

# MONTANA GHOST TOWN PRESERVATION SOCIETY NEWS . . . . . WINTER '75

MONTANA GHOST TOWN PRESERVATION SOCIETY . P.O. BOX 607.. BOZEMAN MONTANA ..ZIP CODE 59715. PHONE NUMBER 587-0733 ...

## JUNCTION CITY

John Devitt

Across the bridge, heading north from Custer Montana, and atop the bluff that overlooks the Yellowstone River lie the only remains of one of Montana's last wide-open frontier towns. Several loosely lain rocks outline the few remaining graves left on Junction City's boothill. The rest of Junction City disappeared nearly 75 years ago.

In 1807, Manuel Lisa came up the Yellowstone to the mouth of the Big Horn River and built the first permanent structure in Montana. It was a two-room log building that was heated by coal dug nearby. Fort Ramon, named in honor of Lisa's son, gained fame as John Colter's refuge after the long cross country chase by the Blackfoot in 1808. Ten years the fort lay in a state of deterioration until in 1823 it was rebuilt and renamed Fort Benton by Joshua Pilcher. His men were massacred by the Blackfoot near the present site of Billings. Pilcher decided the country was too hostile and deserted the fort.

A party of fifteen men under the leadership of Captain Jas. Stuart entered the area in 1863. Another party composed of William Fairweather, Henry Edgar and others were to join them but were turned back by the Crows. On their return trip to Bannack they discovered gold in the famed Alder Gulch. Capt. Stuart set about laying out a plat for Big Horn City. It was never to be.

Thirteen years later the first serious attempt to settle the area came about when in 1875 F. D. Pease came down the Yellowstone and founded a fort and colony on the site of Big Horn City. The crude fort was built close to the river. Enclosing an area of 200 feet square, the fort was a combination of log buildings forming three sides with the fourth side composed of poles set in the ground. For a short period of time the small band of pioneers were very enthusiastic about the growth of the community.

The Sioux war broke out and for several months the small band of men fought off a continual seige by Indians. The pioneers had possession of a cannon known as the "Big Horn Gun." As the battle raged on, the little ammunition they had soon ran out. Before long they were firing scrap metal and buffalo bones using buffalo hides for wadding. The whistling sound created by the buffalo hides terrified the Indians. After several attempts to send couriers out failed, Elias Carter, riding by night and hiding by day, made his way to Bozeman in six days. Under orders of General Terry, on February 22, 1876, Major Brisbin led four companies of the second cavalry from Fort Ellis to rescue the pioneers. The Indians retreated, leaving only 19 survivors. The fort was deserted and shortly thereafter was burned down by the Sioux. Left behind was the "Big Horn Gun" (now on the steps of the Gallatin County Court House in Bozeman).

Following the Custer massacre on the Little Big Horn in June 1876, a relentless war against the Sioux brought an end to Indian domination of the Yellowstone Valley within a year. Terry's Landing was established as a trading post in 1877 to serve the army at Fort Custer. Later the name was changed to Junction City.



With riverboats bringing in supplies at a regular rate the small community became the trade center for the cavalry, rivermen and the miners from the Magginnis district. In 1877, no less than 14 riverboats docked at Junction City. The town gained the reputation as a wide open town, supporting 14 saloons and three dancehalls.

Horse rustlers frequented the town, never disturbing the citizens. The merchants got a good share of the bandits' business from the saloon and dancehalls, and in turn the bandits respected the townspeople's property.

The first major disaster struck on April 5, 1883, when a fire destroyed a portion of the town at a loss of \$10,000. With the coming of the railroad, Junction City's end was inevitable. The railroad was built on the opposite side of the river when at a later date the town of Custer took root. This, together with the overwhelming growth of Billings brought an end to Junction City.

Most of its history died with the town. Most of its settlers were gone and forgotten, but many interesting and exciting stories lie with those buried in Boothill. Junction City's most famous character is not to be found there. Taking a job as Sheriff in Coulson, Muggans Taylor was gunned down by a drunken cowboy and buried on their boothill. He will always be remembered as the man who carried the news of the Custer massacre to the outside world.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

What began as a mild and open winter has turned out to be a bear, at least as far as getting out in the fields to do needed ghost town research. The weekends have not been the best for photography, either.

I had the opportunity to visit Bannack a few weeks ago to evaluate the fine restoration job being done there by the Parks and Recreation Division of the Fish and Game Department. It was my first visit there during the winter, and we fortunately had a clear day. The town took on a new character altogether with a fresh blanket of snow. One can but imagine the tough winters that had to be faced by the early inhabitants in cabins and other buildings lacking insulation, a central heating system, indoor plumbing, etc.

In the past year or so work has proceeded on the original Beaverhead County Courthouse-- later the Meade Hotel-- and the Methodist Church. The unique structure known as the Masonic Temple and Public School Building is now being stabilized and fitted with new siding.

If you have not been to Bannack in recent years plan to do so. A stopover in Dillon is a must, too. It has numerous fine old buildings and at Skeets Restaurant the finest strawberry pie anywhere. We are thinking of having a state-wide meeting there in a few years.

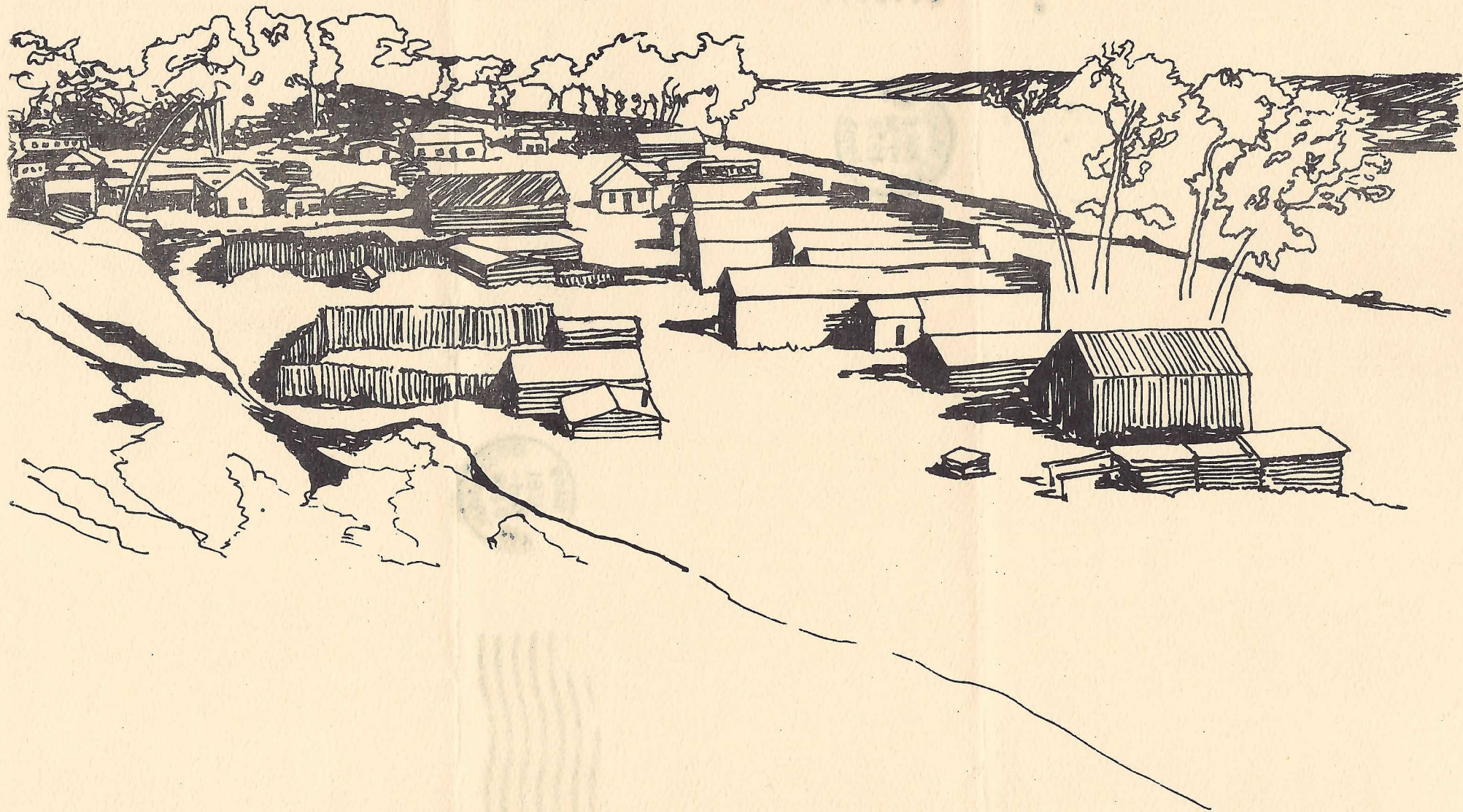
I would like feedback from the Directors as to when and where to hold the annual board meeting. Saturday, May 17, is a tentative date. We can either have the meeting in Helena as in the past, or here in Bozeman. Would the Directors please notify me as to date and place preference?

We solicit news of happenings in your area for the Newsletter. Also, we welcome articles by members. This issue's feature article and sketch is by one of our Directors, John Devitt of Billings.

John N. Dehaas

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J. Devitt