tax-deductible donation.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Sandra Fisher
MCHS Project Coordinator
Historical Museum at Fort Missoula

The Golden "M" Trophy Committee:
Roy Malcolm
George Caras
Albert "Babe" Bellusci
Don Gray
Jack Jourdonnais

SF/enc
Cover Letter, Phase II

March 11, 1998

Dear former student of Missoula County H.S.,

In 1995, The Golden "M" Club (MCHS alumni lettermen) unearthed a cache of athletic and academic trophies in the basement of Sentinel High School dating back to 1904. In an effort to "rescue" these old and dusty trophies, the Golden "M" Club provided a $3600 grant to the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula to catalog, restore, and preserve them.

While attempting to identify the trophies, we discovered that when the county high school system was abandoned in 1965, no individual or agency had taken responsibility for preserving school records, the Bitter Root yearbooks, the Konah and other related memorabilia. Evidence of Missoula County High School's contribution to the community was rapidly slipping away. The Golden "M" Trophy Committee and the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula made a commitment to expand the trophy project to include MCHS social and academic history as well. In August of last year, the Golden "M" and MCHS Historical Preservation Project was born.

Since that time, we have collected over four hundred "lost" objects associated with MCHS history. Among them are rare copies of the 1932 and 1942 Bitter Root yearbooks thought to be unpublished because of the 1931 fire and WWII. We have located handwritten ledgers containing the original minutes of the Pep Club and senior class meetings from the early 1940s and 1950s; a pull-over letterman's sweater belonging to Roy Anderson, teammate of MCHS football great, "Wild Bill" Kelly, class of 1923; and the first issue of the Konah dated December 18, 1913. Its original editor, Clarence K. Streit, became a New York Times foreign correspondent. He entered his report on the League of Nations into the Congressional Record and was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

We located more missing trophies in October. Included in this new find is an early silver scholarship cup (the largest in the collection) and a handsome silver music trophy presented by the Baldwin Piano Company in 1928. So that former MCHS students can understand the full scope of this project, we have enclosed a chronological history of Missoula County High School's early years developed from months of archival research. Currently we are establishing a library of yearbooks, school newspapers, oral history transcripts, photographs, and other resources that former MCHS students and the general public will be able to access for the first time. Last September the first annual MCHS exhibit opened in the main foyer of the Historical Museum where it will remain until the end of March. A new MCHS exhibit will go up in August to coincide with the 1998 class reunions. The diversity and number of memorabilia items received over the last few months will guarantee an even broader representation of MCHS academic, social, and athletic history in this and in future exhibits.

Monetary contributions however, are desperately needed to fund the additional costs of completing the expanded project. Although the collection will be self-supporting once in place, additional financial assistance is required to accession, research, organize and preserve the hundreds of additional objects that former MCHS students have so generously donated. Completion of this project will ensure that future generations will appreciate the remarkable role that MCHS played in the history of the Missoula community.
Please help to preserve this history by filling out the attached (purple) form and enclosing it in the self-addressed envelope with your tax-deductible donation.

Thank you for supporting the Golden "M" and Missoula County High School Preservation Project.

Sincerely,

Sandra Fisher  
MCHS Project Coordinator  
Historical Museum at Fort Missoula

The Golden "M" Trophy Committee:  
Roy Malcolm  
George Caras  
Albert "Babe" Bellusci  
Don Gray  
Jack Jourdannais

NOTE: In November we contacted the classes of 1937, 1942, 1943, 1946, and 1947. If you (or your spouse) were represented by any of these graduating classes or are presently a member of the Golden "M" Club, you may have already received this announcement. If so, we apologize and ask that you disregard this letter or pass it onto another former MCHS student whom you believe may not have been included on his or her class list.

SF/enc
Cover Letter, Phase III

July 29, 1998

Dear former student of Missoula County H.S.,

In 1995 the Golden "M" Club (MCHS alumni lettermen) unearthed a cache of athletic and academic trophies in the basement of Sentinel High School dating back to 1904. In an effort to "rescue" these old and dusty trophies, the Golden "M" Club provided a $3600 grant to the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula to catalog, restore, and preserve them.

While attempting to identify the trophies, we discovered that when the county high school system was abandoned in 1965, no individual or agency had taken responsibility for preserving school records, the Bitter Root yearbooks, the Konah and other related memorabilia. Evidence of Missoula County High School's contribution to the community was rapidly slipping away. The Golden "M" Trophy Committee and the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula made a commitment to expand the trophy project to include MCHS social and academic history as well. In August of 1977, the Golden "M" and MCHS Historical Preservation Project was born.

Since that time, we have collected over four hundred "lost" objects associated with MCHS history. Among them are rare copies of the 1932 and 1942 Bitter Root yearbooks thought to be unpublished because of the 1931 fire and WWII. We have located handwritten ledgers containing the original minutes of the Pep Club and senior class meetings from the early 1940s and 1950s; a pull-over lettermen's sweater belonging to Roy Anderson, teammate of MCHS football great, "Wild Bill" Kelly, class of 1923; and the first issue of the Konah dated December 18, 1913. Its original editor, Clarence K. Streit, became a New York Times foreign correspondent. He entered his report on the League of Nations into the Congressional Record and was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

We located more missing trophies last October. Included in this new find is an early silver scholarship cup (the largest in the collection) and a handsome silver music trophy presented by the Baldwin Piano Company in 1928. So that former MCHS students can understand the full scope of this project, we have enclosed a chronological history of Missoula County High School's early years developed from months of archival research. Currently we are establishing a library of yearbooks, school newspapers, oral history transcripts, photographs, and other resources that former MCHS students and the general public will be able to access for the first time.

The second annual MCHS exhibit is opening this month in the main foyer of the Historical Museum to coincide with the 1998 class reunions. The diversity and number of memorabilia items received over the past year will help to assure representation of MCHS academic, social, and athletic history in this and in future exhibits.

Monetary contributions however, are desperately needed to fund the additional costs of completing the expanded project. Although the collection will be self-supporting once in place, additional financial assistance is required to accession, research, organize and preserve the hundreds of additional objects that former MCHS students have so generously donated. The vast amount of information compiled during the course of this project will be represented in a book to be written over the next few months. An announcement will be mailed to former students at the time of publication. Completion of this project will ensure that future generations will appreciate the remarkable role that MCHS played in the history of the Missoula community.
Please help to preserve this history by filling out the attached (purple) form and enclosing it in the self-addressed envelope with your tax-deductible donation.

Thank you for supporting the Golden "M" and Missoula County High School Preservation Project.

Sincerely,

Sandra Fisher
MCHS Project Coordinator
Historical Museum at Fort Missoula

The Golden "M" Trophy Committee:
  Roy Malcolm
  George Caras
  Albert "Babe" Bellusci
  Don Gray
  Jack Jourdonnais

NOTE: In November we contacted the classes of 1937, 1942, 1943, 1946, and 1947; and in March, the classes of 1939, 1940, 1941, 1944, 1945, and 1948. If you (or your spouse) were represented by any of these graduating classes or are presently a member of the Golden "M" Club, you may have already received this announcement. If so, we apologize and ask that you disregard this letter or pass it onto another former MCHS student whom you believe may not have been included on his or her class list.

SF/enc
Cover Letter, Phase IV

June 28, 1999

Dear former student of Missoula County H.S.,

In 1995 the Golden "M" Club (MCHS alumni lettermen) unearthed a cache of athletic and academic trophies in the basement of Sentinel High School, the earliest dating back to 1904. In an effort to "rescue" these old and dusty trophies, the Golden "M" Club provided a $3600 grant to the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula to catalog, restore, and preserve them.

While attempting to identify the trophies, we discovered that when the county high school system was abandoned in 1965, no individual or agency had taken responsibility for preserving school records, the Bitter Root yearbooks, the Konah and other related memorabilia. Evidence of Missoula County High School's contribution to the community was rapidly slipping away. The Golden "M" Trophy Committee and the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula made a commitment to expand the trophy project to include MCHS social and academic history as well. In August of 1977, the Golden "M" and MCHS Historical Preservation Project was born.

Since that time, we have collected over six hundred "lost" objects associated with MCHS history. Among them are rare copies of the 1932 and 1942 Bitter Root yearbooks thought to be unpublished because of the 1931 fire and WWII. We have located handwritten ledgers containing the original minutes of the Pep Club and senior class meetings from the early 1940s and 1950s; a pull-over letterman's sweater belonging to Roy Anderson, teammate of MCHS football great, "Wild Bill" Kelly, class of 1923; and the first issue of the Konah dated December 18, 1913. Its original editor, Clarence K. Streit, became a New York Times foreign correspondent. He entered his report on the League of Nations into the Congressional Record and was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

So that former MCHS students can understand the full scope of this project, we have enclosed a chronological history of Missoula County High School's early years developed from months of archival research. Currently we are establishing a library of yearbooks, school newspapers, oral history transcripts, photographs, and other resources that former MCHS students and the general public will be able to access for the first time.

The third annual MCHS exhibit will open next month in the main foyer of the Historical Museum to coincide with the 1999 class reunions. The diversity and number of memorabilia items received over the past two years will help to assure representation of MCHS academic, social, and athletic history in this and in future exhibits.

Monetary contributions however, are desperately needed to fund the additional costs of completing the expanded project. Although the collection will be self-supporting once in place, additional financial assistance is required to accession, research, organize and preserve the hundreds of additional objects that former MCHS students have so generously donated. The vast amount of information compiled during the course of this project will be represented in a book to

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be written over the next few months. It will be a history of MCHS and the many generations of students who passed through its doors. It will be told from their point of view and will include tales of adventures, pranks, struggles, and tenacity that spanned decades of changing times. An announcement will be mailed to former students at the time of publication. Completion of this project will ensure that future generations will appreciate the remarkable role that MCHS played in the history of the Missoula community.

Please help to preserve this history by filling out the attached (purple) form and enclosing it in the self-addressed envelope with your tax-deductible donation.

Thank you for supporting the Golden "M" and Missoula County High School Preservation Project.

Sincerely,

Sandra Fisher  
MCHS Project Coordinator  
Historical Museum at Fort Missoula

The Golden "M" Trophy Committee:  
Roy Malcolm  
George Caras  
Albert "Babe" Bellusci  
Don Gray  
Jack Jourdonnais

NOTE: Previously we contacted the classes of 1937 through 1959. If you (or your spouse) were represented by any of these graduating classes or are presently a member of the Golden "M" Club, you may have already received this announcement. If so, we apologize and ask that you disregard this letter or pass it onto another former MCHS student whom you believe may not have been included on his or her class list.
Donation Option Form
(Phases I, II, III, IV;
2" x 8" strip, printed on purple paper and attached to bottom of letter, page 2)

Name_______________________________ I attended MCHS from_______ to________
(Please include maiden name if applicable.)
Enclosed is my donation for:
$25.00 [] $50.00 [] $100.00 [] $500.00 [] Other__________

Please make check payable to: The Golden "M"/MCHS Project.
Thank you for helping to preserve the history of Missoula County High School.
MCHS Historical Time Line
(Phases I, II, III, and IV; double-sided, printed on gold paper)

MISSOULA COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL
A CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY

1883-84 In a mixed grade-level environment, high school subjects such as physics, algebra, and political geography were offered to upper-class Missoula students for the first time.

1885-86 The first official Missoula High School graduation exercises were held.

1890-91 High School enrollment set a new record with 15 students in 3 grades.

1903-04 The State University at Missoula hosted Montana's first interscholastic track meet. With nineteen schools participating, Missoula took 1st place. The traditional colors long associated with Missoula County High School had already been established by this time, as reporters referred to the victorious team as the "purple and the gold." There were however, no regulation uniforms; one athlete was reported to have competed in his long flannel underwear.

A new and larger elementary/high school building was constructed. Still in existence, the structure, now known as the Old Roosevelt School, currently houses the District One Administrative Offices.

1904-05 For the first time, Missoula City High School offered a fully accredited four year curriculum; enrollment had increased to 140 students.

The first Bitter Root was published. Beginning as a literary magazine, the publication eventually evolved into the high school yearbook.

Under the direction of Coach Louis H. Battersby, Missoula City High School won its first interscholastic football game.

1905-06 High School enrollment reached 227 students.

The School Board formally separated Missoula High School from the city school system; at 2:00 P.M. on Tuesday, April 24, 1906, Missoula County High School (MCHS) was born.

1907-08 MCHS won the Fifth Interscholastic Track Meet with 50½ points, the largest total ever amassed in the five year history of the event. By this time, regulation uniforms had been established; Missoula athletes were attired in white sweaters monogrammed with the letters "M H S."
The MCHS orchestra was organized.

On November 16, 1908, the first separate high school structure was completed. Located on Higgins Avenue, the building stood until 1931, when it was destroyed by fire.

1908-09 The first class graduated from the Higgins Avenue building; sixteen girls and three boys participated in the commencement exercises.

1909-10 The Student Association and the Boy's Senate were founded.

1910-11 MCHS won the relay race in the 8th Annual Interscholastic Track Meet.

The first basketball team was organized; because the school had no gymnasium, games were played on an outdoor court or in the University gym when available.

The 1910-1911 school year saw both the birth and death of MCHS's first newspaper, *The Megaphone*.

On February 28, 1911, Jeanette Rankin addressed the Girl's English Club on the subject of women's suffrage.

1911-12 Gilbert A. Ketcham began a 33 year career as Principal of MCHS.

The debate team won first place in the state interscholastic meet. Participants were Lulu Wright, Clarence Streit, and Percy Stone.

1912-13 The first issue of the Konah (the school newspaper) was published on December 18, 1913, with Clarence K. Streit as its managing editor.

John McGough was hired as MCHS athletic coach. He is credited for helping to transform the old Hollenbeck garage into a make-shift gymnasium equipped with hardwood floors, showers, lockers, and a basketball court.

After defeating Butte for the first time, the Missoula football team earned a spot in the state playoff game; they were beaten by Gallatin 26-14.

The Girl's Glee Club was established.

1913-14 The Girl's Club was organized.

1914-15 Enrollment reached 387 students, a 50% increase over the fall of 1913; 43 graduated on May 12, 1915.

The MCHS football team established a high school record on October 17, 1914, when they defeated the College of Montana 115-0.
MCHS won the 12th Annual Interscholastic Track Meet with 50 points. The trophies were presented by Governor Steward at University Hall.

With financial help from the Konah, the School purchased its first Victrola machine for $200.00.

1915-16 Missoula won its second consecutive interscholastic track meet with 40 points. The meet was one of the largest in the country with over three hundred contestants participating.

1917-18 Many sports activities, along with the publication of the *Bitter Root* were suspended due to shortages of materials and student involvement in activities related to the war effort.

1918-19 An outbreak of Spanish Influenza caused Missoula schools to close from October 1918 to January 1919; most school activities were canceled through March. Students, Maynard Stitch and Lawrence Nelson, as well as Latin teacher Mary Burke died as a result of the epidemic.

1919-20 The "M" Club was born. Founding officers were Malcolm Boucher, president; Norman Maclean, vice president; Joe Conroy, Secretary; and Roy Miller, sergeant-at-arms.

Missoula won the Western Montana Football Championship by default when Butte left the field in mid-game with the score 13-3, Missoula.

The first girl's basketball team was organized.

The National Honor Society was established.

The Dramatic Club was founded.

1920-21 Enrollment reached 800.

1921-22 "Connie" Orr, a 1914 graduate of MCHS was hired as athletic coach.

The football team won the state championship with Ted Illman, William "Wild Bill" Kelly, and Tor Seadin named to the all-state team.

After a thirteen-year wait, MCHS finally got its new gymnasium. For the first time in history, the Mining District Basketball Tournament was held in Missoula. The purple and gold team took the series, defeating Dillon 23 - 15. The team later won the state championship and was invited to the National Tournament in Chicago where it lost to Rockford Illinois, 46-19.

1922-23 Missoula's track team won the Mining District Meet, held in Deer Lodge.
The Missoula High School band was organized.

1924-25

Guy T. Stegner became MCHS's new athletic coach.

The Pep and the Stock Judging Clubs were founded.

1925-26

Missoula took first place at the 23rd Annual Interscholastic Track Meet with a total of 36 points.

The School Board purchased two lots from the Missoula Land Company for the construction of a new athletic field. The future field would be bounded by Maurice, Hastings, Woodworth, and Arthur streets. Early predictions for its completion date were optimistic...perhaps in time for spring track practice. In reality, the field was formally dedicated in the fall of 1934.

1926-27

Enrollment reached 907 students with thirty-five teachers on staff.

Both the Girls Glee Club and the School orchestra took first place at the interscholastic music meet.

The "M" Club held its first annual reunion banquet.

Missoula won the Western Montana Interscholastic Football Contest and took second in the state championship.

The Missoula basketball team won the district championship, but was "robbed" of the chance to play in the state tournament when Delmar "Tad" Meeker, team forward, contacted scarlet fever. The entire Missoula team was quarantined and sent home.

The National Athletic Association restricted dribbling in basketball to one bounce (the "walk" rule). Coach Guy Stegner contended that the new rule would "ruin basketball."

1927-28

Enrollment increased to 934.

Students dedicated the 1928 Bitter Root to Colonel Charles Lindbergh.

The Konah took first place at the Interscholastic Editorial Contest.

The debate team won the district championship.

The Spanish, French, and Latin Clubs were founded.

1928-29

The Konah won the Mary Hetherington Cup for the best paper editorial column; the 1928 Bitter Root won the Fredell Cup for the best yearbook.

MCHS took first place in the state music meet with 88 points.
On October 19, 1926, Jeanette Rankin spoke before an assembly on anti-war treaties.

The Art Club was founded.

1929-30

Enrollment reached 1,063; eight new teachers were hired.

Missoula captured the 27th Interscholastic Track Meet with 32½ points; Walter "Boney" Custer set a new pole vault record of 12'10".

The Torch Honor Society and the Girl's Athletic Association were founded.

1930-31

Fall semester opened with 1,105 students enrolled.

The football team won the Western District Championship; quarterback Rudy Sayler and end, Arthur Jacobson were named to the all-state team.

The debate team won the district championship.

MCHS was ranked as one of the one thousand best high schools in the United States.

1931-32

Early in the morning on September 14, 1931, Missoula County High School was destroyed by fire; thus began a year of separation as students attended classes at various Missoula locations. Clean-up started immediately; reconstruction began the following February.

In spite of "hard times," the MCHS track team won the 29th Interscholastic Meet with 36 points.

Guy Stegner ended his eight-year coaching career; Sam Kain took over as athletic director. (Mr. Stegner continued teaching at MCHS and was re-hired as head track coach in the fall of 1936. He remained in that position until his retirement in 1951.)

Famed MCHS football player, William Carl "Wild Bill" Kelly (class of '23), died in New York City on November 14, 1931, of acute indigestion.

Clarence K. Streit, New York Times foreign correspondent and first editor of the Konah (1913) entered his report on the League of Nations into the Congressional Record.

Epilogue:

The rebuilding of Missoula County High School was completed in September of 1932; a record 1,278 students were enrolled.

In 1957, overcrowding precipitated the building of a new "south plant" on South Avenue. Still united as MCHS students, classes were divided.
between the two locations.

The history and traditions of Missoula County High School ended in 1965, when the county school system was abandoned. The "Higgins Plant" was renamed Hellgate High School; students commissioned the Knight as its new symbol. The "South Plant" became Sentinel High School which adopted the MCHS Spartan name, as well as the Bitter Root (the yearbook), and the Konah (the school newspaper).

NOTE: The research involved in compiling this summary was made possible by contributions to the Golden "M" and MCHS Preservation Project.
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