

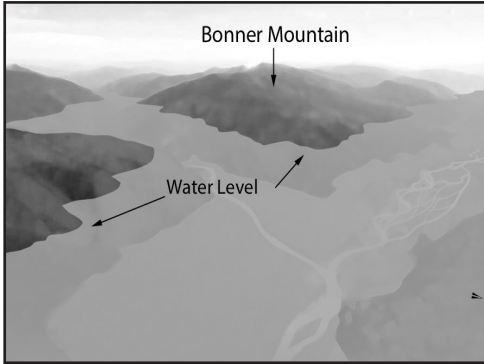
BONNER Walking Tour

Prepared for Bonner School by the Bonner Milltown History Center and Museum
May, 2020

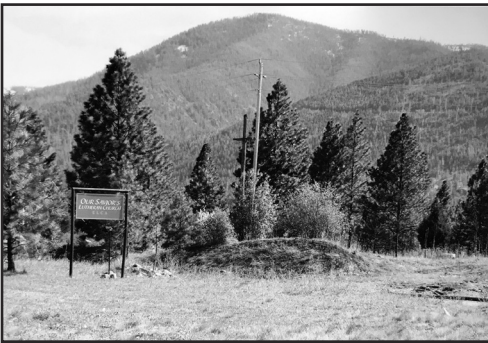


Begin this self-guided history tour on the corner of Hwy 200 and Hwy 210

Hi, Bonner Lumberjacks! Let's go on a Bonner time travel walk.



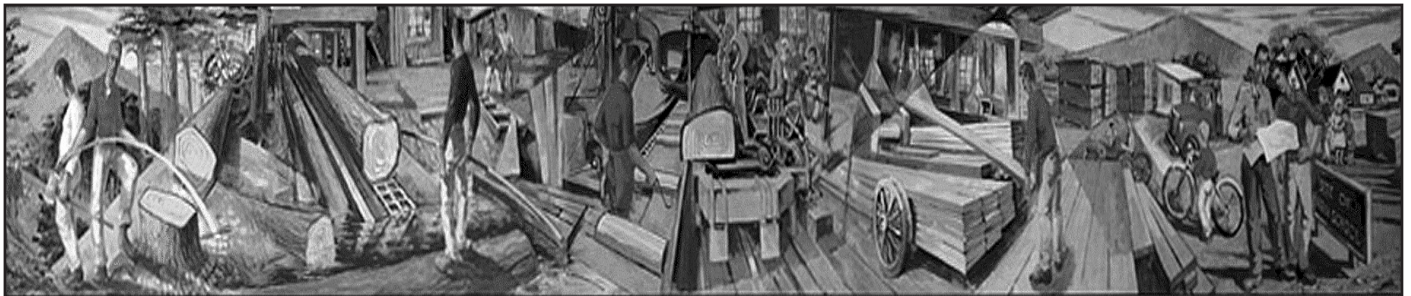
Before we start, let's take a minute and look around. How long can you hold your breath? A long time ago (10,000 years) we would be standing on the bottom of Glacial Lake Missoula. It was 1,000 feet deep! How deep is that? The tops of Bonner and Woody mountains were islands.



Did you know that our valley has a mountain that is a weather forecaster? Turn and look across the Clark Fork Valley. Crystal Peak had to be free of snow before Bonner girls in the 1940s were allowed to stop wearing the long, brown thick stockings that kept their legs warm under their skirts on their walk to school in winter. And gardeners waited for the snow to disappear from Crystal Peak to plant their gardens or a late freeze might kill all of their plants. What is Crystal Peak telling you today? Is it time to plant your garden?



Now, let's get started on our tour! Do you recognize this picture? It's hanging in the school library. Walter Hook graduated from Bonner School. Later when he was a famous artist, he painted this mural showing how the timber industry is a part of Bonner School from the trees being cut in the forest, to boards being made at the mill, to the building of the school.



Look at the picture. Can you tell what the steps are for making boards? What building will be built from the plans men are discussing in the right hand section of the mural?

Activity: What is a mural? Can you draw a mural of things you do in a day?

1. MILL

Across the street is the Bonner Mill.

FACT: In the spring of 1886, 20 million board feet of logs were floated down the Blackfoot River and the mill started sawing them in June. That would build five big houses for every student, teacher, and staff member at Bonner School!

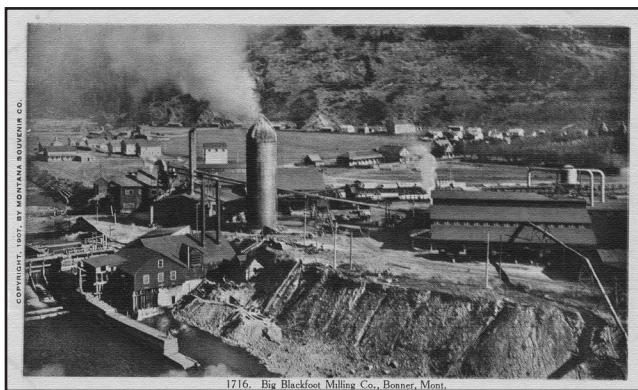
The mill made much more than boards for houses. Over the years it made railroad ties, timbers to support the underground mining tunnels in Butte, picket fences, wooden boxes for shipping fruit and vegetables, complete house kits, laminated beams like the beams in our school gym, and plywood.

Question: How old is Bonner?

Question: Why is this such a great location for a lumber mill? (Hint-two reasons are given in the FACT.)

Question: If Andrew Hammond was an original mill owner and his brother Henry Hammond was the mill manager, why isn't our town named Hammond? **Answer:** Andrew Hammond admired his mentor E.L. Bonner so much that he copied E.L.'s way of writing his name and became known as A.B. Hammond; he named his company town Bonner; and he even trimmed his hair and beard in the same style as E.L. Bonner!

The Bonner Mill had many names and many owners over the years and was the longest running lumber mill in the west. It lasted until 2008 when the mill closed and the equipment was sold. The mill didn't go away but it changed from one lumber business to many businesses making everything from moldings for houses to fancy metal work to pedicabs and custom cycles to aluminum trailers to beer!



Big Blackfoot Milling Company, 1907



L-R: Bonner School (background), St. Ann Catholic Church, Our Savior's Lutheran Church. 1930s

BRIEF TIMELINE OF MILL HISTORY

- 1886** – Spring: First log drive down the Blackfoot, nearly 20 million board feet of logs.
 June 6: First log sawed at Bonner (Hammond) mill.
 Early July: Mill completed.
- 1898** – Anaconda Copper Mining Company buys Bonner mill for \$1.5 million.
- 1911** – Railroad logging begins, replacing most log drives.
- 1972** – June 26: Announcement that U.S. Plywood-Champion Papers Inc. had acquired most assets of Anaconda Forest Products for \$117 million in cash.
 Oct. 2: U.S. Plywood, now known as Champion International, starts sawmill operation with some 400 employees; 1,047 worked at mill in 1976.
- 1993-2008** Stimson Lumber Company owns and operates the mill.
- 2008** – Stimson closes mill and auctions off equipment.
- 2011** – December. Bonner Property Development LLC owned by Steve Nelson and Mike Boehme purchases the mill site. The mill is subdivided into industrial condominiums.

2. CHURCHES

The two churches that we are standing by have been here for almost as long as Bonner itself. The mill owners wanted to attract good, hardworking laborers and building a town with a school and churches would bring family men who would likely stay and make the mill a profitable place. The Company provided land for the churches to help them get established.

The denominations of the churches give a hint to the nationalities of the workers who came here. **St. Ann Catholic Church** is the older, built in 1905, nineteen years after the mill was established. Many workers attracted to Bonner were of French descent and came from the woods in eastern Canada and Maine. French-Canadians founded Frenchtown, 25 miles to the west, and were predominantly Catholics. For years Father Lionel LeGris from Frenchtown would drive to Bonner in his car described as “looking like a regular buggy, one with a motor on it with chains, with a rope.” French was spoken during the service and the Mass was done in Latin.

The first Catholic church was designed by noted Missoula architect A.J. Gibson and built on land donated by the Anaconda Copper Mining Company Lumber Department in 1905. In 1939 it was replaced by a bigger, better church alongside. *A section of the original sanctuary was given to Bonner School in the 1970s for use as a storage shed and it still stands on school property beside the church.* In 1985 a fire severely damaged the church and for 21 months the Lutheran Church next door opened its doors to welcome the parish so it could continue Catholic mass until the new church, the one we see now, was completed.

French-Canadian names: *(look closely-can you find your last name, the name of a Bonner classmate, or an area street name?)* Albert, Babin, Beaulieu, Bellefleur, Blanchard, Boileau, Bouchard, Boucher, Burgoyne, Cadieux, Castonguay, Charbonneau, Chartier, Chaussee, Clevette, Cormier, Cyr, Daigle, Deschamps, Douchette, Dubois, Dufresne, Fontaine, Foucher, Gaudin, Gauthier, Gendrow, Gervais, Giroux, Goodbout, Hamel, Hebert, Jalbert, Jette, Labbe, LaBelle, LaCasse, LaFond, LaForge, Lagus, Lalime, Langlois, LaTrielle, Lavoie, Lebeau, Martin, Michaud, Michelle, Moreau, Ouilette, Parent, Pelletier, Poitras, Prefontaine, Racine, St. Marie, Soucie, Therriault, Thibodeau, Violette.

St. Ann’s neighbor, **Our Savior’s Lutheran Church**, served the many Scandinavian workers drawn to work in the woods and the Bonner mill. The congregation met in homes until a church was built on land donated by the Anaconda Copper Mining Company Lumber Department in 1910. In August of 1932 a fire destroyed the church building although members and friends were able to save the furniture. It was the days of the Depression, but the congregation voted to rebuild and held the first services in the new church that December. All the services were in Norwegian until 1935.

A new church was built in 1966 and the old building was moved to Clinton where it serves as the community clubhouse.

Norwegian names: *(look closely-can you find your last name, the name of a Bonner classmate, or an area street name?)* Abrahamson, Anderson, Aspense, Brotholm, Haye, Iverson, Larson, Lien, Nelson, Nikalayson, Olson, Peterson, Strand, Sund, Sylten, Twedt



Next, make your way to the entrance to Bonner School’s playground.



Look across the valley to the Blackfoot River bluff. Did you know that there was a super highway across the river running up the Blackfoot? Thousands of Native Americans for hundreds of years followed a trail to the eastern side of the mountains where they would hunt buffalo. The Nez Perce people named it and the river it followed “Cokahlarishkit” which means the Road to the Buffalo. Salish people also used the trail that followed the river and their name for the river was “In-ah-e-itiz-chistum,” (Bull Trout River). The trail was used by Salish, Pend d’Oreille, Nez Perce and others. White explorers used the super highway also.

On July 4, 1806, Meriwether Lewis followed the trail through Bonner on his return trip of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.



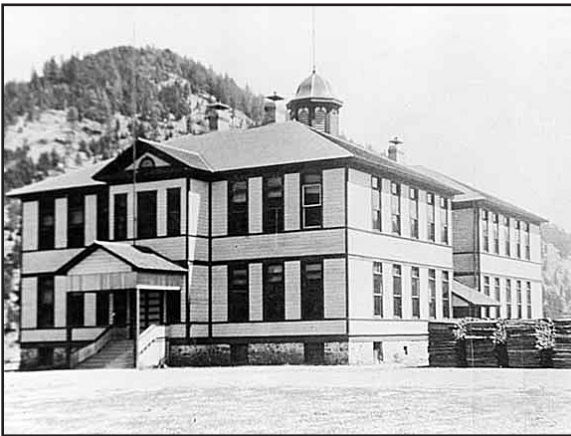
School children participate in a tree planting ceremony to celebrate the opening of the new Bonner School. 1907-1908

From the sidewalk skip straight back toward to the X on the playground. Don't forget to notice the shed that was part of the first A.J. Gibson-designed Catholic Church!

You are standing at the stairway entrance to Bonner's second schoolhouse! Second? Where's the first? Well, we'll have to walk to the end of Bonner to visit that spot. This was the brand new school built in 1907. The first school was built in 1889 just three years after the mill itself was built!

Why was a new school needed after just 18 years? Bonner and the surrounding neighborhoods were growing! The first school was way at the end of Bonner and in those days, kids walked to school. If there was a bad storm, the Anaconda Company would lend a horse and wagon to give them a ride. So it was decided that a more centrally located school would be better and in 1907 the community (men voters only) voted to buy land and build a new 4-room school building. Within four

years, enrollment had grown and another four rooms were added. And that's where we're standing today!



The school was heated by burning "slab wood" donated by the mill. When a log first goes through the saw, it is round. The log is sawed into a square shaped "cant" and the edge pieces, called "slabs" were cut into four foot pieces and used for firewood by families and the school.

Do you see the slab wood piled alongside the school in the picture? For many years, Mr. Teague, the school custodian, would feed the furnaces day and night during the winter so the school would be warm for the students. The furnaces were in the basement and there were vents in the floor of both stories of the school so that the warm air could rise and heat the rooms.

The school was heated by burning slab wood from the mill in big furnaces in the basement. Mr. Akin was the Principal and his daughter was a student at Bonner School. She remembers the big piles of slabwood. "My father forbade anyone to climb between the piles but, needless to say, we all took a turn at seeing if we could make it through without tearing our clothes or getting stuck."

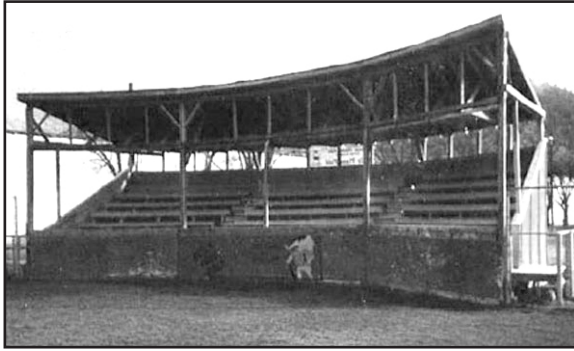
Willie Bateman also remembers the fun of playing around the slab wood piles dumped on the back of the schoolyard for the families to pick up and use for heating their homes. One day when he was in the fourth grade, he found a strange looking rock on the ground. When he took it to his teacher, Miss Splann, she told him it was an Indian hammer, probably lost when the Native Americans camped in the area. That awakened Willie's lifelong interest in studying Native American history.



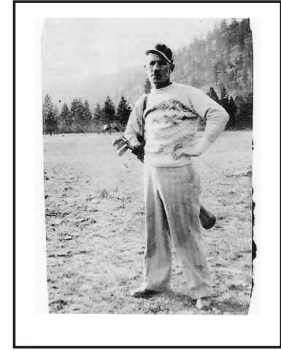
Go back to the sidewalk and continue heading east towards Kelly Pine baseball field.

4. BASEBALL

Baseball has been Bonner's favorite sport for almost as long as Bonner existed. One of the earliest references to the sport in Bonner is from a news clipping in 1904 that told of a visit to Bonner by a Fort Missoula team that drew 250 spectators. The Fort team won 14-17. By 1913 Bonner was playing in the Bitterroot League. One team, the Lumberjacks, was sponsored by the company because there were so many millworkers who were good and wanted to play. A second team, the Highlanders, was sponsored by the Missoula Brewing Company, maker of Highlander Beer.



Left: The original grandstand built in 1937 to honor the memory of baseball player and mill worker Kelly Pine.



Right: Kelly Pine

This is Kelly Pine Field. Do you know how it got its name? Not the big pine trees lining the outfield. It's named for a really good ballplayer, Kelly Pine, who also worked at the mill. Kelly was a pitcher and a star even though he had only one full arm. He would hold his glove under his arm, pitch the ball, and quickly put the glove on his pitching hand to become a fielder! Kelly died in a car accident in 1935 and the community honored him by building the first grandstand and naming the field after him in 1937. The mill provided all the lumber and the townspeople did the construction! After 70 years the old grandstand was showing its age and this grandstand was built in 2007.

Question: Do you play baseball or softball or do you know someone who does? Do you have a favorite sport?



Now walk on the sidewalk along Highway 200, enjoying the tree-lined street and imagine what it looked like 100 years ago in this same spot. What might have looked different and what might have looked the same?

5. HOUSES



In 1886 Bonner looked much different than it does today!

In the same year the mill was built (1886) the first eight houses were built in Bonner. More houses were built in the 1920s. The houses were rented to men who had important jobs at the mill so that they were always nearby in case they were needed at work. The houses were built following the Bungalow/Craftsman style. Can you see things about the houses that are the same? (porches, bay windows) How are some different? (size) The houses are different colors now, but when the mill was in business, they were white with green trim.

Kids in Bonner walked to school and everyone – dads and kids – came home for lunch. Life was regulated by the mill whistle – it blew when it was time to go to work, time for lunch, time for the shift to be over.

When not in school, kids did their homework and chores and then were free to play outside until suppertime and then until dark. What chores did they have? (filling the woodbox, washing and drying the

dishes) What did they play? (making forts on the mountain, swimming in the summer, ice skating in the winter, Ante over – throwing a ball over the house to kids on the other side, two a cat – a baseball game like work up, and playing with dolls, riding bikes or flying kites, pick up baseball or football games)

Married men in Bonner were employed by the mill and their status in the work place was often reflected in the houses they lived in. Among the other homes in Bonner, company rental documents reveal families shifted from one home to another over time, indicating some houses were regarded as better than others and employees with seniority were the ones who

gained access to them. These men often filled many roles in the community, as school trustees, postmasters, mill security, firefighters, and members of various organizations.

Women in Bonner were either married or the daughters of mill workers. One exception was Mrs. Lena Fleming, who was the Postmistress at Bonner for more than 30 years. There were no women employed at the mill until the 1960s. Even so, the women of Bonner were essential to its social history. They were instrumental in the day-to-day elements of life that helped keep the town functional.



Stop for a moment and look at the empty “park” across the highway from the houses.

6. The Hotel Margaret and Engine #7



That park-like lot across the street was once the setting for the grand Hotel Margaret. When it was built in 1892 a trip to Missoula was made by horse and buggy and took a long time. So, important visitors to the mill needed a place to stay and because they were important, that place needed to be fancy. There was a stable for the horses where the baseball field is today. Later, when it was easier to travel from place to place by car, the hotel was home to some of the important mill workers.

Many community events were held at the hotel. Bonner resident Genevieve McClellan recalled that on Sundays, dinner was served and often some of the men from the lumber camp at Potomac attended.

Kids loved to go into the hotel and play tag until they were chased out by the manager. The last managers, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Kosch, were wonderful cooks. Glenn “Hooligan” Smith recalls knocking on the door in hopes of getting a cookie. Mr. Kosch was always willing to give cookies to kids coming to the door, but if Mrs. Kosch answered, there were no cookies given out.

The hotel also had a wonderful invention – a telephone. You could pick up the receiver, spin the crank, and a lady would talk to you, asking “Number, please.” Since the kids weren’t really calling anyone, they would just ask her what time it was!

For a while the community library also was housed in the hotel, and after checking out books, patrons could sit in the handsome lobby and read. The Margaret was an elaborate Victorian structure, with much hand-carved detail. In 1957, the building was no longer needed by the Company and was torn down, much to the regret of the community.

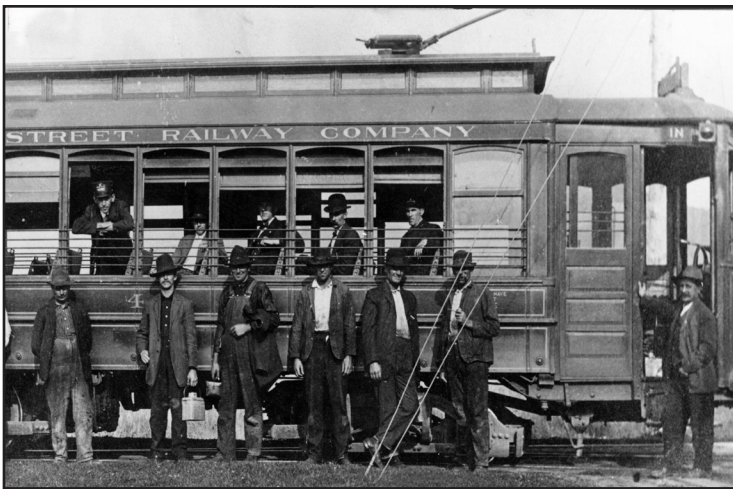
Later, Bonner's most famous engine, #7 was on display in the park for many years. #7 was a powerful engine called a Willamette shay type engine that pulled large loads of logs from the Blackfoot Valley logging operations to the mill. It was also a movie star, featured in the movie *Timberjack* that was partly filmed right here in Bonner in 1954. Now you can see #7 at The Historic Museum at Fort Missoula where it is getting a complete makeover to make it run again!

Take a trip to The Historical Museum at Fort Missoula to see Engine #7!



Continue to the Post Office/Bonner Milltown History Center and Museum building

7. Transportation and History



Workers arriving on the streetcar.



The streetcar turns around the Roundhouse.

Before cars, people traveled by horse-drawn wagons, buggies, or stagecoaches. The horses were stabled at the Bonner House, a stage depot near where the baseball field is today. Even when cars were invented, most people didn't have one and didn't leave Bonner very often.

Then, in 1910 came a wonderful service – the electric streetcar. The coming of the street car system that ran from Missoula to Bonner replaced the stagecoach route. The stage depot was replaced by the Round House located in the middle of Bonner where we are standing right now.

This was where the street car route ended with tracks circling the Round House to turn the car around for its return trip to Missoula. It ran hourly from 6 in the morning to midnight, greatly increasing Bonner's access to Missoula. Residents could visit Missoula for school or shopping or a movie and still make it home by midnight.

The street car stopped running in 1932 and the Round House was torn down between 1942 and 1945. It was replaced with the current structure that houses the Bonner Post Office and the Bonner Milltown History Center and Museum. After many years without public transportation, in October 1978, Mountain Line Bus in Missoula added service to Bonner.

The Roundhouse was a popular building. There was a barbershop, a candy shop, a beer parlor, and an apartment located in it. Later, when this building was built, part of it housed a café. Glenn "Hooligan" Smith remembers being a regular customer. After earning a nickel for filling a woodbox for a local family, he'd hurry to the café to get a double decker orange sherbet ice cream cone!

The sidewalks of Bonner are cement today and perfect for skateboarding. Bonner kids in those days attached roller skates to their shoes and skated on wooden sidewalks made by planks laid crossways. It was a bumpy ride, but the biggest danger was knotholes which could catch a wheel and send the skater tumbling. Lois Fuller Johnson's dad was the head maintenance man for the Bonner buildings and sometimes he would rebuild the sidewalks. Lois loved that project – she could tag along with her dad and retrieve coins that had fallen between the boards.

Question: What's your favorite way to get from place to place? Walk? Skateboard? Bike? Or??

In 2007 and 2008 Bonner Area History Roundtables were held occasionally at Bonner School and in 2009 the Bonner Milltown History Center and Museum was established.



Cross Highway 200 at the crosswalk and stop to look down the street towards the mill.

8. The White House and Silk Stocking Row



The original mill entrance

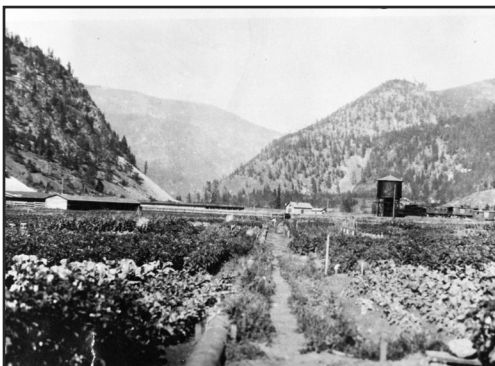
The higher ranking employees were most often located on the street referred to by mill workers as “Silk Stocking Row”, where there was quick and easy access to the company office, store, and mill. These houses were larger and finer in architectural detail than others in the community. They were the only ones provided with steam heat instead of wood. According to Glenn “Hooligan” Smith, they were also the best houses for Trick or Treating at Halloween.

The White House was built in 1942 and was the office building for many years. It now houses the Bravo Catering Company.



Continue walking east along the sidewalk to the end of Bonner.

9. COMMUNITY GARDENS



During World War I it was hard to get all of the groceries needed and to help the war effort the mill donated property for community or Victory Gardens so people could raise their own food. From 1918 to the late 1940s the Community Victory Garden, established by ACM on a former horse-exercise yard, fed many of the Bonner families.

Charles Hart established the community or “Victory Gardens.” Mr. Hart, an expert gardener, “suggested the company plow eleven acres of pasture on company property” and “put in water works.” This area was then divided into 80 sections and staked as “family plots.” Later the gardens were taken back by the company to be used as a log yard.

In January 2017, the KettleHouse Brewery and Taproom was established on what was part of the gardens. Do you see the solar panels on top of the brewery? They say that instead of harvesting plants from the gardens, they are harvesting the sun's energy.



Look across the highway and notice the vacant parking area.

10. Bonner House and the first Bonner School



Bonner House and First Bonner School (1888-1907)



Bonner House shown in the foreground. Looking toward Victory Gardens, mill housing, and the mill. 1921

The first important structure added to the town after worker housing was the school and social hall, located on the east end of town. Constructed in 1888, it was called Bonner Hall and was used as a school, a Masonic Lodge, and for social events. The community hall and school were in the same building, with the hall on the first floor and the school on the second floor. In January 1889 a dance was held to celebrate completion of the Bonner Hall.

On March 14 Bonner School District (No. 41 at that time) was established by the Missoula County Commissioners and that autumn the first classes were held at Bonner School. C.W. Young was the principal and Margaret Robinson taught all 8 grades.

The hall provided a popular locale for community activities. It was used as a polling place and for social events such as card parties, dances, and live “educational” stage shows called “Chautauquas.” Other events at the hall included Sunday school classes, “Girl Reserves,” and Boy Scout meetings. It was also used as a Masonic Lodge but operated officially in this capacity for only sixteen years.

The Bonner Hall served as the Bonner School until 1907 when a new two-story school was built on the other end of town. After the new school was built and the Masonic Lodge no longer held meetings in Bonner, the community hall was still used for social gatherings. It was also used as an office for the Blackfoot Forest Protection Association, a regional group formed to help fight forest fires. Having outlived its usefulness the Bonner Hall was torn down in the early 1940s.

Lefty Pleasant grew up in Bonner. He was an ace baseball pitcher for the Bonner Lumberjacks. (Why was he called Lefty?) He also worked at the mill for many years. He told the story of kids having dances on the second floor of the Bonner House. A girl living in Bonner brought her phonograph and records to play their dance music. (What is a phonograph? What songs would the kids have danced to in the 1940s?)



Well, that's the end of our tour. Thanks for coming along! Return to the churches. Along the way, imagine ways that your lives are the same as families of long ago. How are they different?

SOURCES

A Grass Roots Tribute: The Story of Bonner, Montana

Bonner Company Town Historic District, Missoula County, Montana

The Tamarack, "Early Times at Bonner" by Glenn Smith

Website of Bonner Milltown History Center and Museum: www.BonnerMilltownHistory.org

Personal communications: Lois Fuller Johnson, Dennis "Lefty" Pleasant, Willie Bateman, Glenn "Hooligan" Smith

Photographs are from the Jack L. Demmons Historic Photograph Collection, Jimmie Willis, Shirley Olson, Ed Olean, Glenn Smith, and the Bonner Milltown History Center and Museum

The Bonner Milltown History Center and Museum is located in the Bonner Post Office Building, 9397 Hwy 200 E. The Museum is currently closed indefinitely due to COVID 19. Please visit www.bonnermilltownhistory.org for updates on hours and in depth discussions of Bonner area history.

NOTES

Use this page to write down questions you want to research, write a story or poem about your life in Bonner, or draw a picture of something you remember from the tour!