

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of PropertyHistoric name: Sixteen School

Other names/site number: _____

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. LocationStreet & number: 400 feet south of Francis Road, west edge of Sixteen, MTCity or town: Sixteen State: MT County: MeagherNot For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A B X C D

Montana State Historic Preservation Officer

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title :

State or Federal agency/bureau
or Tribal Government

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☒
- Public – Local ☐
- Public – State ☐
- Public – Federal ☐

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s) ☒
- District ☐
- Site ☐
- Structure ☐
- Object ☐

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>2</u>	<u> </u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>2</u>	<u> </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register NA

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION: School

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Late 19th And 20th CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENT: Prairie School influences, school house

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: _____

Foundation: CONCRETE

Walls: WOOD: Weatherboard

Roof: METAL

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Sixteen School and its teacherage stand in Township 5 North, Range 6 East, Section 8 at the south end of a broad valley and west edge of the small unincorporated community of Sixteen, a former stop on the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad. The railroad grade, now Francis Road, and Sixteen Creek, the namesake of the community, run east-west less than 400 feet north of the two buildings. The Big Belt Mountains lie to the north, west, and south with Sixteen Creek meandering through them. Historically, the county developed around mining and ranching. The simply constructed hipped roof wood frame school and gabled roof teacherage served not only the students of the neighboring farms and ranches but also the general rural population for nearly 40 years. Although displaying signs of neglect and abandonment, the school and teacherage retain all aspects of integrity, including location, workmanship, design, materials, setting, feeling, and association.

Narrative Description

The Sixteen School and its teacherage sit on a slight slope on the south side of a small mountain valley. The Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad bed lies just to the north as does Sixteen Creek. The school building and teacherage represent the only two buildings on the property.

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Sixteen School (1915, one contributing building)

The simply constructed wood frame Sixteen School faces north and sports a hipped roof with hipped dormer all topped with raised seam metal roofing. Boxed eaves provide a finished touch to the roof. A brick ridge chimney projects from immediately south of the dormer. Horizontal shiplap siding covers the 30-ft. (N-S) by 21-ft. (E-W) school's walls. The west wall displays heavy environmental degradation with tarpaper and underlying planking visible in many spots. Wood cornerboards protect the building's edges. The school originally sported white paint with green trim.

Fenestration includes a five-panel wood door with transom flanked on each side by a 1/1 single hung window; plywood and boards cover the transom and windows. Plywood covers a ribbon of six 1/1 single hung $\frac{3}{4}$ height windows on the middle and south end of the east elevation. A single, small, fixed-light appears in the north wall of the dormer. Wood steps once approached the entry but no longer remain. The school rests on a concrete foundation supported by rock in spots.

Interior

The Sixteen School faces north toward Sixteen Creek and appears as it did when constructed. The interior features two rooms that include the large volume classroom space that consumes $\frac{3}{4}$ of the building's interior and the anteroom that historically served as the coat room. A bookshelf occupies the north side of the wall that separates the coatroom from the classroom. Interior five-panel wood doors appear on each end of the bookshelf allowing passage from the coatroom to the east or west to the short north-south hallways that lead to the classroom. Vertical beadboard wainscot painted tan adheres to the lower portion of all interior walls and the historic blackboards continue to grace the south and west walls, replete with writing dating to the 1940s. Wall plaster remains largely intact. The ribbon of six 1/1 single hung windows in the east wall remain but are covered by plywood on the school's exterior. Much of the ceiling now displays the underlying lath. Immediately south of the wall separating the coatroom from the classroom stands the original pot belly stove with shroud.

Teacherage (circa 1930, one contributing building)

Standing 80 ft. east of the school is the circa 1930 teacherage. The building displays an L-plan with open porch entry supported by three turned wood posts on the northwest corner. A gable roof topped with asphalt shingles covers the building including the open porch. Other roof elements include open eaves with exposed rafters and a brick slope chimney. Lapped siding and cornerboards painted white clad the lower portion of the building while unpainted shingles cover the gables. Wood cornerboards cover the corners. Entry occurs via a one-light/three-panel wood persondoor fronted by a wood screen door in the west wall of the open porch entry. Windows include a 1/1 single hung unit in the north wall, paired 4/1 fixed units in the south wall, paired 4/1 fixed units in the east wall, and a square single-light unit in the west wall.

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The teacherage sits on a concrete foundation. A three-stair wood step approaches the open wood porch.

Interior

The small teacherage holds four rooms that include a dining room/living room, bedroom, closet, and utility area. As the largest room in a small house, the yellow-painted dining room/living room serves a number of uses beyond its aforementioned title—it holds furniture associated with relaxation and eating but also food preparation—both a Majestic stove and refrigerator occupy this space. Dark wood wainscoting covers the lower dining room/living room walls. The light green bedroom currently holds a wood bunkbed, wood dresser, and leather-covered chair; a beautiful five-panel wood door provides ingress to the bedroom. A small sink, cupboard, and shelving are found in the utility room. Wood planks with rolled vinyl flooring in areas appears throughout the house.

Integrity

The Sixteen School and teacherage require attention due to abandonment, but integrity remains quite sound. Both stand where built providing strong integrity of location. Although simply constructed, the buildings easily retain integrity of workmanship, design, and materials. An historic photograph of Sixteen that dates to circa 1931, captures the school building in the distance appearing almost exactly as it now stands. Integrity of setting, feeling, and association also remain exceptionally strong, although the nearby community of Sixteen has witnessed considerable population loss. The setting continues to impart its rural agricultural roots, allowing for continued integrity of feeling and association to the surrounding area.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION

SOCIAL HISTORY

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1915-1945

Significant Dates

1915, 1930

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Sixteen School is eligible to list in the National Register of Historic Places at a local level of significance under Criterion A; the school gains significance from its association with the history of early public education in rural Meagher County, specifically in the area around the small community of Sixteen. Sixteen School served both as an educational facility and as a location for local gatherings and functions, a role served by many small schools in rural locations. A variety of groups and organizations met at the school, cementing its significance to the local population.

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Sixteen School gains additional significance under Criterion C. The simply constructed school presents Prairie School influences of the period including a rectangular shape, hipped roof, hipped dormer, and and overhanging eaves.

The period of significance begins with the school's construction in 1915 and ends with its closure tentatively in 1945. Significant dates include the year of the school's construction, 1915, and 1930, the approximate date that reflects the construction of the teacherage.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

In 1864, the Montana Territory was created. The establishment of Meagher County occurred three years later in 1867, formed from parts of Chouteau and Gallatin counties. Irish loyalist, Civil War general, and later acting-Governor of Montana, Thomas Francis Meagher supplied the name for the county. After the war, Meagher became the acting governor of the Montana Territory.¹ In 1885, Meagher County contributed a portion of its acreage toward the establishment of Fergus County. Meagher County lost additional in 1897 to help create Broadwater County. The trend reversed in 1911, however, when a portion of Fergus County returned to Meagher County. In 1889, Montana became an official state of the country.

Initial gold discoveries in Montana occurred in the 1850s, but discovery of the metal in Grasshopper Gulch in southwest Montana in 1862 opened the flood gates of exploration. Miners traversed much of the Mountain West with strikes occurring near the future location of Sixteen. Castle, 22 miles northeast of Sixteen, and Confederate Gulch, 31 miles to the northwest, proved two of the larger nearby strikes.

The influx of miners and those moving west increased hostilities with Indigenous groups of the area leading to the establishment of military forts; one, Fort Ellis, built about 40 miles south of the future Sixteen. Ranching in Meagher County and the surrounding areas accelerated after 1869, as the military presence provided a layer of security for stocking cattle, an industry that came to dominate these areas.² However, the flood of cattle resulted in overcrowding, an untimely occurrence, especially when combined with a hot 1886 summer that depressed grass coverage followed by the hard winter of 1886-1887—a winter that saw a 60 percent loss of the territory's cattle population.³

¹ Roberta Carkeek Cheney, *Names on the Face of Montana*, (Missoula, MT: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 1996), p. 181.

² Merrill. G. Burlingame. *The Montana Frontier* (Bozeman, MT: Big Sky Books, 1942), p. 267.

³ Michael P. Malone and Richard B. Roeder. *Montana, A History of Two Centuries* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1976), p. 125.

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Meagher County's population fluctuated through the years. After three decades of growth from 1870 to 1890, when it topped 4700 people, it shrank to just over 2500 individuals in 1900, a reflection of the removal of portions of the county added to nearby counties.⁴ However, Meagher County counted 4190 individuals in 1910, undoubtedly associated with passage of the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909 and the slightly later electrification of the Milwaukee Road.⁵ The population again decreased by just over 1500, noted in the 1920 census, garnering it the status as one of Montana's counties to boast less than two inhabitants per square mile.⁶ The population of Meagher County for the civil division that included Sixteen in 1940 tallied 1132 people with the town of White Sulphur Springs concentrating the majority of the population. By 1950, the county counted 1427 individuals with only 402 people living outside of White Sulphur Springs.⁷

Railroads Arrive

Arrival of railroads to Montana changed every facet associated with settlement and travel across the expanse of the vast state. Railroads spurred construction with much of the early push related to the exploitation of agriculture and mining resources. Name changes, competition, and merges resulted in a dynamic railroad landscape. Sixteen and the surrounding area proved no exception to the to the impact and importance of railroads. Although not the first in the state, the Montana Railroad laid the first tracks between Ringling, east of Sixteen, and Lombard to the west. The brainchild of entrepreneur Richard Harlow, the "Jawbone" (a nod to Harlow's ability to convince anyone of almost anything) grew to fruition from Harlow's vision of providing more cost effective transport for mining activities in central Montana, a demand that slowly grew, commensurate with the population of Meagher County.⁸ Harlow planned to connect his line with the Northern Pacific Railway at the Lombard interchange, 20 miles west of the future location of Sixteen, then up through Sixteen Mile Canyon to the mining areas of central Montana, and eventually to Harlowton.

Alternative route options found voice, depending on the source. One possibility included a path through White Sulphur Springs, 23 miles northeast of Sixteen, then east to the mines on the north side of the Castle Mountains. Finances, however, dictated the optimal route for the section of railroad in this area ran through Sixteen Mile Canyon. Despite economic ups and downs including the silver panic of 1893, construction through the canyon began in spring of 1895.⁹ Difficult terrain suggested the necessity of a well-constructed route; however, the initial

⁴ Specific information related to 1910 is lacking. Population of Montana Counties and Minor Civil Divisions, Census Bulletin, No. 33, Washington D.C., January 17, 1901.

⁵ Contents—Montana, Census, pp. 9, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1920/state-compendium/06229686v20-25ch5.pdf>

⁶ Contents—Montana, Census, pp. 10, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1920/state-compendium/06229686v20-25ch5.pdf>

⁷ Table 6—Population of Counties By Minor Civil Divisions: 1930-1950,

<https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1950/population-volume-2/15276180v2p26ch1.pdf>

⁸ Lindsay Rhynard, "Iron Persistence: History of Montana's Jawbone Railroad, How one man's vision brought a railroad to Montana," *Montana Living*, April 22, 2016.

⁹ Lindsay Rhynard, "Iron Persistence: History of Montana's Jawbone Railroad, How one man's vision brought a railroad to Montana," *Montana Living*, April 22, 2016.

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grade proved less-than-durable and susceptible to washouts. By 1900, the rapid demise of mining found Harlow pivoting toward shipping wool and other items resulting in the construction of 24 more miles of track to Martinsdale, northeast of Sixteen, and further east to Harlowton.

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the route from Lombard through Sixteen to Harlowton became part of the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad's (Milwaukee Road) push to complete a new transcontinental line.¹⁰ The Milwaukee began taking control of segments of the line several years earlier, building a new grade through the canyon positioned higher above the creek; they continued to use the old Montana Railroad line route for a time while they built the new grade. Part of the construction included driving the Eagle Nest Tunnel, about four miles west of Sixteen, through the rock cliffs of the canyon to connect to a 300-foot bridge crossing about 100 feet over Sixteen Mile Creek below. The railroad's efforts resulted in Sixteen becoming a section base for crews, adding population to the sparsely inhabited area.¹¹ Electrification of the line commenced in 1914, with much of the power to the substations deriving from the Montana Power Company. Acquisition by the Milwaukee Road in conjunction with the passage of the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909, signaled a campaign to promote homesteading to the area; settlers moved in large numbers to Montana assisted by the railroads including the Milwaukee Road, which wasted little time in advertising Montana as a can't miss opportunity for farmers.¹²

The effect of the new Act proved momentous as 1910 witnessed a jump in entries from 7,500 in 1909 to nearly 22,000.¹³ Meagher County welcomed many new immigrants as did nascent Sixteen. The pace of entries continued in many areas until the United States entered World War I. Three years later and furthering incentive, Congress reduced the prove-up time for claims from five years to three.¹⁴ Agreeable weather and growing conditions attracted additional settlement.

By 1910, agriculture held the mantle of Montana's primary industry.¹⁵ Meagher County also boasted industries primarily focused on cattle and sheep, smaller logging operations, and

¹⁰ "Montana Historical Society Post," Montana Historical Society Facebook page, April 19, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/MontanaHistoricalSociety/posts/the-montana-railroad-nicknamed-the-jawbone-for-the-deal-making-by-its-president-/6463120813698463/>, accessed January 22, 2026.

¹¹ "Sixteen," Lost & Found Montana, <http://www.lostandfoundmontana.com/towns/sixteen.html>, accessed January 29, 2026.

¹² Warren Elwood, "Milwaukee Road Historic District" National Register Nomination (NR # 88001024, listed July 8, 1988), on file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office; Krys Homes and Sue Dailey, *Montana: Stories of the Land*, (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 2008), p. 177.

¹³ James Muhn and Hanson R. Stuart, *Opportunity and Challenge: The Story of BLM* (Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1988), p. 35.

¹⁴ James Muhn and Hanson R. Stuart, *Opportunity and Challenge: The Story of BLM* (Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1988), p. 35.

¹⁵ Michael P. Malone and Richard B. Roeder. *Montana, A History of Two Centuries* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1976), p. 186.

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limited mining.¹⁶ Settlement of Sixteen served as a microcosm of the county, boasting a diverse work population with railroad workers now contributing to the town. Today, ranching and agriculture continue as the primary industries of the area with tourism and outfitting industries gaining traction.

Sixteen

Sixteen initially arose as a homestead community. The 1903 General Land Office (GLO) map for Township 5 North Range 6 East notes quite a bit of settlement in the lower lying areas both in the area around Sixteen in Meagher County and to the south across the border in Gallatin County. By 1903, Sixteen boasted the “Robertsons House” and “store & P.O.” labelled on the map.

The teens represent the highwater mark for Sixteen’s population and that of the surrounding area as passenger and freight service rolled along the Milwaukee Road rails. The railroad proved an economic boon as it created opportunity for employment reflected in the 1920 Census for District 7 (Battle Creek) that included the community of Sixteen, a tally of 71 individuals.¹⁷ Sixteen’s population consisted of both families and single persons hailing from a number of states including Montana, Illinois, Virginia, Missouri, Ohio, New York, Nebraska, Michigan, Idaho, and Wisconsin. Several individuals arrived from outside the United States: Serbia, Poland, Ireland, England, and Scotland. Roughly half listed their work in farming or ranching while 10 worked for the railroad.

By 1930, the population dipped to 63 people.¹⁸ States of origin remained similar to 10 years prior though folks from Oklahoma, California, Texas, West Virginia, South Carolina, Washington, and Pennsylvania made an appearance; newly represented countries of origin included Sweden and Canada. Farming/Ranching continued as the primary industry, though employment through the railroad grew significantly with many noting work as “electric railroad.”

By 1940, Sixteen’s population plummeted to 25 individuals.¹⁹ Such a drastic decline in population played a major role in the eventual closure of the Sixteen School by around THE mid-1940s. Those that remained in Sixteen displayed more varied employment than found in the previous two census records: postmaster/merchant, section foreman, laborer (two), hospital maid (two), elementary teacher—ranchers are only represented twice. Eighteen residents claimed Montana origins.

¹⁶ Stephen A. Aaberg et al. *6666 Ranch-Dry Range Proposed Land Exchange, Class III Cultural Resource Survey Results, Meagher County, Montana, Volume I: Management Report*, (For Burnett Ranches, Inc., Fort Worth: TX and Douglass, Inc. Missoula: MT), p. 39.

¹⁷ Fourteenth Census of the United States:1920—Population, District 7, sheets 4A and 4B.

¹⁸ Fifteenth Census of the United States:1930—Population Schedule, School District 7 Sixteen, sheets 1A and 1B.

¹⁹ Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940—Population Schedule, District 7 Sixteen, Sheet 1A.

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George W. and Emma Roberson

George Washington Roberson (1854-1935), an early settler/pioneer of the area, contributed much to the growth of the Sixteen.²⁰ Born near Newmarket, Missouri, Roberson moved to Colorado at the age of 19 before arriving in Montana two years later. In 1879, he found himself in Meagher County. He met future wife and teacher Emma Holliday "at old Martinsdale;" they married in 1884. After a year in Texas, the couple moved back to Montana where they operated a "Half-Way House" near Deep Creek at the lower end of Sixteen Mile Canyon.²¹ The Robersons provided a location to change horses and eat dinner for passengers travelling through the canyon, a service they continued until 1896, and the arrival of the railroad.

Within a year of the railroad's arrival, 1897, the Robersons moved to their Sixteen location. They immediately began the homestead process of improving the land noted on the 1903 General Land Office (GLO) map and associated land surveyor notes that detail the Roberson's house/store/post office in the NW1/4 Section 8, Township 5N, Range 6E.²² The survey positioned Roberson's buildings at the very far west edge of the NW1/4 of Section 8. Roberson was still in the process of proving up on his land at the time of the 1903 survey as a homestead patent was not issued to him until 1907.

George Roberson passed in 1935 and Emma in 1941.²³ George and Emma's son George Jr., remained in Sixteen until his passing at the age of 80 in 1966. Local prominent families in the Sixteen area included the Doig family, relatives of famous Montana author Ivan Doig.

Other 1903 GLO details in addition to the Roberson's buildings included an east-west trending railroad grade, telephone and fence lines, and ditches in the location soon to be called Sixteen; the 1903 map also noted nearby cultivated land.²⁴ The only building recorded on the map other than the Roberson's holdings was a barn a mile to the east. The surveyor described the area as broken mountains and good grazing land, with springs and creeks providing water that could also be used for irrigation. Pine and fir growing on the nearby hills sported lumber for construction that could be milled at a sawmill two miles to the south.

Sixteen School

Children that lived in the area attended class at the Battle Creek School in District 22 prior to the 1915 Sixteen schoolhouse construction. Battle Creek School was founded around 1895 and counted the attendance of 12 children. In March of 1987, Battle Creek School moved under the supervision of School District #7. Reference of a school in the Sixteen Mile area began to emerge around the turn of the twentieth century, noted through the newspaper that Ida Balch

²⁰ "Final Rites Held at Sixteen for Meagher County Pioneer," *Meagher County News*, October 30, 1935, p. 1.

²¹ "Meagher County Historical Society," *Meagher County, An Early-Day Pictorial History, 1867-1967*, (White Sulphur Springs: Meagher Republican, 1968), pp. 84, 86, .

²² "Pioneer Woman Of Sixteen Dies," *Meagher County News*, September 3, 1941, p. 1.

²³ "Final Rites Held at Sixteen for Meagher County Pioneer," *Meagher County News*, October 30, 1935, p. 1; "Pioneer Woman Of Sixteen Dies," *Meagher County News*, September 3, 1941, p. 1.

²⁴ (1903 GLO Notes for T5N, R6E)

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resigned her present position to assume a role at Sixteen Mile.²⁵ School references in the Sixteen Mile area firmed up considerably by the mid-teens: "Mrs. Kerrs is teaching a very successful school at Sixteen," and "Miss Flay Ridge of Shelbyville Mo. is teaching the school at Sixteen." Despite such allusions that instruction indeed occurred within the young town, it remains unclear as to whether classes occurred in a dedicated school building or a resident's house.²⁶

Acquisition of the Montana Railroad by the Milwaukee Road spurred new growth of the community and surrounding area, especially when the railroad moved to electrification in 1914. This reorientation of the railroad's operation and the increase in local population served as an impetus to build a new schoolhouse to accommodate the growing student population.

Growth of the student population resulted in School District No. 7 selling \$1500 worth of bonds "for the purpose of purchasing a school lot and building a school house, thereon, and furnishing the same."²⁷ The board followed up the bond call with a request for bids for "building of a new school house... plans and specifications... obtained from Tom Roberson clerk, Sixteen, Mont."²⁸ Students continued to receive an education as bids and planning moved forward.²⁹

School District No. 7 side-stepped property-purchase issues as in January of 1915, Roberson and wife Emma deeded an acre of land in the NE1/4 of Section 8 to the district in Meagher County for one dollar; the deed stipulated the property revert back to the family in the event it ceased use for educational purposes. The one acre school property was defined as: "Beginning at a point west Thirteen Hundred Twenty (1320) feet from the Northeast corner of Section Eight (8), Township Five (5) North, Range Six (6) East, Montana Principal Meridian; running thence west, to hundred eight and twenty-five hundredths (208.20) feet; thence south two hundred eight end twenty-five hundredths (208.25) feet; thence east two hundred eight and twenty-five hundredths (208.25) feet; thence North two hundred eight and twenty-five hundredths (208.25) feet to the place of beginning, including in said courses about one (1) acres, more or less." The parcel lay $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile east-northeast of Roberson's house/store/post office. Emma's past vocation as a teacher may have contributed to the family's decision to grant the land for the school.³⁰ Emma received much credit for her involvement with the district, which hosted students from three counties.³¹

²⁵ "You And Your Friends," *Livingston Enterprise*, August 18, 1900, p. 6.

²⁶ "Sixteen," *Meagher Republican*, November 17, 1911, p. 8; "Sixteen," *Meagher Republican*, September 27, 1912, p. 3.

²⁷ "Notice Of The Sale Of Bonds," *Meagher Republican*, October 9, 1914, p. 2.

²⁸ "Notice To Contractors," *Meagher Republican*, December 4, 1914, p. 4.

²⁹ "Sixteen," *Meagher Republican*, February 26, 1915, p. 2.

³⁰ "Roberson Service," *Helena Independent*, September 7, 1941, p. 16.

³¹ "Pioneer Woman Of Sixteen Dies," *Meagher County News*, September 3, 1941, p. 1.

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April of 1915 found Sam Bingham and Simon Marquess of nearby Ringling embarking to Sixteen to serve as carpenters for the school's construction.³² The community hoped to start construction earlier but a "delay in receiving materials" slowed progress. The community witnessed a buzz of activity as along with the school's construction, work occurred on a channel change of Sixteen Mile Creek and electrification of the railroad. Construction continued into May, though Mr. Bingham returned to Ringling for a short time.³³

By June 4, 1915, the new Sixteen School was "completed and is a nicely finished structure of which any community might well be proud. It is to be used as a social center in accordance with the latest ideas and will add much to the social life of the neighborhood."³⁴ Sunday School activities commenced almost immediately in the new space.³⁵ July's big news included "the new piano which has been bought for the school house... arrived, tested and found very satisfactory. Now we have a new school house and a splendid musical instrument we are well equipped for all amusements."³⁶ The school received a new furnace as summer wound down, installed by W.W. Reeder of Bozeman.³⁷

Reviews of the new building proved positive: "The new building at 16, completed during the past summer will present a striking contrast to the building heretofore used. The building will be correct as to heating and lighting, while the library fund on hand will ensure a good working library."³⁸

Before long, the school building assumed the primary role as the community center hosting dances and holidays.³⁹ In October of its first year of operation, the school witnessed a community masquerade party.⁴⁰ "Hallowe'en" school parties focused solely on the children also occurred.⁴¹ Other events at the school in 1916 included Friday night dances and "preaching services."⁴² Sponsorship of gatherings varied according to event: Mr. Shearer hosted "a dance at the school house last Friday night. It was attended by quite a large crowd and all reported having a good time."⁴³

A number of different teachers graced the interior of Sixteen School through the years, some staying longer than others. Miss Ethel Gile instructed the students during the 1915/1916 school year.⁴⁴ By January of 1924, "Miss Golda McVay of Broadview" was "engaged to teach the

³² "Ringling," *Meagher Republican*, April 2, 1915, p. 4; "Ringling," *Meagher Republican*, April 23, 1915, p. 4; "Sixteen," *Meagher Republican*, April 23, 1915, p. 2.

³³ "Ringling," *Meagher Republican*, May 14, 1915, p. 2.

³⁴ "Sixteen," *Meagher Republican*, June 4, 1915, p. 6.

³⁵ "Sixteen," *Meagher Republican*, June 4, 1915, p. 6.

³⁶ "Sixteen," *Meagher Republican*, July 30, 1915, p. 2.

³⁷ No title, *Meagher Republican*, August 20, 1915, p. 2.

³⁸ "Progress of Schools," *Meagher Republican*, September 10, 1915, p. 6.

³⁹ "Sixteen," *Meagher Republican*, December 31, 1915, p. 2.

⁴⁰ "Sixteen," *Meagher Republican*, October 22, 1915, p. 2.

⁴¹ "Sixteen News," *Meagher Republican*, November 4, 1915, p. 4.

⁴² "Ringling," *Meagher Republican*, March 17, 1916, p. 3; "Sixteen," *Meagher Republican*, March 31, 1916, p. 3.

⁴³ "Sixteen," *Meagher Republican*, November 16, 1917, p. 4.

⁴⁴ "Spring Bubbles," *Meagher Republican*, November 26, 1915, p. 5.

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Sixteen school for the balance of the term," possibly replacing Clare Turner.⁴⁵ By the fall of 1924, Mrs. Mary B. Roberson held the position overseeing nine pupils.⁴⁶ In 1925, Mrs. E. McKay of Maudlow taught at Sixteen temporarily.⁴⁷ Miss Vila Stevens provided instruction in 1927/1928 replaced in 1928/1929 by Mrs. Nina Craw, replaced by Miss Abbott in 1929/1930.⁴⁸ Miss Florence Harley instructed students in 1934/1935, expected to return for the 1935/1936 school year, likely taught the 1936/1937 academic year, and continued to serve for 1937/1938.⁴⁹

Early Sixteen School (mis)adventures included heavy snowmelt in March of 1916 that significantly increased the water flow of nearby Sixteen Mile Creek. The water elevated to the extent that "school was dismissed in order to get pupils and teachers to town before they became so high that it was unsafe to cross the bridge."⁵⁰ The high water and associated ice jams forced the school to remain closed the ensuing day. Following tried-and-true methods of returning the river's flow to its pre-ice jam level, locals turned to "dynamiting the ice to keep the bridge from going out."

Meagher County continued to refine the boundaries of its school districts through the mid-teens. In December of 1917, the size of School District No. 7 represented by Sixteen School, was reduced and the acreage added to School District No. 8, an alteration that affected no real change to the students of Sixteen School.⁵¹ One year later, redrawing of District No. 34's boundaries occurred resulting in land from that district shifting to School District No. 7.⁵²

Speaking to the importance of education and the presence of Sixteen School to the community, School District No. 7 voters passed a two mill levy in both 1917 and 1918.⁵³ The community's commitment to education and keeping the building's doors open for non-educational purposes continued into the mid-twenties as it passed a four mill levy in 1925 and an eight mill levy in 1926.⁵⁴ The district followed this up with passage of a 1 ½ mill levy in 1934.⁵⁵

⁴⁵ "Sixteen," *Ringling Independent*, January 5, 1924, p. 8; "Clare Turner Married," *Ringling Independent*, July 28, 1923, p. 1.

⁴⁶ "Sixteen," *Ringling Independent*, September 6, 1924, p. 5; "Rural Schools Are Now Open," *Meagher Republican*, September 19, 1924, p. 1.

⁴⁷ "Sixteen," *Meagher County News*, October 2, 1925, p. 1.

⁴⁸ "County School News," *Meagher Republican*, December 23, 1927, p. 1; "Perfect School Attendance," *Meagher Republican*, February 17, 1928, p. 4; "Sixteen News," *Meagher Republican*, September 13, 1929, p. 6; "Sixteen," *Meagher Republican*, May 30, 1930, p. 4.

⁴⁹ "Local News," *Meagher Republican*, June 26, 1935, p. 8; "Superintendent Visits County Schools," *Meagher Republican*, April 20, 1938, p. 1.

⁵⁰ "Ringling," *Meagher Republican*, March 17, 1916, p. 3.

⁵¹ "Commissioners Proceedings," *Meagher Republican*, December 21, 1917, p. 1.

⁵² "Boundaries of School Districts Changed," *Meagher Republican*, February 1, p. 4.

⁵³ "Special School," *Meagher Republican*, September 7, 1917, p. 4; "District School Levies," *Meagher Republican*, March 3, 1918, p. 6.

⁵⁴ "Tax Levies Made," *Meagher Republican*, September 4, 1925, p. 1; "Tax Levies for 1926," *Meagher Republican*, September 10, 1926, p. 5.

⁵⁵ "Commissioners Proceedings," *Meagher Republican*, August 22, 1934, p. 4.

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Support of the school appeared to serve as a catalyst for some people's relocation to the town. The *Meagher Republican* detailed several instances when the Sixteen School motivated a move to the Sixteen area. In 1917, Mr. and Mrs. Morris' moved to town "for the winter, so as to send their little girl to the school."⁵⁶ Only a week later, the newspaper reported, "Sixteen has been quite enlarged this week as Mr. and Mrs. Wm. Morris and Mr. and Mrs. Sage have already moved down and the White family intend to move soon. They all have moved in on account of school."⁵⁷

Entry of the United States into World War I cast Sixteen School into the role of event center, illustrated by a November 1917 gathering described as "a big patriotic entertainment... part of the proceeds... given to the Red Cross Society."⁵⁸ Sixteen itself numbered 32 members of the association serving the War effort.⁵⁹ In addition to providing the parcel of land for the school building with her husband George, Emma Robinson displayed her initiative by organizing "the first Red Cross chapter in the county during the first world war."⁶⁰

County staff stayed engaged with the schools within their districts highlighted by numerous visits from the Superintendent of County Schools and health nurses. In 1923, Superintendent Edith Johnston travelled to Sixteen to visit the school as part of her rounds.⁶¹ By 1925, Katherine King replaced Ms. Johnston as superintendent and visited the school in the spring of that year.⁶² Mrs. Florence Abbott Wallace assumed the position by 1936, and like her predecessors, made visiting the local schools a priority, including the Sixteen School, which she called upon in January and again in October of that year.⁶³ Gesine Musgrove became Superintendent in 1938 and paid a visit in April.⁶⁴

In addition to the Superintendent, county nurses also made frequent stops at the rural schools, visiting each one in Meagher County. A Sixteen School visit in 1921 revealed that of the 12 students examined, five exhibited "enlarged tonsils," and "defective teeth," three displayed "defective vision," and two exhibited "enlarged thyroid."⁶⁵ Possibly as a result of the nurse's report, the following year the school embarked on "doing some real constructive work in malnutrition" with students becoming "interested in their monthly weight records."⁶⁶ The goal to improving the students' weight entailed an increase in milk consumption to at least twice a day. Nursing visits to the Sixteen School occurred routinely through its time of operation.⁶⁷

⁵⁶ "Sixteen," *Meagher Republican*, November 2, 1917, p. 4.

⁵⁷ "Sixteen," *Meagher Republican*, November 16, 1917, p. 4.

⁵⁸ "Sixteen," *Meagher Republican*, November 23, 1917, p. 8.

⁵⁹ "Sixteen," *Meagher Republican*, November 30, 1917, p. 9.

⁶⁰ "Pioneer Woman Of Sixteen Dies," *Meagher County News*, September 3, 1941, p. 1.

⁶¹ "Sixteen," *Ringling Independent*, November 3, 1923, p. 8.

⁶² "Sixteen News," *Meagher Republican*, May 1, 1925, p. 4.

⁶³ "Sixteen," *Meagher County News*, January 22, 1936, p. 8; "Sixteen," *Meagher County News*, October 20, 1937, p. 4.

⁶⁴ "Superintendent Visits County Schools," *Meagher County News*, April 20, 1938, p. 1.

⁶⁵ "County Nurse Makes Report," *Meagher Republican*, May 6, 1921, p. 1.

⁶⁶ "School Notes," *Meagher Republican*, March 31, 1922, p. 1.

⁶⁷ No title, *Meagher Republican*, April 24, 1935, p. 1.

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Learning about health issues also occurred under less stressful circumstances than via visits by the county nurse. In 1929, the Montana Tuberculosis Association sponsored a poster contest.⁶⁸ Participants in the contest ranged from large city schools to “little one room schools,” like that at Sixteen. The posters stimulated “pupils’ interest in learning and practicing health rules.” With over 150 posters submitted, Sixteen School’s first and second graders advocated for the health benefits of the consumption of milk. Their efforts proved fruitful with a first prize for “rural free hand cutting,” and a \$6.00 award.

Although a center of education first, the Sixteen School’s role in the community extended far beyond its educational premise. Countless community events and gatherings transpired within the confines of the building with holiday celebrations common. A December 1917 gathering included “school entertainment and Christmas tree... patriotic songs... Flag Drill... and dance.”⁶⁹ In 1923, Santa dropped in to the school “bringing presents to every child in the community.”⁷⁰ Amidst the glee of the visit, the white bearded man confessed that in fact, he was only “Santa’s brother Jim” and that Santa sent Jim early while the jolly man himself continued with Christmas preparations. A dance followed Santa Jim’s visit and “everyone had a good time.”⁷¹ The 1941 Christmas festivities witnessed “Mrs. Alford and the pupils... “presenting “a Christmas program... in the school house.” One skit drew unanimous praise as Hope Roberson and Miss Harley “put on a speciality act that the audience demanded an encore;” alas, the pair didn’t anticipate the rousing applause they received and failed to plan a second act.

Thanksgiving also proved exceptionally popular to celebrate at the school as noted by the *Meagher Republican* that provided a glowing review on the charms of the community of Sixteen and its Thanksgiving celebration in 1922.⁷²

Thanksgiving morning dawned upon a beautiful little hamlet... at one end of the famous Montana canyon. One may find their way to this little hamlet by telling the ticket agent at Ringling that they wish to buy a ticket to Sixteen or the little yellow (Ford) bug as it winds its way among the sage brush from the hills on the north side of Sixteen Mile Creek.

...All day long the fairer sex were busy making pumpkin pie, roasting turkey, shaping popcorn balls and numerous other eats...

The Sixteen train stopped to unload the passengers that had heard of the event that was to take place at the Sixteen School house.

⁶⁸ “Winners In Poster Contest,” *Meagher Republican*, October 11, 1929, p. 6; “Sixteen News,” *Meagher Republican*, October 11, 1929, p. 5.

⁶⁹ “Sixteen,” *Meagher Republican*, November 16, 1918, p. 4.

⁷⁰ “Thanksgiving At Sixteen,” *Ringling Independent*, December 29, 1923, p. 8.

⁷¹ “Sixteen,” *Meagher Republican*, May 30, 1930, p. 4.

⁷² “Thanksgiving At Sixteen,” *Ringling Independent*, December 9, 1922, p. 1.

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Soon after sundown a light was seen at the school room and people were seen coming from every direction. Up the track came Mr. and Mrs. Roberson, down the track came Everet and his family including the dog. From the south came more Whites and from the north came the Powder River bunch, bringing with them, mothers, brothers, sisters, cousins and all.

The sound of Fords rattling and the yells of cowboys filled the air, all bound for the big turkey feed and old-fashioned dance at Sixteen.

The ball room was gaily lighted and highly decorated with bright colors. Three large tables, the length of the room were filled with all of the good eats that were ever heard of even in the Garden of Eden.

After supper the room cleared and the orchestra began to tune up... and all were dancing...

The article's author summed up his experience: "Sixteen is a fine place to live. Everyone wears a smile."⁷³

The school's location in the small community didn't always equate to easy access for all families. The district moved proactively in cases involving student attendance issues. In 1926, School Trustees of District No. 7 approved a "payment of \$25 for a period of one month for the transportation of the children of Wm. Blakely," ensuring their continued presence at the school.⁷⁴

The importance families placed on their children's attendance at the school was affirmed in December of 1927 with newspaper coverage that reported "pupils neither absent nor tardy in the Sixteen School District," with accolades rolling to Dorothy and Alice Blakely, Raymond Austin, and lastly, Iner Styner, who in addition to receiving recognition for perfect attendance, also won the name rhyming award.⁷⁵ Just over two months later, the perfect attendance record fell to the family-Blakely with children Raymond, Charlie, Bob, Bill, Dorothy, and Alice notching zero missed days and appearing to constitute the majority of the local attendees.⁷⁶ The Blakely kids proved a tough bunch to beat as they claimed the attendance crown for the remainder of the school year. Passage of a few years and graduation spelled the crowning of new attendance winners dominated by the White, Austin, and Roberson families with an early appearance by a member of the Doig family.⁷⁷ Such stellar attendance apparently correlated with the mission to achieve good grades—members of the Austin and Roberson families "from

⁷³ "Thanksgiving At Sixteen," *Ringling Independent*, December 9, 1922, p. 1.

⁷⁴ "Transportation for School Children," *Meagher Republican*, November 5, 1926, p. 1.

⁷⁵ "County School News," *Meagher Republican*, December 23, 1927, p. 1.

⁷⁶ "Perfect School Attendance," *Meagher Republican*, February 17, 1928, p. 4.

⁷⁷ "Perfect Attendance Records in the Meagher County Schools," *Meagher Republican*, February 1, 1933, p. 1.

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the school at Sixteen ranked highest in Meagher county at the recent seventh and eighth grade examinations."⁷⁸

Dating to at least the early 1920s, Sixteen School served as the neighbourhood polling location for school, local, and national elections.⁷⁹ The building continued as a precinct through the 1930s; locals contributed to the patriotic spirit by volunteering as election judges.⁸⁰ Locals also cast their ballots at the school for financial issues, such as a "debenture bond" that went before the voters in May of 1943.⁸¹

Constructing an associated teacherage at Sixteen School first percolated in June of 1916, as the National Lumberman's Association advocated for "a teacher's cottage for every country school house."⁸² Montana was one of the initial states selected "to introduce the movement" supported by a \$25,000 grant by the Rockefeller Foundation. However, it wasn't until 1929, the same year as the poster contest, that School District No. 7 advanced plans to construct teacher lodging for Sixteen.⁸³ A full 15 years after the construction of the school, the community finally moved forward with building a teacherage. W. R Plew of the State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts in Bozeman who compiled plans for the construction of one and two room school houses, noted the possibility that an area such as Sixteen would need a teacherage: "for rural communities in Montana it is sometimes necessary that the district furnish a house for the teacher."⁸⁴ The surprise wasn't that Sixteen built a teacherage, it was that it took so long to occur.

Trustees published: "the School House in the Town of Sixteen... sell to the highest and best bidder for cash, either amortization bonds or serial bonds... in the amount of Eleven Hundred (\$1100.00) Dollars, for the purpose of building a teacherage." Further information followed three months later in March of 1930:

"Notice is hereby given... at the school house... let to the lowest and best bidder, a contract for the erection of one teacherage. The same to be a frame building on the same lot as school house. Plans and specifications to be obtained from the clerk of said district."⁸⁵

⁷⁸ "Sixteen and Loweth Students Rank Highest in State Tests," *Meagher County News*, June 2, 1937, p. 1.

⁷⁹ "Sixteen," *Ringling Independent*, April 19, 1924, p. 1; "Sixteen News," *Meagher Republican*, April 15, 1927, p. 5.

⁸⁰ "Votes On Good Roads Measure," *Meagher Republican*, May 1, 1931, p. 1; "Commissioners Proceedings," *Meagher Republican*, April 27, 1932, p. 1; "Notice To All Judges Of Elections," *Meagher County News*, October 28, 1936, p. 2.

⁸¹ "Arrangements For Election Are Being Made," *Meagher County News*, May 5, 1943, p. 1.

⁸² State News," *Meagher Republican*, June 16, 1916, p. 3

⁸³ "Notice Of Sale Of School District Bonds," *Meagher Republican*, December 27, 1929, p. 3.

⁸⁴ W.R. Plew, "One and Two Room Rural School Buildings," University of Montana Bulletin, State College Series No. 11, Bozeman, Montana, 1919, p. 53.

⁸⁵ "Notice For Bids," *Meagher Republican*, March 28, 1930, p. 5. The teacherage does not appear in an historic photo of Sixteen credited to 1931 that appears in "Meagher County: An Early-Day Pictorial History, 1867-1967," suggesting the photo date may be incorrect as its reasonable to assume if a bid went out for construction of the small teacherage in March of 1930, that year would also reflect the teacherage's construction date.

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In 1937, the *Meagher Republican* printed stories written by local students across the district. Not all the stories shed light on school life, though one highlighted the difficulties of arriving for school on time: "When our clock is fast we get here too soon when our clock is slow we get here too late."⁸⁶ Second grader Hope Roberson imparted these words regarding what obviously proved a complicated task when one reached seven or eight years of age.

In August of 1939, the newspaper revealed Sixteen School represented one of two Meagher County school districts that owed bonded debt.⁸⁷ The newspaper reported, "the Sixteen school owes \$141.39 on an old bond issue" but intended "to pay that off this year."

Adios Sixteen School

By the time Superintendent Gesine Musgrove visited Sixteen School in April of 1938, the number of attending students dwindled to one.⁸⁸ The student decrease reflected the greater population contraction of Meagher County as a whole; Sixteen witnessed a dramatic drop from 72 occupants in 1920, 63 in 1930, falling to 25 in 1940.⁸⁹ Despite the dwindling student population, the importance of the school and education to the surrounding area remained firm with the school open for the 1938/1939 academic year.⁹⁰ Likely due to the lack of financial ability, students slated to go to Sixteen School shifted their attendance to other nearby towns for the 1940/1941 school year.⁹¹ Instead of Sixteen, the students attended class in Bozeman or Ringling, 35 miles to the south and 10 miles to the northeast, respectively.⁹²

The exact closure date of Sixteen School proves a bit murky. After a one year hiatus, Superintendent Musgrove visited the Sixteen School and welcomed back the students in the fall of the 1941/1942 school year; that academic year found Mrs. Florence Alfred teaching classes with pay of \$85.00 per month.⁹³ Difficulties attracting teachers to schools in Meagher County in the early 1940s, including District No. 7, destined the Sixteen School to close their doors for the 1942/1943 school year and forced the pupils who would have attended the school to travel elsewhere, including the children of George Roberson and Jess Ailey.⁹⁴ Although no school apparently took place within the confines of the building, the locals continued to use it

⁸⁶ "Among the School Kids," *Meagher County News*, January 20, 1937, p. 1.

⁸⁷ "Schools Get Out of Debt," *Meagher County News*, August 2, 1939, p. 1.

⁸⁸ "Superintendent Visits County Schools," *Meagher County News*, April 20, 1938, p. 1.

⁸⁹ Fourteenth Census of the United States:1920—Population, District 7, sheets 4A and 4B; Fifteenth Census of the United States:1930—Population Schedule, School District 7 Sixteen, sheets 1A and 1B; Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940—Population Schedule, District 7 Sixteen, Sheet 1A.

⁹⁰ "News of the Town and County," *Meagher County News*, April 26, 1939, p. 1.

⁹¹ "Sixteen," *Meagher County News*, September 4, 1940, p. 5; Enumeration Districts—1940 Census, Department of Commerce, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1940_Census_Enumeration_District_Descriptions_-_Montana_-_Meagher_County_-_ED_30-1,_ED_30-2,_ED_30-3,_ED_30-4,_ED_30-5,_ED_30-6,_ED_30-7,_ED_30-8,_ED_30-9_-_NARA_-_5872532.jpg, accessed May 5, 2026.

⁹² "Report Shows Finances Good," *Meagher County News*, July 23, 1941, p. 1.

⁹³ "Sixteen," *Meagher County News*, October 22, 1941, p. 1; Jean B. Ellison, Superintendent of Meagher County Schools, letter to Norman Hobby, September 25, 1981.

⁹⁴ "Schools Begin Work," *Meagher County News*, September 16, 1942, p. 1.

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sporadically including in 1943 when it served as a voting precinct for a "debenture bond issue" in May of that year.⁹⁵

Information from the Meagher County Superintended of Schools in 1981 noted, "The last year for which there is a census record is 1944, when five children 6-21 were recorded. Only one of those was of elementary age and was a new name to the area."⁹⁶ It remains unknown, however, if any of these children attended Sixteen School or travelled elsewhere for their education.

In 1946, Mrs. Dorothy Roberson and Florence Harley were appointed district trustees despite the district struggling to keep the Sixteen School's doors open.⁹⁷ Unfortunately, by the autumn of 1947, Sixteen and the surrounding area lacked any school-age children with the result no classes occurred.⁹⁸ Consolidation of schools in Meagher County gathered steam around this time as the county continued to face a sparsity of teachers.

By the summer of 1948, the writing was on the chalkboard regarding the fate of several Meagher County schools due to low or negligible enrollment. Superintendent Musgrove moved forward with the abolition of three of the county's districts, including District No. 7—the Sixteen School.⁹⁹ District No. 7 along with districts 14 and 35 were consolidated under White Sulphur Springs District No. 8. Abolition of the three districts resulted from a "law that requires the abandonment of school districts which have not had school for three years."¹⁰⁰ This stipulation suggests the final year the Sixteen School operated in an educational capacity was 1944/1945 at the latest, though this date differs by three years from information provided by the Superintendent of Meagher County Schools in 1981 who "assumed" no school occurred after 1941/1942."¹⁰¹ Information regarding the 1945 levies reported District No. 7 represented one of two districts with no appropriation.¹⁰²

Final closure of Sixteen School and termination of School District No. 7 by 1948 found the property for sale in September of 1949 with bids and proposals considered by the school board in early October:¹⁰³

Included in the sale will be the teacherage and the school building at Sixteen. The section crew has been moved from 16 and the Milwaukee station there has been abandoned. At present there is only one youngster of school age in the district and he is attending in White Sulphur Springs. School authorities believe

⁹⁵ "Arrangements For Election Are Being Made," *Meagher County News*, May 5, 1943, p. 1.

⁹⁶ Jean B. Ellison, Superintendent of Meagher County Schools, letter to Norman Hobby, September 25, 1981.

⁹⁷ "Trustees To Be Elected," *Meagher County News*, March 20, 1946, p. 1.

⁹⁸ "County Schools One Teacher Short," *Meagher County News*, September 24, 1947, p. 1.

⁹⁹ "School Districts Are To Be Abandoned," *Meagher County News*, December 15, 1948, p. 7.

¹⁰⁰ "Attorney General Rules On School District Taxes," *Meagher County News*, July 23, 1941, p. 1.

¹⁰¹ Jean B. Ellison, Superintendent of Meagher County Schools, letter to Norman Hobby, September 25, 1981.

¹⁰² "Meagher County Levies for 1945," *Meagher County News*, August 29, 1945, p. 4.

¹⁰³ "School District To Sell Property," *Meagher County News*, September 28, 1949, p. 5.

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it would be cheaper to rebuild school buildings in this and other abandoned districts in case the school is needed, then it would be to maintain and repair the buildings for an indefinite period of years.

During the early October 1949 school board meeting:

A hitch appeared in the proposal to sell some of the school sites, advertised in last week's issue of the News. It seems that the land upon which the Sixteen schoolhouse and teacherage are located was deeded to district 7 with a reversion clause, so that if the site were ever abandoned for school purposes it would revert to the Roberson estate. The buildings, being on a permanent foundation are a part of the real estate and subject to the reversion.¹⁰⁴

Reversion occurred. Four years later, George Roberson returned to his house in Sixteen to find it burned to the ground.¹⁰⁵ The complete loss of his home and all his belongings resulted in Roberson living "in the teacherage at the abandoned school house in Sixteen until he" could "build himself a new cabin."

Consolidation with Meagher County School District No. 8 (White Sulphur Springs)

Montana became a state under the Enabling Act of 1889. The Act charged that newly admitted states provide for establishing and maintaining public schools. Incentivizing this dictate, the federal government afforded sections of land for use in each township to further the goal. The spread of Progressive ideas regarding standardized universal education assisted these initial provisions. Special school taxes on property became a primary source of funding for local schools.¹⁰⁶ Sixteen School was not constructed on any of the federal government allotted sections but instead sat upon land donated by a local for educational use with the proviso that the land returned to the grantor if it ceased used for its educational function.

The idea and discussion of school consolidation began almost as soon as the earliest schools were constructed in the state: "School consolidation," had "been part of the educational milieu for almost as long as there have been schools. . . Throughout most of this century," school reformers "attempted to create larger more efficient schools, likening the 'laws' of school administration to the 'laws' of efficient industrial and agricultural production."¹⁰⁷

School consolidation discussions garnered significant traction in the 1960s and later, but it appeared as a topic of discussion as early as 1933 with the release of a report from the National Educational Financing Conference that explored a plan for the consolidation of rural schools.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ "News of the Town and County," *Meagher County News*, October 5, 1949, p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ "Fire Destroys Roberson Home," *Meagher County News*, October 28, 1953, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ Stremick, Paul, "School District Consolidation in Montana," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Montana, Missoula, 2001), p. 19.

¹⁰⁷ Stremick, Paul, "School District Consolidation in Montana," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Montana, Missoula, 2001), pp. 23, 26.

¹⁰⁸ "School Centralization," *Flathead Monitor*, September 28, 1933, p. 4.

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The 1948 consolidation of Sixteen School, District No. 7 with White Sulphur Springs District No. 8 reflects the trend of similar events noted above that occurred across Montana. Reasons for consolidation varied but included economics related to agricultural markets, especially in rural areas, and loss of employment resulting in families moving. Consolidation also relied heavily upon the premise of the increased ease of travel that allowed students to attend schools farther from where they lived.

In an oft-repeated occurrence in townships across Montana and elsewhere, District No. 7 wrestled with declining enrollment by consolidating. Sixteen School consolidation proved the easier and inevitable path to pursue with the continued loss of the area's population and prospective students—maintaining the expense of operating a school for only a few attendees year after year would truly have been onerous.

Architectural Significance—a short history of Montana Schools

Soon after the arrival of Euro-American settlers the issue of schools and their construction emerged. Small groups of settlers often accommodated education needs of students through the construction of one-room schoolhouses. These early schools often featured similar characteristics associated with rural churches and community buildings including rectangular footprints, gable roofs, and front entry orientation. Some were vernacular, others adhered more closely to an actual architectural style, and others featured influences of a style without fully embracing the style itself. Presentation and general proportion likely sprang from the single-pen house and placement of the entry at the center and front on the façade proved functional for a single large volume with uniform window distribution. Although simple, these early schools, whether gable or hipped, proffered clean lines with a touch of classical presentation. The hipped/gable-front schoolhouse dominated rural areas of Montana during the period of settlement.¹⁰⁹

The year 1866 witnessed the establishment of the first public school districts in Montana Territory. Reflecting their time, these schoolhouses usually proved sturdy in construction, but sparse in niceties; often built of log, the schools were poorly lit, poorly heated, and lacked running water. Legislation passed in 1887 mandating attendance; although intended for the right reasons, enforcing attendance proved impossible, especially in rural areas where many families' livelihoods depended on agriculture. In 1901, 182 rural schools stood in Montana with an average attendance of less than eight children per school. The year 1906 witnessed Montana elementary and secondary schools study course standardization. The early years of the twentieth century marked a period of school construction focused on the use of frame, stone, and brick to replace the earlier existing log buildings.

Simple frame schools began to incorporate current ideas of best-practices by the mid-nineteenth century. The turn of the twentieth century yielded standard schoolhouse designs available to most communities in most areas. Likely due to the plethora of Montana's rural

¹⁰⁹ Taken from Architectural Historian Paul C. Diebold's excellent *Indiana's Public Common and High Schools MPD*, available online at: https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/GetAsset/NRHP/64500213_text, accessed July 17, 2026.

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population and communities, it was only in 1919 that the state assembled guidelines and standards for its school architectural design, four years after the construction of the Sixteen School.¹¹⁰

By the late 1910s, momentum increased for Montana to be proactive when it came to school building construction recommendations. This momentum culminated under state school law that directed the secretary of the State Board of Health to issue “suggestive plans for rural school buildings.”¹¹¹

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Mary Trumper wrote in 1919:

With the rapid increase of population in Montana and the correspondingly large number of new school buildings being erected each year, it has become imperative that increased attention should be given to the furnishing of plans and specifications particularly for our smaller types of school buildings.¹¹²

Superintendent Trumper’s remarks highlighted the need to address the actual physical needs of education—the buildings—especially those of less-grand stature that generally catered to populations in rural areas, such as Sixteen. To this end, Superintendent Trumper championed the efforts of the State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts in Bozeman’s Professor of Architectural and Civil Engineering W. R. Plew. Two years of research resulted in Plew compiling plans for one and two room school houses adapted to Montana. The bulletin provided “up to date suggestions regarding the best types of buildings and detail directions for their construction” and incorporated a variety of recommendations including site selection, size of grounds, site beautification, sanitation, and layout.¹¹³ Interiors suggestions discussed optimal lighting, blackboard placement, heating, and desk arrangement.

Sixteen School predates Plew’s 1919 bulletin by four years, but displays many of the characteristics, philosophy, and design recommendations of the State Department of Health and Public Instruction detailed by Plew. Despite the four-year difference between the construction of the Sixteen School and the release of Plew’s bulletin, many of the “best practices” promoted by Plew were already employed in rural school construction, illustrated by the schoolhouse in Sixteen.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Kate Hampton, *Evano School* National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, listed May 1, 2003, NR #03000321; Christine Brown, *Target Range Elementary School* National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, listed August 10, 2010, NR #11000526; Kate Hampton, *Big Arm School* National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, listed August 16, 2007, NR #07000816; Delia Hagen, *Eagle Butte School* National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, listed January 28, 2009, NR #08001383.

¹¹² W.R. Plew, “One and Two Room Rural School Buildings,” University of Montana Bulletin, State College Series No. 11, Bozeman, Montana, 1919, introduction.

¹¹³ W.R. Plew, “One and Two Room Rural School Buildings,” University of Montana Bulletin, State College Series No. 11, Bozeman, Montana, 1919, introduction.

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The Sixteen School most strongly resembles Plew's Plan C1 school building, albeit, in a somewhat modified presentation. Plew understood the restrictions faced by small rural communities: "Due to the undeveloped conditions of many of the rural districts there seems to be quite a demand for a plan of a small building furnishing only the barest necessities."¹¹⁴ A hipped roof tops the C1 school plan instead of a gable and the exterior displays a "simple and plain" appearance.¹¹⁵ Although predating Plew's work, Sixteen School exhibits many features and design cues promoted in his bulletin: north/south orientation, centered endwall entry flanked to each side by window openings, and a ribbon of six large single-hung windows on the east wall (or "left" as described by Plew when the building faces north). Placement of the ribbon of windows on the Sixteen School's east wall presages the bulletin's dictum to limit possible damage to the children's eyes that results from "cross lights."¹¹⁶ Plew noted "some authorities recommend a north light but for a school in the latitude of Montana this would be too cheerless and gloomy during the winter months. It should be possible to flood the school room at some time during the day with bright sunlight."¹¹⁷ He further expounded: "All windows must be on one side and rear of the room. No blackboard shall be placed between windows."¹¹⁸ The Sixteen School sports a dormer above the façade entry, an enhancement that supplemented the light from the two windows on each side of the door.

The interior of the Sixteen School features a coat room to each side of the entry (intact), one for boys and one for girls. Plew's later design of the C1 floorplan includes such a coat room set-up and Plew advocated for separate coat rooms: "Two coat-rooms are provided, but when attendance is small and two coat rooms are not needed, the one near the stove might well be used as a fuel room. Placing the two coat rooms on each side of the entrance gives a vestibule, which, in this state is desirable and is required by law."¹¹⁹ Classroom space dominates the interior with the ribbon of windows in the east wall and blackboards across the south and west walls; positioning of the window ribbon adheres to Plew's future recommendation of reaching within a foot of the ceiling.

Sixteen School displays Prairie style architectural elements. Though not a low-slope roof, the school features a normal slope roof, more practical for an area of heavy snow load. Extended eaves conscribe the edges of the school, though not as wide as true Prairie-style extended eaves. Sixteen School mostly strongly aligns with the "Hipped Roof, Symmetrical, With Front

¹¹⁴ W.R. Plew, "One and Two Room Rural School Buildings," University of Montana Bulletin, State College Series No. 11, Bozeman, Montana, 1919, pp. 23, 24.

¹¹⁵ Some of Plew's forms featured hipped roofs but not with the central entry and band of windows; Sixteen School represents a modified basic form.

¹¹⁶ W.R. Plew, "One and Two Room Rural School Buildings," University of Montana Bulletin, State College Series No. 11, Bozeman, Montana, 1919, p. 13.

¹¹⁷ W.R. Plew, "One and Two Room Rural School Buildings," University of Montana Bulletin, State College Series No. 11, Bozeman, Montana, 1919, p. 13.

¹¹⁸ W.R. Plew, "One and Two Room Rural School Buildings," University of Montana Bulletin, State College Series No. 11, Bozeman, Montana, 1919, p. 14.

¹¹⁹ W.R. Plew, "One and Two Room Rural School Buildings," University of Montana Bulletin, State College Series No. 11, Bozeman, Montana, 1919, p. 24.

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Entry" Prairie School subtype.¹²⁰ This subtype presents a simple rectangular or square footprint, symmetrical façade, and low-slope hipped roof. Sixteen School's central entry serves as the focal point of the façade. As noted by McAlister and McAlister, this early "Prairie form... developed into the most common vernacular version... and in vernacular examples, hipped dormers are common."¹²¹ In the case of the Sixteen School, the hipped dormer not only reflects the school's vernacular history, its siting above the façade's doorway accentuates the entry and provides a handsome touch to the otherwise mostly spare building.

An historic photo from 1931 indicates the school never boasted a front porch nor covered entry and looks almost exactly like it does now. The abandoned and unlisted Rothiemay Schoolhouse in Golden Valley, Montana, stands as a near double of the Sixteen School—it too lacks a full width entry porch. Despite sitting vacant for years, the Sixteen School continues to present as it did historically, causing no confusion to the rare passerby of its original function as a school.

Similarly, the later constructed vernacular teacherage presents as such. Its simple, no frills build exhibits practical and functional use to house the school's teachers. Its utilitarian purpose required no adornment.

Conclusion

After serving the small community of Sixteen and the surrounding area, the school closed its doors around 1945. The area could no longer support its own school resulting in the students attending elsewhere. Closure of the school not only affected students, but the remaining population in general as the building's variety of functions over the years extended beyond its educational service. Meetings, dances, elections, and events occurred within the walls. Though vacant, the school and teacherage tell of the area's early educational efforts. A visit to the town and school in 1922 elicited a comment that bore directly on the community and the school: "Sixteen is a fine place to live. Everyone wears a smile."¹²²

¹²⁰ Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), p. 439.

¹²¹ Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), p. 439.

¹²² "Thanksgiving At Sixteen," *Ringling Independent*, December 9, 1922, p. 1.

Sixteen School
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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

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Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .72 acres

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 46.214520 | Longitude: -110.998910 |
| 2. Latitude: 46.214540 | Longitude: -110.998020 |
| 3. Latitude: 46.214020 | Longitude: -110.998020 |
| 4. Latitude: 46.214000 | Longitude: -110.998890 |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Per the Montana Cadastral, the property lies in "S08, T05 N, R06 E, TRACT OF LAND IN NE1/4NE1/4 SEC 8 T5N R6E 132' X 660'." The boundary is the historic property boundary associated with the use of the school. See attached map Section 9, page 36; reference to this map confirms the boundary.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The property boundary encompasses the historic Sixteen School and the associated teacherage, the only buildings associated with the operation of the school.

Sixteen School
Name of Property

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title: John Boughton
organization: Montana State Historic Preservation Office
street & number: 225 North Roberts, P.O. Box 201201
city or town: Helena state: MT zip code: 59620
e-mail jboughton@mt.gov
telephone: (406) 444-3647
date: July 2026

Additional Documentation

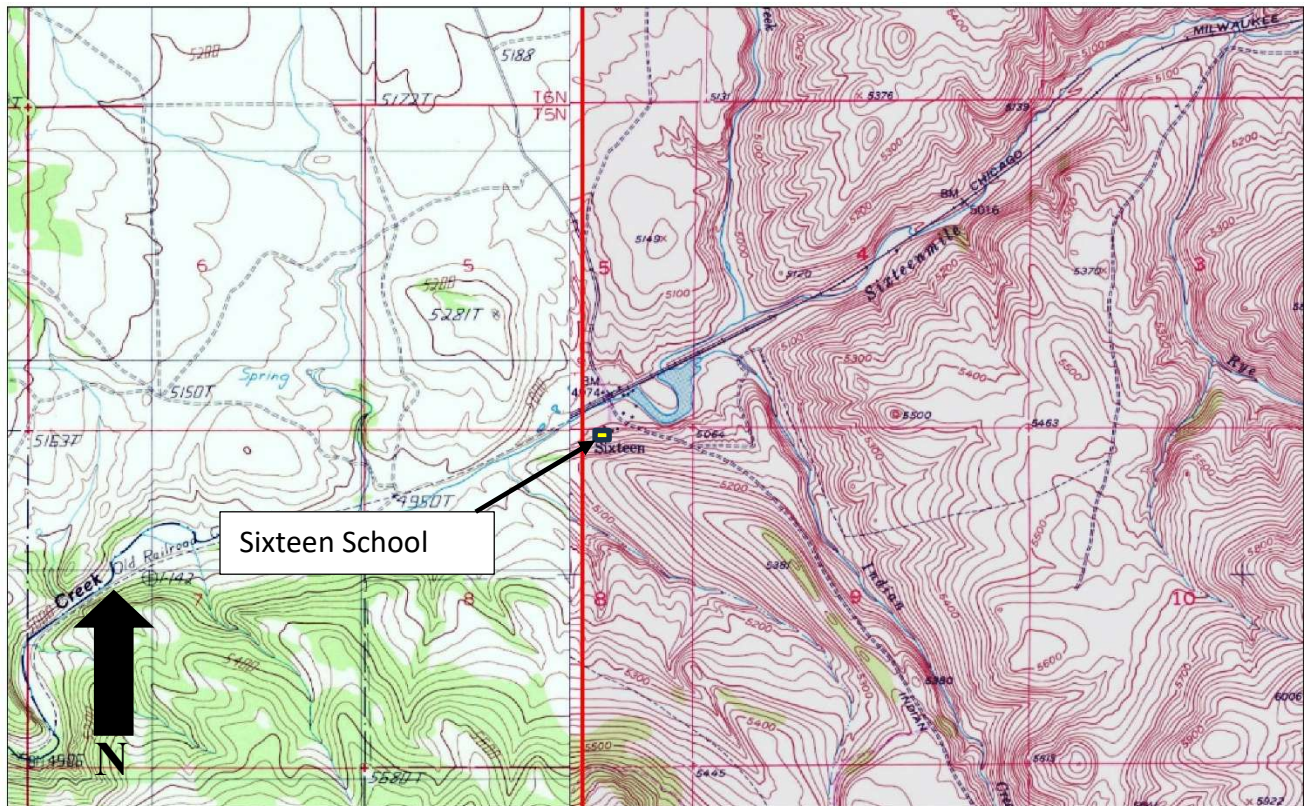
Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Sixteen School
Name of Property

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Maps and Floorplans



● — ● = 1/2 mile

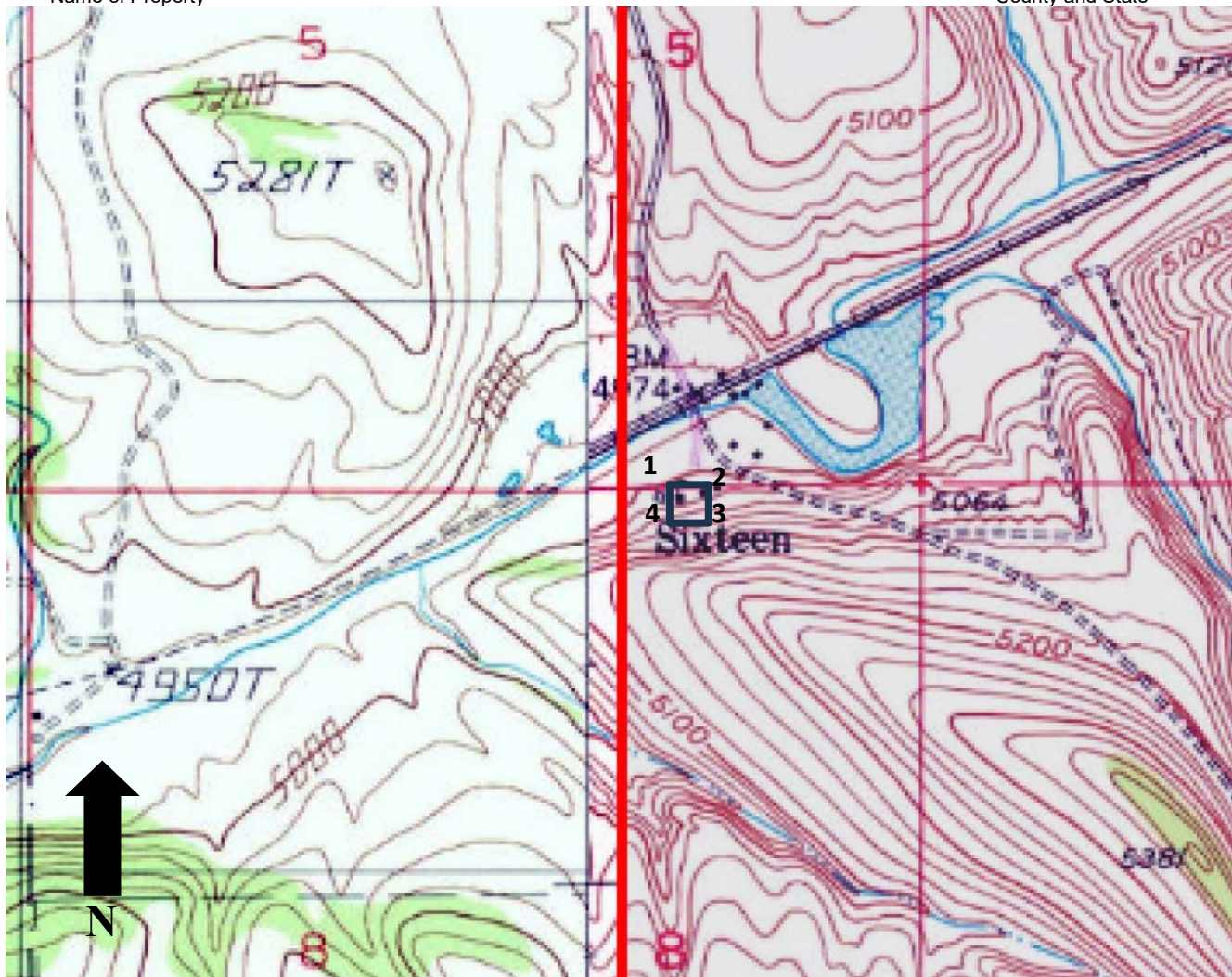
Map created using the Digital Atlas January 16, 2026
<http://msl.mt.gov/GIS/Atlas>

Montana State Library - Digital Library
(406) 444-5354 | geoinfo@mt.gov | <http://msl.mt.gov>

Location of Sixteen School. Found on the Sixteen 7.5' Quadrangle map.

Name of Property

County and State

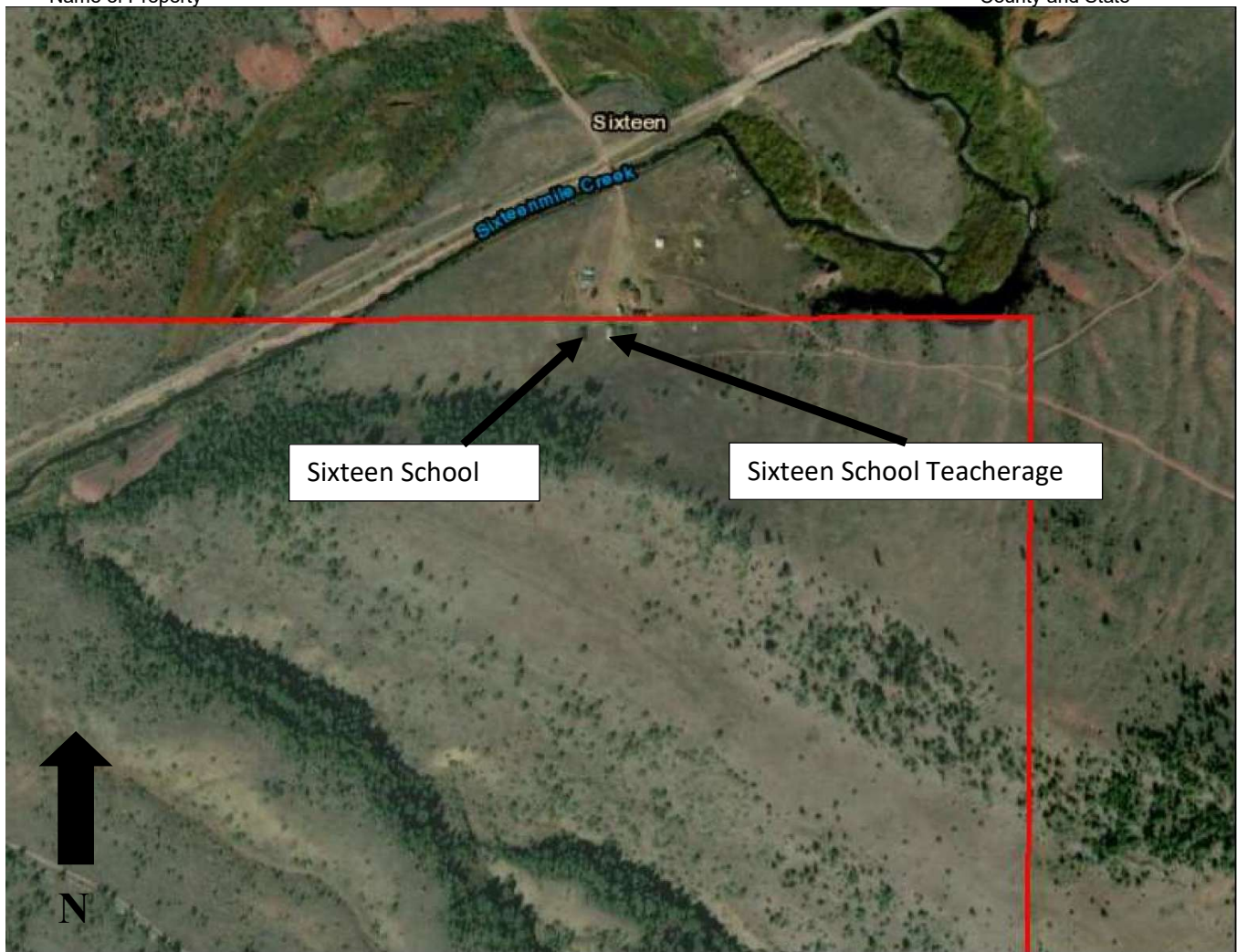


Location of Sixteen School Showing Boundary. Found on the Sixteen 7.5' Quadrangle map.

 = $\frac{1}{4}$ mile

Sixteen School
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● ————— ● = 500 ft.

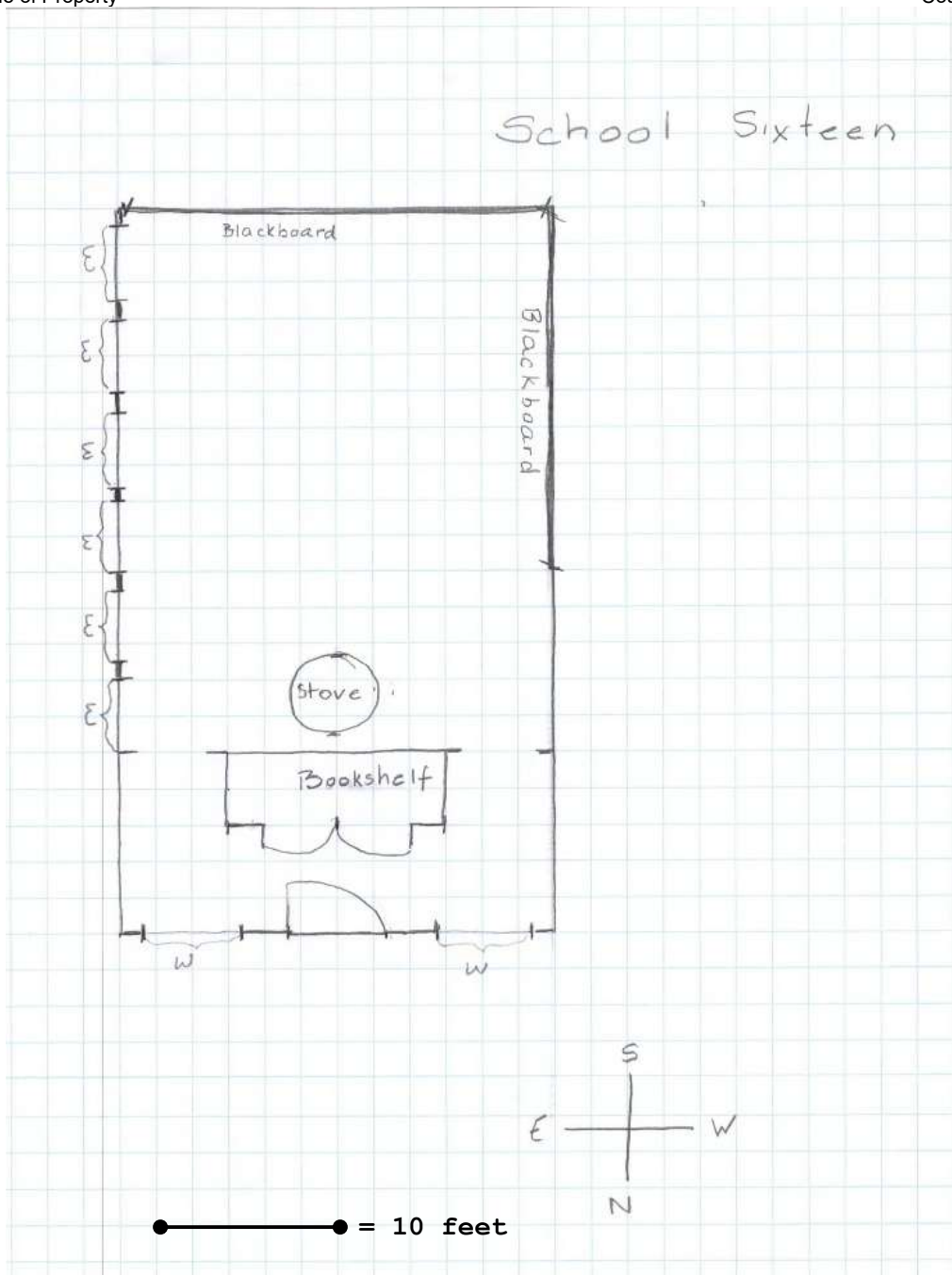
Map created using the Digital Atlas July 6, 2026
<http://msl.mt.gov/GIS/Atlas>

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Sixteen School and Sixteen School Teacherage location as seen on aerial image.

Sixteen School
Name of Property

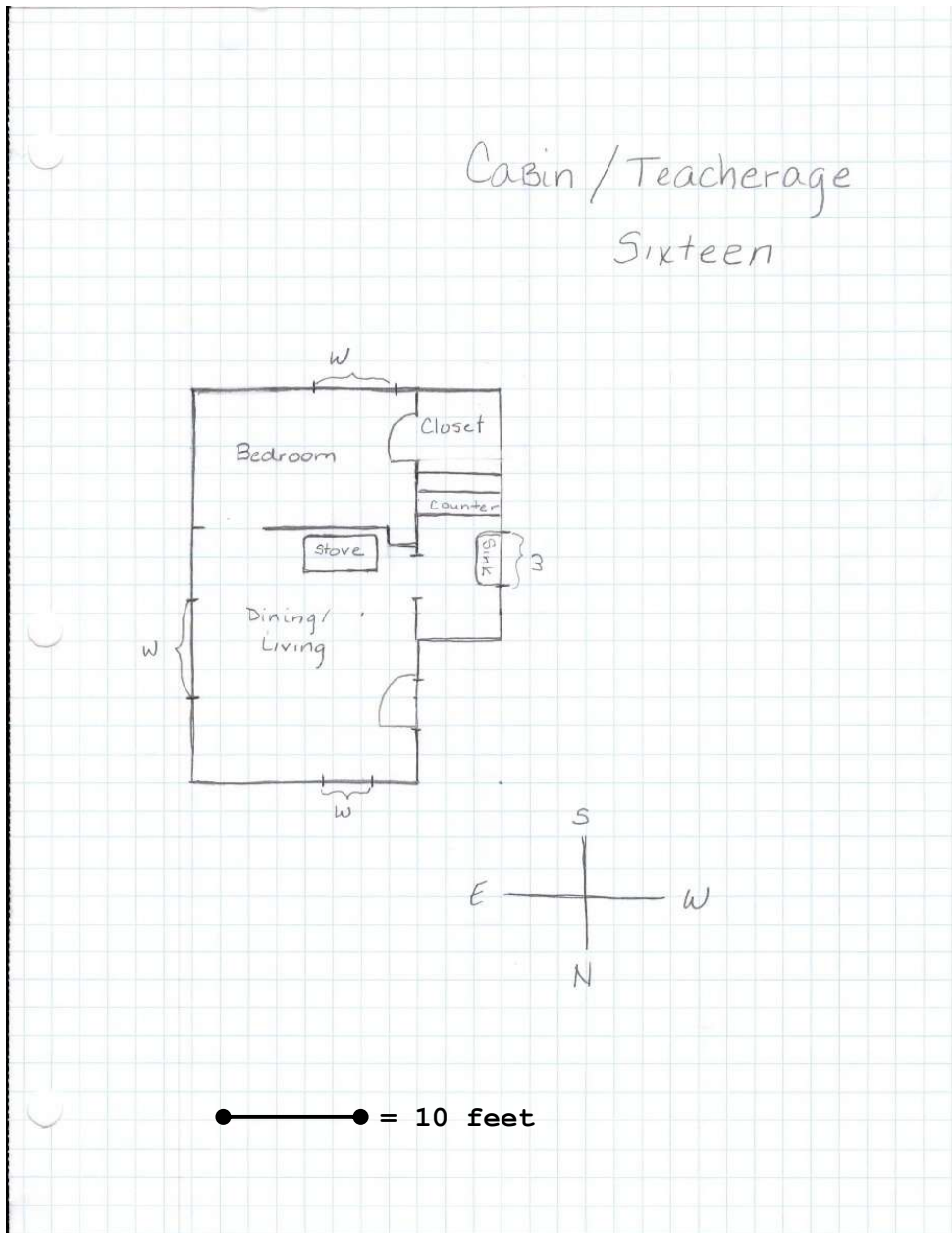
Meagher County, MT
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Sixteen School Floorplan

Sixteen School
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Sixteen School Teacherage Floorplan

Sixteen School
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Historic Images



"A typical Sat nite dance at the Sixteen School house." Courtesy of Pam Zimmerman.



Sixteen Townsite. 1931. Courtesy of Pam Zimmerman

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"A horse race through Sixteen, Montana, population about 20, in the early years of this century; an unusual photo, shot with hand-held camera." Date unknown, courtesy Pam Zimmerman. Additional information on back of image, "This House of Sky pics/Ivan Doig."

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The abandoned and unlisted Rothiemay Schoolhouse in Golden Valley, Montana—a virtual double of Sixteen School

Sixteen School
Name of Property

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County and State

National Register Photographs

Photo Log

Name of Property: Sixteen School

City or Vicinity: Sixteen

County: Meagher

State: Montana

Photographer: Pam Zimmerman

Date Photographed: Fall 2025 and spring of 2026

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

Exterior Images



MT_MeagherCounty_SixteenSchool_0001: Front façade/north elevation of Sixteen School, view to the south.

Sixteen School
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MT_MeagherCounty_SixteenSchool_0002: East and north elevations of Sixteen School, view to the southwest.

Sixteen School
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MT_MeagherCounty_SixteenSchool_0003: South and east elevations of Sixteen School, view to the northwest

Sixteen School
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MT_MeagherCounty_SixteenSchool_0004: West elevation of Sixteen School, view to the northeast.

Sixteen School
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MT_MeagherCounty_SixteenSchool_0005: Front façade/north elevation of Sixteen School Teacherage, view to the south.

Sixteen School
Name of Property

Meagher County, MT
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MT_MeagherCounty_SixteenSchool_0006: West and south elevations of Sixteen School Teacherage, view to the northwest.

Sixteen School
Name of Property

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County and State

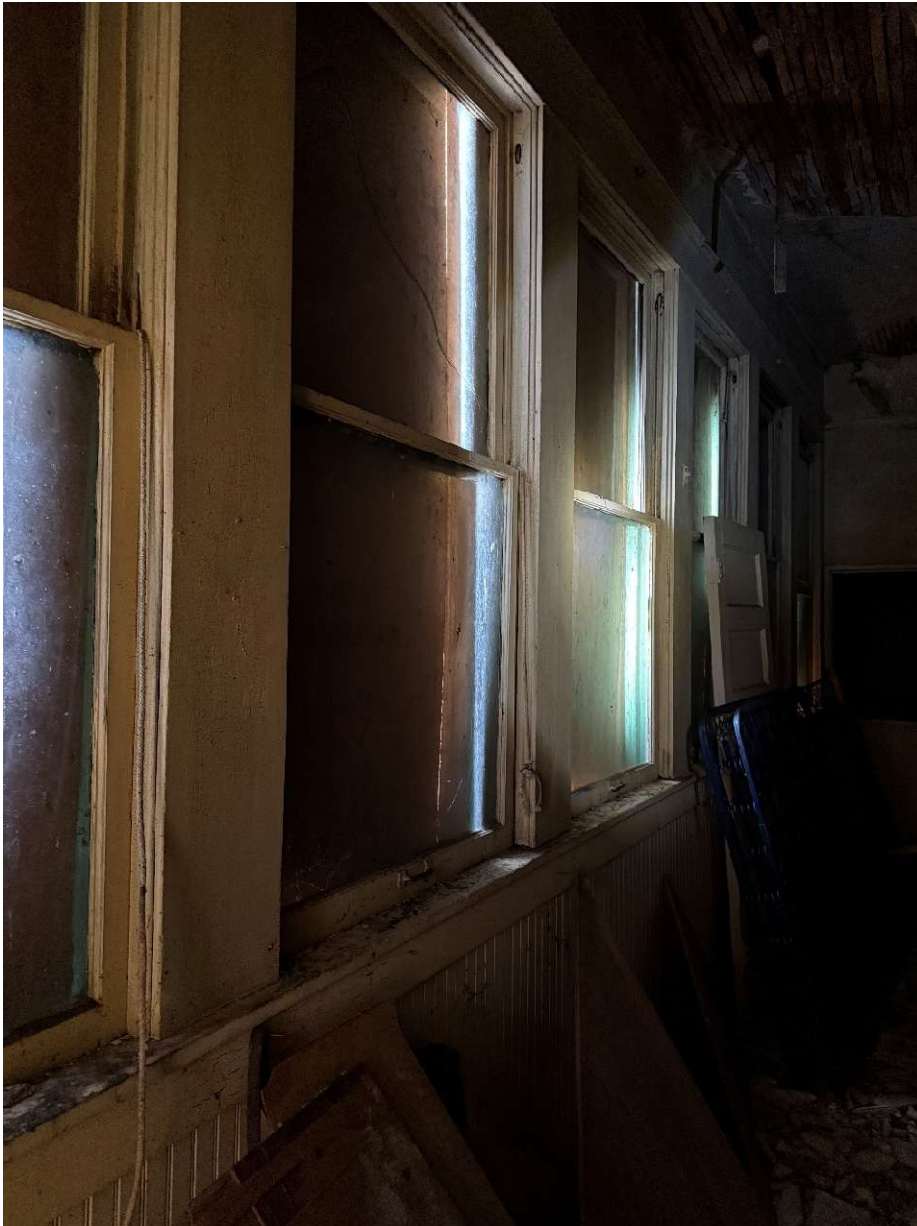


MT_MeagherCounty_SixteenSchool_0007: East elevation of Sixteen School, view to the west.

Sixteen School
Name of Property

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Interior Images (Sixteen School)



MT_MeagherCounty_SixteenSchool_0008: Windows on east wall of Sixteen School, view to the southeast

Sixteen School
Name of Property

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MT_MeagherCounty_SixteenSchool_0009: East and south walls and ceiling of Sixteen School, view to the southeast

Sixteen School
Name of Property

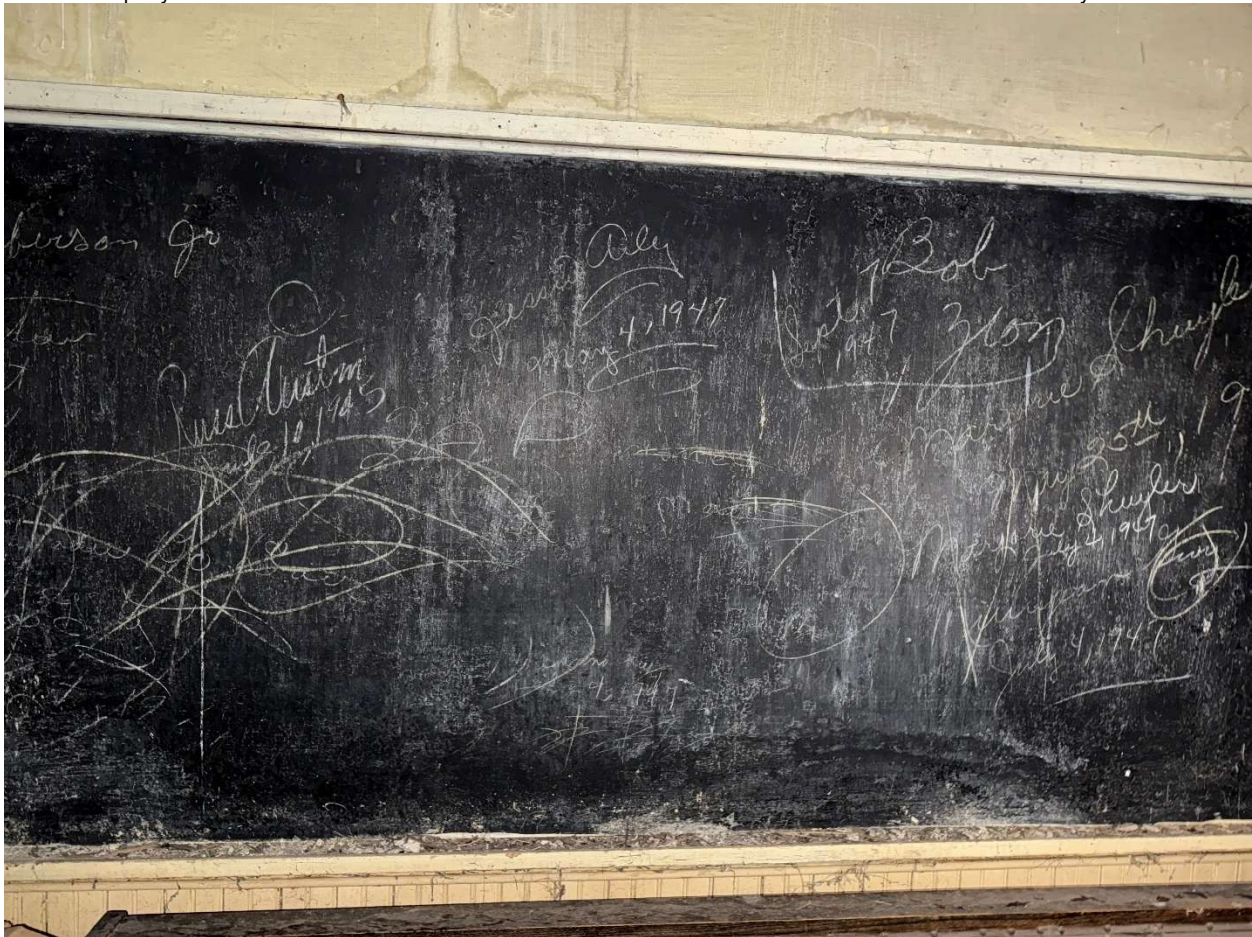
Meagher County, MT
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MT_MeagherCounty_SixteenSchool_0010: South and West walls of Sixteen school showing blackboards, view tot eh southwest

Sixteen School
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MT_MeagherCounty_SixteenSchool_0011: Close up of blackboard showing writing, view to the south

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MT_MeagherCounty_SixteenSchool_0012: Original bookshelf inside Sixteen School, view to the south

Sixteen School
Name of Property

Meagher County, MT
County and State

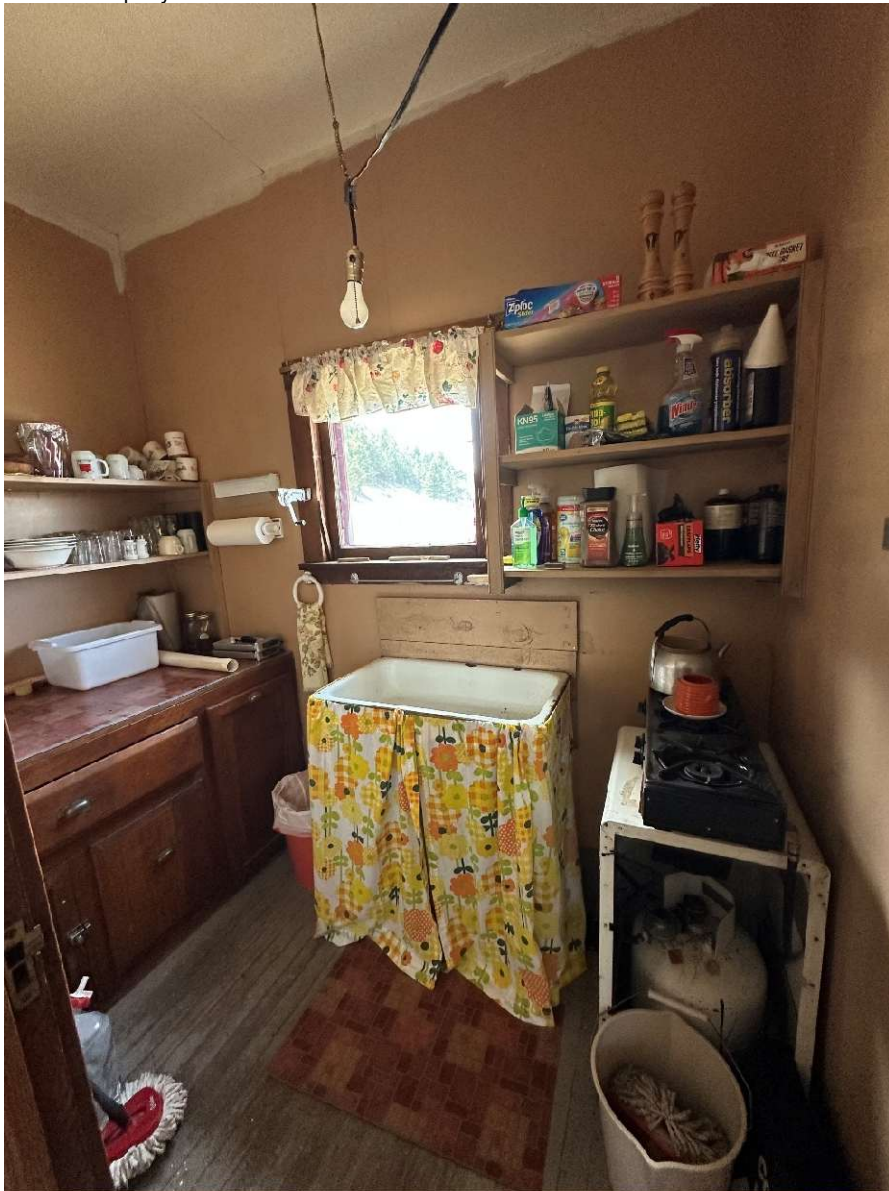
Interior Images (Sixteen School Teacherage)



MT_MeagherCounty_SixteenSchool_0013: Living area of Sixteen School Teacherage, view to the northwest

Sixteen School
Name of Property

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MT_MeagherCounty_SixteenSchool_0014: Kitchen in Sixteen School Teacherage, view to the west

Sixteen School
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MT MT_MeagherCounty_SixteenSchool_0015: Majestic Stove in Sixteen School Teacherage, view to the southwest

Sixteen School
Name of Property

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MT_MeagherCounty_SixteenSchool_0016: Closet door in Sixteen School Teacherage, view to the west

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
Tier 2 – 120 hours
Tier 3 – 230 hours
Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.