

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 Property**Historic name: Paradise SchoolOther names/site number: Paradise Elementary School, Paradise CenterName of related multiple property listing: N/A**2. Location**Street & number: 2 Schoolhouse Hill RdCity or town: Paradise State: MT County: SandersNot For Publication: ☐ N/A Vicinity: ☐ N/A**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

MT State Historic Preservation Officer 1/28/2021

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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NPS Form 10-900

OMB No. 1024-0018

Paradise Elementary School

Sanders Co., Montana

Name of Property

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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 ☐

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing

2

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2

Noncontributing

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

buildings

sites

structures

objects

Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A**6. Function or Use****Historic Functions**

EDUCATION: school

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**RECREATION AND CULTURE: museum,  
auditorium

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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## 7. Description

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### Architectural Classification

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS:

Italian Renaissance

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY AMERICAN

MOVEMENTS: Bungalow/Craftsman

### Materials:

BRICK

WOOD

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### Narrative Description Summary Paragraph

The Paradise School, now the Paradise Center, is a symmetrical two-story 1910 brick schoolhouse displaying Italian Renaissance and Craftsman style influences, a popular style of the day. A large gymnasium constructed in 1963 stands northeast of the school building. Both buildings sit on a hill overlooking the town of Paradise, Montana, and the lower Clark Fork River Valley. The town of Paradise is located in the historic Northern Pacific Railway corridor that winds through western Montana. Both the rail line and nearby Montana Highway 200 run parallel to the Clark Fork River west of the school. Numerous mountain ranges surround the valley and the town, including the Missions, Cabinets, and Bitterroots.

The school is a stately two-story brick building featuring a projecting central entry bay with a large Palladian window set into the second story, and a crowning bell tower sporting paired Palladian louvered vents in three of the four walls of the bell tower. The wood frame multi-purpose gymnasium/cafeteria was constructed northeast of the school in 1963, and includes a saltbox style roof extending at the front to cover the entrance and adjoining kitchen.

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### Narrative Description

#### Setting & Location

The Paradise School is a civic presence and sits on the top of School House Hill at the southeast end of the town of Paradise, Montana. The hill lies immediately below a ridge that forms a backdrop to the community. A paved road winds up and around the hill to access the property. The school property looks out toward the Clark Fork River to the west, and a spacious yard with a parking area and large playground lie south of the school and gymnasium, which stands behind the school to the northeast. A pole and wire mesh fence concribes the majority of the property.

Paradise, Montana is within Sanders County in the western part of the state. The town sits east of the Clark Fork River, just over a mile northwest of its confluence with the Flathead River. The valley is broad here and ringed by the Cabinet Mountains to the north, the Bitterroot Range to the west, and the Mission Range to the east. Paradise is a small railroad town that lays out over 20 platted blocks built facing Montana Highway 200 with the railroad tracks to the west. The small commercial district aligns with the highway, with a residential neighborhood to the northeast. The community is characterized by one and two-story buildings, mostly wood frame construction, dating to the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Located between the river and the highway, the railroad district has been reduced to a brick depot used for storage and staging track repairs. A large railroad tie treatment plant destroyed by fire in 1982 formerly occupied this

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area, and a 20-stall roundhouse that once sat between Plains and Paradise was removed when diesel replaced steam locomotives.

**Paradise School** (one contributing building)

The historic Paradise School is a two-story brick building constructed of warm red brick resting on an uncoursed native stone mortared basement foundation. The school features a 2,500-square foot footprint (7,500 square feet total including basement) built around a central circulation core with perimeter classrooms. Single-light awning windows with metal wells puncture the stone basement foundation and display modest segmental arches. The walls of brick bearing construction display a common bond brick pattern with full headers appearing every sixth course. The hipped rooflines accentuated by generously wide overhanging eaves with exposed brackets strongly evoke Craftsman styling. A metal roof tops the building, replacing the original wood shingles. Locally milled wood was used throughout.

The primary entrance to the building is in the projecting bay centered on the west elevation, providing an architectural focal point for the design. A bell tower crowns the top and includes a small belfry space with its original bell; restoration occurred in 2019 and the bell pull, hanging down into the entryway, still works. The bell was manufactured by the C.S. Bell Company in Hillsboro, Ohio.

West Elevation

The west elevation is the primary façade of the school highlighted by the dominant projecting bay and bell tower, the architectural focal point of the building. A four-light Palladian window topping paired one-over-one single hung units occupies the second story of this projecting bay. An associated round arch displays soldier and rowlock coursing conscribed by a single course of brick painted white. The recessed bays on each side of the projecting bay hold an eight-over-one fixed window flanked on each side by a four-over-one casement unit topped with a modest segmental arch and concrete sill in both the first and second floors. The first story arches feature individual bricks arranged in a “keystone” pattern, whereas the arches of the second story abut the cornice above. Entry occurs through paired one-light person doors topped by a single-light transom, above which rests a segmental arch of the same style as those in the recessed bays. An eight-step concrete stoop with metal handrails leads to the front entry; a concrete handicap ramp originates off the south elevation, turns north at the southwest corner of the school, and joins the stoop near the front doors.

South and North Elevations

First and second story windows consist of one-over-one double-hung units. Segmental arches of the same style as those in the recessed bays of the west elevation grace the first floor windows. A single small louvered vent appears in the elevation between the first and second floors, and between the basement and first floor. A concrete handicap ramps begins mid-way along the south elevation before turning north to join the main entry concrete stoop on the west elevation; the ramp is separated from the south wall by several feet.

East Elevation

Window style and placement in the east elevation mimics that of the south elevation. Access to the basement from this elevation is possible through a centered basement entry projecting to the east. Eight concrete steps lead down to the below-grade entry door, which is bordered by concrete retaining walls. A

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low-clearance gable roof topped with metal cladding covers the entry. An historic metal tube fire escape extends from a second story window to the ground east of the building immediately to the south of the basement entry.

**Interior**

The basic layout of the classroom building has been modestly changed since 1910, except in the basement area. The original wood steps to the main doors on the west have been replaced by concrete, augmented by a recently added handicap access ramp. The entrance opens into a main lobby foyer where two separate stairway sets, one on each side of the lobby, were constructed. One was intended to lead to the top floor and the other to the basement. Reportedly, the symmetrical design was to separate boys from the girls, especially when accessing bathrooms in the basement. During the original construction, however, one of the stairwells to the top floor was not completed—apparently to provide more usable space on the top floor. The still visible portion is commonly referred to as the “stairway to nowhere.”

Two classrooms of equal size, each with a cloakroom, open off of the foyer. The “girls” stairwell to the basement was eventually removed, and the space converted into a janitorial closet. Within the last year, the closet has become a play area with railroad toys for small children.

The top floor consists of three rooms of different sizes: a large classroom; a medium size room last used as the school library; and a small, sunny room (with the Palladian window) used variably for kindergarten, music, and in its last iteration, as a computer lab. Many decades in the past, the library was actually a stage opening into the large classroom.

Several classrooms have as many as five layers of black-green-white boards with one exposed area revealing that the original chalkboards actually consisted of black paint on plaster.

The full basement is a mix of support spaces adapted to new uses. The foundation is of uncoursed native slate and rises above grade; the inclusion of windows in the basement allows the passage of some sunlight. The fuel oil steam boiler takes up considerable floor space. Over the years, the basement was modified to accommodate bathrooms, and in the mid-1940s a kitchen was installed when the school started a lunch program. Later modifications on the basement level included a nursing station, an office for the school clerk, kindergarten, theater, faculty lounge, and a storage area where the earlier stairwell occurred. With the gymnasium construction in 1963, the kitchen moved into that building.

Throughout the building, tall, double hung windows illuminate the rooms. The surviving stairwells are brightly illuminated with natural light. The interior walls are mostly plaster lath supported with locally milled wood. The flooring is concrete in the basement, narrow plank oak boards in the main floor classrooms, and reportedly oak on the top floor (damaged due to roof leakage in 1985; now covered with industrial carpet). The oak flooring in the foyer was also damaged by steam during a boiler accident and replaced with a Pergo-like covering. Oak flooring remains in the two main floor classrooms.

Antique steam radiators original to the building continue to provide heat with steam produced by the basement boiler. It is unclear when the steam radiators were installed. The boiler is 1930s vintage (but perhaps previously used); indications exist that individual classrooms may have originally featured wood or coal fired stoves. One room in the basement shows evidence of having been used as a coal bin, filled periodically through one of the outside windows.

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**Gymnasium** (one contributing building)

The gymnasium was constructed in 1963. A saltbox roof with open eaves and enclosed rafters covered with metal sheeting tops the wood-frame building clad with wood siding.

West Elevation

The main doorway faces west and is protected by a recessed entry on the southwest corner of the building. Other fenestration includes paired one-by-one sliding windows, and two one-over-one single-hung windows topped with screens. Three small vents, two with covers, also puncture the elevation. The far north end of the gymnasium displays a shed addition projecting off the north elevation; a 16-panel fiberglass overhead door occupies the west wall of this addition. A small open gable-roof walk leads from the gymnasium's front door to the rear basement door of the school, covering a concrete walk.

South Elevation

The second story of the south elevation holds a wood person door accessed by a flight of wood steps and wood handrail. A small concrete landing accesses both the ground floor door in the west elevation and the bottom of the flight of stairs that lead to the second story door. A louvered vent occurs in the gable.

North Elevation

The north elevation displays the same cladding as the rest of the building but completely lacks fenestration. A narrow enclosure, a few feet square and likely associated with a natural gas fireplace, extends up the side of the elevation terminating just before the top of the gable. A full width shed addition extends north off the elevation.

East Elevation

The east elevation features a ribbon of five one-by-one sliding windows situated immediately below the eave. A wood person door is located in the far north end of the elevation. A single story shed roof addition that houses a stage is centered below the ribbon of windows and projects off the east wall. The south wall of this addition holds an undersized person door entry. A small shed roof addition (previously described) projects off the north elevation; paired metal vents appear in this addition's east wall.

A fenced area lies immediately south of the east projecting addition and east of the east elevation of the gymnasium.

The gymnasium's design, likely the work of the contractor, incorporates a single large gymnasium, a hot lunch kitchen, and combined bathrooms and lockers for boys and girls on the southwest side. The interior walls are finished with paint over drywall, and the floor is a concrete slab covered with large rubber floor tiles. Built in nooks house cafeteria tables across the southeast wall.

Later modifications included the addition of the balcony, a small stage addition constructed in 1974 that projects out from the east wall of the room, and a food storage area and garage (north addition) built in 2005. The bathrooms were expanded, updated, and brought into ADA-compliance in 2017-2018.

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Grounds

Outside, change is modest. The Paradise School property is flanked by a large ridge to the east. Mature evergreen and deciduous trees border the property to the west and north, with a few isolated evergreens providing scattered shade to the south and southeast. Much of the property to the south is open and used for recreation and playground, with a smaller section southeast of the buildings serving as parking. Playground equipment, except for a basketball court east of the gymnasium, congregates just south of the school and includes: a metal frame swing set, metal frame cross bars, newer plastic slides with wood platforms, a merry go round, a funnel ball pole, and buried tires to play on. The road leading to the school lies in its original location and provides the same access it has for over 100 years. Similarly, concrete steps embedded in the ground provide a walkway from the west edge of the property near the road to the front doors of the school. A wood post fence with mesh fencing surrounds most of the grounds. An interpretative walking trail around the perimeter of the site was completed in 2020. Fifteen panels provide information about the school, community, and railroad history—thus enriching the visitors' experience even when the Center is closed. These panels are "QR" enabled, providing visitors access additional audio-video information using their smart phones. Adjacent properties include the town cemetery to the south and a slate quarrying operation on private property to the east.

**Integrity of the Paradise School**

The Paradise School and gymnasium are in good condition and were used until 2013, when a significant reduction in enrollment led to the school's closure. Following that decision, the nonprofit Paradise Elementary School Preservation Committee worked with the outgoing school trustees and Sanders County Commissioners to develop a preservation and repurposing strategy. The trustees deeded the property to the county, and the county leases it to the Preservation Committee for the operation of a community, arts, and visitors center, the Paradise Center. The committee remains respectful of the historic character of the school and strives to retain all aspects of its integrity. Recent upgrades have improved the space for public use. The addition of a ramp for ADA accessibility and interior exhibits have all been done with the school's history in mind.

As a result, the school holds high levels of historic integrity on all counts. The design and materials remain unchanged, the setting and feeling of this original location have not been altered, and the historical associations with the railroad and the nearby agricultural community are still readily apparent.

The multipurpose gymnasium also retains integrity. The two additions, one off the east elevation and one off the north, were built to make the building more functional. The additions are neither large nor do they overly detract from the original presentation of the gymnasium. Similarly, the construction of an interior balcony resulted in the building being more functional with no impact to its exterior appearance. Changes such as the additions and the balcony merely reflect the evolution of the property through its history of serving the public. ADA-required restroom improvements also contribute to the functionality and usefulness as a public meeting and performance center. Seating and the stage are all movable and set up for performances; they are not attached as permanent fixtures.

The integrity of the Paradise School allows the building to reflect its long history of education and as a focal point as the center of community for the families of the railroad, timber, and agricultural workers who settled in this part of the Clark Fork River Valley.

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**8. Statement of Significance**

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**Applicable National Register Criteria**

☒

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**

Education

Architecture

**Significant Person**

**Cultural Affiliation**

**Period of Significance**

1910-1970

**Architect/Builder**

John and Josephine Kennedy (attributed)

**Significant Dates**

1910, 1962-1963

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph**

The 1910 Paradise Elementary School was a center of community in Paradise throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Sited on the hilltop southeast of town, the school served the children and families of this tiny community for over 100 years until diminished enrollment forced its closure in 2013.

The brick Paradise Elementary School is a substantial building that represents a century of educational history, symbolizing hope and stability in an era when the community was fast developing. As a well-preserved school building that mirrors the evolution of the community and the importance placed upon education in the history of the valley, the Paradise School holds historic significance and qualifies for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A.

Further, design of the Paradise School is attributed to the husband and wife architectural team of John and Josephine Kennedy, prominent for their role in rural school design in western Montana at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It reflects the influences of Renaissance Revival and Craftsman style design in schools of this era and is an excellent example of the second generation, brick two-story school that often appeared in growing settlements in the territorial and early statehood period in Montana. For this reason, it provides an example of a building type of historical importance and lends eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

The Clark Fork and Flathead Rivers join together in a circular valley that was a lakebed some 13,000 to 15,000 years in the past. The prehistoric body of water was created by a lobe of the Cordilleran ice sheet that dammed up the Clark Fork River near the present-day Montana–Idaho border. Known as Glacial Lake Missoula, this enormous reservoir existed until the warming climate melted the glaciers, and the ice dams broke. In the course of a week, the lake waters rushed downstream, scouring the land and washing away all in its path.

This mega-flood, likely repeated many times, leaving behind narrow valleys where bedrock and slide-rock edge the river, and grassy terraces hold rich alluvial soils. With its mild climate fed by the Pacific and abundant wildlife, the valley proved a resource-rich environment to the Native people of this region. The archaeological record; the oral histories of the Kootenai, Confederated Salish and Nez Perce people; and the remains of ancient trails attest to the importance of the Lower Clark Fork Valley as a travel corridor to the buffalo, an important salmon fishery, a mild setting for wintering horses, and a conducive site for tribal councils and gatherings.

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The river became an important route in the exploration of the West, first traversed in the Missoula area in 1804-1805 by Lewis & Clark's Corps of Discovery. Only a few years later, David Thompson revisited the area in 1808-1812 and mapped the Columbia River Basin on behalf of the North West Company. Thompson established fur trading posts and commerce with the Salish and Kootenai tribes. Along the Clark's Fork or Nemissoolatakoo River, Thompson established Kootenai Post near Libby and Saleesh House near Thompson Falls (1809) to secure the upper Columbia River drainage for the North West Company. For almost two decades, the Pacific Northwest served as the setting for the rivalry between the American's North West Company and the British Hudson's Bay Company. In 1821, the companies merged as the Hudson's Bay Company and established Fort Vancouver as a new headquarters for their Columbia Department.<sup>1</sup>

The early histories of exploration and trapping describe this intermontane region and its potential. As David Thompson noted (c. 1809), "The impression of my mind is, from the formation of the country and it's climate, it's extensive Meadows and fine Forests, watered by countless Brooks and Rolls of pure water, that it will become the abode of civilized Man, whether Natives or other people; part of it will bear rich crops of grain, the greater part will be pastoral, as it is admirably adapted to the rearing of Cattle and Sheep."<sup>2</sup>

The ancient travel route along the Clark's Fork was heavily used during the early fur trade era. A longtime wintering and council grounds for the Salish, Kootenai, and others, the place below the confluence of the Flathead and Clark Fork Rivers was known to early trappers as Prairie de Cheveaux or Horse Plain. In 1824 the journals of Alexander Ross record it as an encampment for trappers, including a group of African American freemen. That year in late November, the Salish and Kootenai set up a large winter camp of 128 lodges at Prairie de Cheveaux, with close to 1,000 people and 1,850 horses.<sup>3</sup>

By the mid-1800s, fur trapping gave way to mining, and then agriculture and lumbering in western Montana. White settlers began to move into the lower Clark Fork in the late 1860s, and though the valley remained remote, it began to see settled towns along the river.

The southwest boundary of the Flathead Indian Reservation is just upstream from the town of Paradise. Established by the Treaty of Hellgate of 1855, the reservation is home to the Bitterroot Salish, Pend d'Oreille, and the Kootenai. Although the reservation was a diminishment of these tribes' aboriginal lands, the United States returned in 1882 to negotiate additional land cessions from the Flathead Tribes, including a right-of-way through the reservation.<sup>4</sup>

The complete transcript of negotiations that took place between August 31 and September 2, 1882 survives. Tribal leaders including Arlee, Eneas, Michele, and others argued that the rail route could follow

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<sup>1</sup> Malone, M., R. Roeder & W. Lang. *Montana: A History of Two Centuries* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973), pp. 41-47.

<sup>2</sup> *David Thompson's Narrative, The Publications of the Champlain Society*, Vol. 12 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1916), p. 422.

<sup>3</sup> Elliott, T. (ed.), *Journal of Alexander Ross: Snake Country Expedition, 1824* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1913), pp. 386-387.

<sup>4</sup> Flathead Reservation Timeline Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes 2017, *Indian Education Division, Montana Office of Public Instruction*, found online at <https://opi.mt.gov/Portals/182/Page%20Files/Indian%20Education/Social%20Studies/K-12%20Resources/Flathead%20Timeline.pdf>, accessed 23 November 2020.

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the lower Clark Fork River (then called the Missoula River) below Missoula. Federal Commissioner Joseph McCammon responded, "The Great Father . . . thinks he knows what is best" for the Indians. When pressed, the tribal delegation asked for \$1 million for the 1500 acres. Ultimately, they accepted \$16,000 and signed the Flathead Railroad Treaty of 1882.<sup>5</sup>

***The Northern Pacific Railroad and Paradise<sup>6</sup>***

Following the Civil War, the push for a transcontinental railroad sparked competition to connect the rail system from the eastern half of the nation through the Great Plains and Rocky Mountain West to the Pacific Coast. The Union Pacific-Central Pacific railroad was the first to achieve this, completing a route between Omaha, Nebraska and Sacramento, California in 1869. To span the northern territories, Congress granted the Northern Pacific Railway a charter in July 1864, and the Northern Pacific Railroad Co. officially organized on December 7 that year.<sup>7</sup>

Financed by Jay Cooke and company, the Northern Pacific (NP) began construction in 1870, building west from Pacific Junction, Minnesota. Construction came to a standstill with the Panic of 1873, and the NP's subsequent bankruptcy. While they regrouped, the Union Pacific entered Montana Territory by completing a Utah & Northern branch line from Corinne, Utah to Dillon (1880) and then Butte, Montana (1881).<sup>8</sup>

A resurrected Northern Pacific was destined to be the second transcontinental railroad line through Montana, after reorganizing and beginning construction anew in 1879. In 1881, Henry Villard took control of the railroad and with renewed vigor, rail crews built their way across Montana. The NP completed its line at Gold Creek, Montana, with a ceremonial golden spike driving ceremony in 1883.<sup>9</sup>

With completion of the railroad line, the NP looked to establish towns and support facilities across their route. Livingston and Billings were the major division points in the Territory, and heavily timbered western Montana was eyed for rail tie production. In 1906, the NP built the "Low Line," a river-level rail line running from Paradise to St. Regis. The Low Line connected the Wallace Branch from the Silver Valley of Idaho with the line that terminated in Missoula, Montana.<sup>10</sup>

In a common pattern, the NP's Northwestern Improvement Company bypassed the existing town of Plains and instead chose a location about six miles upstream at Paradise for a tie plant.<sup>11</sup> In 1907, crews constructed the NP Tie Treating Plant in Paradise, one of just two such plants for the entire line. The

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<sup>5</sup>Secretary of the Interior, Message and Documents Communicated to the Two Houses of Congress (47<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session.), Vol. II, 1882, pp. 163-164.

<sup>6</sup>For general information see B. M. Hanson, *Milepost Zero: A Chronicle of the Northern Pacific and its Presence in Paradise, Montana* (Self-Published, 2010).

<sup>7</sup>Malone *et al.*, pp. 172-174; Paradise Elementary Preservation Committee, *The Paradise Center: A Proposal for a Second Century of Service for the Paradise School* (Paradise: Paradise Elementary Preservation Committee, 2016), p. 8. On File at the Paradise Center, Paradise, MT.

<sup>8</sup>Malone *et al.*, pp. 172-178.

<sup>9</sup>Malone *et al.*, pp. 177.

<sup>10</sup>Benita M. Hanson, *Milepost Zero: A Chronicle of the Northern Pacific and its Presence in Paradise, Montana*. Paradise: Self-Published, 2010, pp. 88.

<sup>11</sup>Travis DeWitz, *Paradise, Montana—Historical Railroad Geography Series*, found at <https://www.therailroadcollection.com/atlas-series/paradise-montana-historical-railroad-geography-series/>, accessed 23 November 2020.

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Paradise tie plant began operations in the spring of 1908, and that first year treated over 370,000 ties. At peak operation, the crew numbered 45.<sup>12</sup>

In April 1908, the railroad platted the town of Paradise. In his Certificate of Dedication that accompanied the survey plat filed in the new county seat of Sanders County, Edward Elliott, President of both the Northern Pacific and the Northwestern Improvement Company, named the town of Paradise. His Dedication said in part, "To be known and designated as 'Paradise', said Paradise being an unincorporated town in Sanders County, Montana, and that the land included in all streets, avenues, and alleys, shown on this plat are hereby granted and dedicated to the use of the public forever. Dated this sixth day of June, 1908."<sup>13</sup>

In addition to tie plant operations, the NP sited a rail passenger depot, a 45-room hotel, and a "beanery" café at Paradise for travelers and railroad workers. Paradise became a Division Point where Idaho and Rocky Mountain Division crews changed. A smaller hotel—the Cliff House—west of town accommodated the engine crews while their locomotives were being serviced in the roundhouse. Paradise had the designation of Milepost 0 in the Idaho Division. The mileage designation was posted where the two main lines merge, east of the depot.<sup>14</sup>

The town plat for Paradise eventually spread across roughly 20 blocks. The commercial district runs parallel to the tracks and the railroad district across Montana Highway 200. The original plat set aside parcels for two churches—one Protestant and one Catholic—and provided property for a school. In 1910 and 1911, the 3.53-acre school site, on what became known as "School House Hill" at the southeast edge of town, was granted to the Paradise Elementary School District #8 by the Northwest Improvement Company.<sup>15</sup>

That year, Paradise included 300 people over an 8-block area lined by wood frame four-square workers cottages and wood Craftsman-style homes. The business district included the Northern Pacific Hotel, three general stores, a post office, two drug stores, a meat market, two restaurants, a saloon, a pool hall, an ice house and a bakery. By 1927, there were 400 people, along with a jail, a movie house, and two confectionary stores. Never a large community, over the 20<sup>th</sup> century the population remained below 1000.<sup>16</sup>

Paradise was a working town and life centered around industrial jobs. Railroad operations and the tie plant provided steady employment for the community, along with service industry jobs for the community. In addition, there was employment in timber and family-run agricultural farms and ranches in the surrounding lower Clark Fork valley.

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<sup>12</sup> Benita M. Hanson, *Milepost Zero: A Chronicle of the Northern Pacific and its Presence in Paradise, Montana*. Paradise: Self-Published, 2010, pp. 153, 157.

<sup>13</sup> Paradise Elementary Preservation Committee, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Benita M. Hanson, *Milepost Zero: A Chronicle of the Northern Pacific and its Presence in Paradise, Montana*. Paradise: Self-Published, 2010, pp. 100-101.

<sup>15</sup> Steve Adler, Philip Maechling, and Bob Oaks produced the feasibility study, which also incorporated work by the Community Design Center at the Montana State University School of Architecture, directed by Professor Tom McNab, and the Small Business Institute, at the University of Montana Business School, managed by Professor Bambi Douma, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Map for Paradise, Montana, 1910 and 1927. U.S. Department of the Census, Decennial Census 1900 – 1980.

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After the original wood frame railroad depot in Paradise was destroyed by fire in 1943, the Northern Pacific built a new brick depot in the same location. The new building was a "Class A" depot with facilities for crews waiting to board their next train after checking with the crew they relieved. Division points offered more accommodations at the depot than other stops along the railroad route. The new depot allotted rooms for administrative work and for crews as they awaited their next assignment.<sup>17</sup>

Alongside the depot stood another Northern Pacific icon, "The Beanery," a well-respected restaurant, open 24 hours a day every day of the week. The structure itself was similar to the original depot. Railroad towns all along the Northern Pacific line had a "Beanery." While the location of the café sat near the tracks, townspeople and travelers frequented the restaurant because of the quality of the food and its always convenient hours, compared to the NP Hotel, which also boasted a spacious dining room but only served food at mealtime. After growing complaints from crews coming and going on whatever "ride" they had just completed, the company built a lunchroom with 24/7 service for their hungry employees. Even though "The Beanery" was established to meet a need for railroad crews, the café became an integral part of the town itself.<sup>18</sup>

Throughout the history of the town, the railroad provided Paradise with a steady, resilient economy. However, long-running negotiations to consolidate the nation's large rail lines led in 1970 to the merger of the Northern Pacific; Burlington; Spokane, Portland & Seattle; and Great Northern railroads. The resulting Burlington Northern railroad ended passenger service through the region in 1979 and ultimately consolidated and reduced its workforce along its routes.

The largest impact to Paradise was the closing of the tie plant and its subsequent destruction by fire in 1982. The fire eliminated the town's primary industry and led to years of decline, aggravated by the reorganization of the railroad. Since 1982, the population and economic base have suffered, and the population declined. The provision of local goods and services has waned, and the business district has suffered many losses: the hotel and The Beanery no longer stand, the local café/bar – the Pair A Dice – burned in 2008, not to be replaced. Today, just two commercial establishments operate in Paradise.

In Spring 2013, with only five students enrolled, the Paradise School Trustees decided to close their school, forcing those students to attend school in Plains the following fall. Closing the school left the trustees with a mandatory three-year period to decide the future of the school, or have it incorporated into the Plains School District in July 2016. Believing the facility was central to the community and its identity, local residents formed the Paradise Elementary School Preservation Committee and partnered with the Sanders County Board of Commissioners and the Sanders County Community Development Corporation (SCCDC) to explore options to repurpose the school and adopt an action plan. With a Community Development Block Grant from the Montana Department of Commerce in 2014, a feasibility study was undertaken to assess the resources for repurposing the school as a community center, arts center and visitor center.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Benita M. Hanson, *Milepost Zero: A Chronicle of the Northern Pacific and its Presence in Paradise, Montana*. Paradise: Self-Published, 2010, pp. 130.

<sup>18</sup> Benita M. Hanson, *Milepost Zero: A Chronicle of the Northern Pacific and its Presence in Paradise, Montana*. Paradise: Self-Published, 2010, pp. 116.

<sup>19</sup> Steve Adler, Philip Maechling, and Bob Oaks, feasibility study.

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**History of Paradise School**

As a community developed around the railroad in Paradise, the need for a public school arose. The first wooden structure (still extant) was located on the flats in town, but the student body soon outgrew the space. Community leaders worked with the railroad to plan for a replacement. The railroad-affiliated land company, the Northwestern Improvement Company, sold land on a hillside overlooking the town to the school district for \$100.<sup>20</sup>

Early mention of the search for contractors to construct the new school first appeared in August of 1909 with the notice, "Contractors will be interested in the advertisement... for the construction of a new school building in Paradise. Plans and specifications can be seen at several places designated in the advertisement."<sup>21</sup> The same issue of the paper also reported that a special meeting of the Board of Trustees School District No. 1 convened. Items discussed included consideration of bids for \$10,000 bonds received from Union Bank & Trust of Helena, A.S. Kean & Co. of Chicago, and Farson Son & Co. of Chicago, who all submitted guaranteed bids. Although the article fails to mention the bond was for the construction of a new school building, it is highly likely that is exactly the case.<sup>22</sup> The bid of the Union Bank & Trust of Helena was accepted unanimously.

By May of 1910, bids were being requested for the construction of the new school; "Notice to Contractors, Sealed bids will be received at the office of the clerk School District No. 8 (Paradise) in Sanders County for the construction of a four-room school house in accordance with the plans and specifications now on file at the office of the clerk."<sup>23</sup> Construction ensued with the two-story (plus basement) brick structure completed in 1910 in time for the first class. The Paradise School opened offered grades 1 through 12. Additional land for a playground was acquired from the Northwestern Improvement Company in 1911 for \$1.00.<sup>24</sup>

With the construction of the new school complete, hiring educators began. J.R. Norville was one of the first principals to serve in the new Paradise School building. Norville previously served as the principal in Wisdom before accepting the position in Paradise.<sup>25</sup> J.W. Skelton was another early principal at the new building who hailed originally from Ohio and was involved in education much of his life.<sup>26</sup> "Professor"

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<sup>20</sup> Benita M. Hanson, *Milepost Zero: A Chronicle of the Northern Pacific and its Presence in Paradise, Montana*. Paradise: Self-Published, 2010, pp. 98.

<sup>21</sup> "Local News and Items of Plains and Vicinity," *Sanders County Signal*, 7 August 1909.

<sup>22</sup> "Paradise Local News," *Sanders County Signal*, 7 August 1909.

<sup>23</sup> "Notice to Contractor," *The Sanders County Ledger*, 20 May 1910.

<sup>24</sup> Paradise Elementary Preservation Committee, p. 3. The playground and parking area were expanded a final time to 3.54 acres in 1991 with a .76-acre donation of land from the Ernest Johnson family.

<sup>25</sup> *The Dillon Tribune*, 23 June 1911; although unconfirmed, circumstantial evidence suggests the first to serve as the principal at the new building may have been Ella Castlio, who was not only a teacher but was also noted to be the county superintendent of schools for several years in the late 1900s. Ms. Castillo is noted in teacher lists of the Paradise School as being present in 1909. A gap exists in the list from 1909 to 1912. If Ms. Castlio served as the first principal in the new building, her early and untimely demise in 1911 at the age of 54 would have resulted in the opening of the position then assumed by J. R. Norville. *R. L. Polk & Co.'s 1907 US City Directory*; Ella M. Castlio, "Commissioners Proceedings," *Sanders County Signal*, 9 January 1909; "Find a Grave", found at <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/59250329/ella-m.-castlio>, accessed 8 October 2020.

<sup>26</sup> *The Sanders County Ledger*, 2 May 1913; 1920 Federal United States Census.

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Skelton served as principal for two years and was elected a third time to succeed himself, but stepped down after being offered a more lucrative contract for the principalship at Judith Gap.<sup>27</sup> One of the earliest teachers to have worked at the new Paradise School was Jennie Fountain, who also stepped down in June of 1911 bound for her new home in Penoka, Alberta.<sup>28</sup> Other early employees at the new school included Miss Hart and Miss Duncan, who in October of 1911 attended venues outside of town to broaden their skills. That month the two women travelled to Missoula to attend the "teachers' institute."<sup>29</sup>

Although not called-out as holding accreditation in 1912, the Paradise School still required many of the same necessities that any school operating at the time did.<sup>30</sup> In the July 1912 edition of the *Sanders County Ledger*, the school board requested sealed bids for the delivery of 60 cords of "green cut tamarack or fir wood, and 20 cords dry tamarack and fir wood...and sixty (60) tons of cal (*sic*) to be delivered at the school house."<sup>31</sup> Similar bid requests continued for several years.<sup>32</sup>

Additional work on the school continued for the next few years after its 1910 completion. In June of 1912, a "Notice Of And Call For Bids," was printed in the newspaper "... for a steam heating plant complete and installed in the school house at Paradise as per the plans and specifications on file with the clerk of said board."<sup>33</sup> This was followed four years later for a request for bids for the installation of plumbing fixtures at the school.<sup>34</sup>

The year 1916 also witnessed Paradise School recognized as one of eight schools in Sanders County that earned the "name plate" of "Standard School," awarded by the State Superintendent. The certification was based on several factors including the buildings, school equipment, school grounds, students and community activities, and quality of work performed by the school itself.<sup>35</sup>

Apparently, little out of the ordinary occurred at the Paradise School during the 1920s based on a virtual dearth of news coverage on the school during that decade. However, one major change did occur in the mid-1920s—the move from the school educating grades 1 through 12 to focusing on grades 1 through 8. The last high school class graduated from the school in May 1926 and consisted of seven seniors. Due to insufficient school space, graduation exercises were held at the local theater.<sup>36</sup> For the next two years, 9<sup>th</sup> through 11<sup>th</sup> grade students could still attend classes at Paradise but needed to enroll elsewhere for their senior year and to receive their diploma.<sup>37</sup> As Paradise School transitioned away from high school grade-education, and prior to the completion of a decent road between Paradise and nearby Plains, students of

<sup>27</sup> "Paradise Teacher Given A Surprise," *The Missoulian*, 25 August 1914.

<sup>28</sup> *The Missoulian*, 11 June 1911.

<sup>29</sup> *The Daily Missoulian*, 12 October 1911.

<sup>30</sup> State of Montana, Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1912, p. 21.

<sup>31</sup> "Notice Of And Call For Bids," *The Sanders County Ledger*, 19 July 1912.

<sup>32</sup> "Notice Of And Call For Bids," *The Sanders County Ledger*, 25 July 1913.

<sup>33</sup> "Notice Of And Call For Bids," *The Sanders County Ledger*, 21 June 1912.

<sup>34</sup> "Notice to Plumbing Contractors," *The Missoulian*, 1 July 1916.

<sup>35</sup> *Sanders County Signal*, 11 August 1916.

<sup>36</sup> "With Passing of C.D. Thaxton, Days of Paradise High School Recalled," *The Missoulian*, 25 October 1964.

<sup>37</sup> Paradise School Teacher Registers, 1926-27 & 1927-28, on file at the Paradise Center, Paradise, MT.

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high school age who formerly attended Paradise could travel by a “dinky” rail engine each Monday morning to Thompson Falls where they boarded throughout the week at the high school, returning to Paradise on Friday.<sup>38</sup> Paradise continued to provide education to grades 1 through 8 for the remaining students. Once the highway was improved between Paradise and Plains, Paradise students began attending high school in Plains.<sup>39</sup> In the 1970s, the Paradise school began offering kindergarten.<sup>40</sup>

One constant thread among all schools is the need for financial support by the local community. In 1924, such support was requested through a special 8-mill tax levy presented to the Paradise voters to allow the school “... to carry on the school activities...”. The funds available under a 10-mill levy proved inadequate necessitating the special levy vote.<sup>41</sup>

Other funding came through for all Sanders County schools in 1935 including “Paradise school improvements.”<sup>42</sup> More improvements took place four years later with the installation of a new heating plant by H.C. Scott of Plains; additional work that year included installation of new hardwood floors and interior redecorating.<sup>43</sup> The year of 1939 witnessed the addition of the tube fire-escape on the south elevation. While few schools retain these types of fire escapes, the Paradise School tube escape continues to cling to the building.

As building improvements continued, other news related to the Paradise School occurred. Near tragedy was averted in November of 1936 when a Paradise School bus overturned on ice, rolling twice. Luckily, neither the driver nor any of the children were seriously injured. The bus was following its regular route of picking up children when the accident occurred.<sup>44</sup> Also arresting, but less alarming, was the presence of a snake in the school, which garnered coverage on page 3 of *The Missoulian* in 1937. The author of the article colorfully noted, “If education is considered a help to the redemption of the world, there is still hope for humanity for even the snakes of Paradise are found in school...”.<sup>45</sup> The prospective reptilian student, identified as a bull snake, alas, was summarily dismissed from not only class, but from its time on earth. Health took a grim turn again in 1938 when the Paradise School closed for a week because of scarlet fever. The school board in consultation with the county health officer made the decision after several cases developed over a weekend.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> While the “dinky” story is often told among Paradise School alumni, no direct documentation of these Paradise-Thompson Falls commutes has been found. See, however, John Stromnes’ article in *The Missoulian*, 13 June 2003, for information on the Thompson Falls School Dormitory, and Mona Leeson Vanek’s discussion of the dinky in, “Behind These Mountains: Great Service-Sometimes Risky,” 4 March 2011, found at <http://www.behindthesemountains.com/2011/02/great-service-sometimes-risky.html>, accessed 30 November 2020.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Karval Pickering, former student, school clerk and Trustees Chair, 29 November 2020.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Karval Pickering, former student, school clerk and Trustees Chair, 29 November 2020.

<sup>41</sup> “Paradise Votes School Levy,” *The Missoulian*, 11 March 1924.

<sup>42</sup> “Planning Board Gives Approval Of Projects,” *The Montana Standard*, 17 February 1935.

<sup>43</sup> “Paradise,” *The Missoulian*, 10 September 1939; “Paradise School To Open Tuesday,” *The Missoulian*, 29 August 1939.

<sup>44</sup> “Paradise School Bus Turns Over On Icy Grade,” *The Independent Record*, 18 November 1936.

<sup>45</sup> “Snake Killed in Paradise School,” *The Missoulian*, 14 August 1937.

<sup>46</sup> “Paradise School is Closed for a Week Because of Fever,” *The Independent Record*, 20 April 1938.



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In 1938, the Paradise School was able to boast that they were one of the few schools in the district that were free of debt, with the exception of running expenses. The last large sums paid out related to schoolhouse improvements and a new water system. Some of this financial relief lay with Northern Pacific Railway who assisted the school.<sup>47</sup>

This lack of debt may have motivated a group of local businessmen to investigate the possibility of constructing a gymnasium at the school.<sup>48</sup> Although such ideas had ruminated in the community for a "considerable time," and despite the preparation of preliminary plans that included a "regulation floor, dining room, store room and stage," such a project never moved forward until the early 1960s. While the construction of a stand-alone gymnasium never gained traction, or maybe because of it, a large playroom in the school's basement was remodeled and table tennis tables installed for use not only by the students but by the community. Success was such that evening table tennis gatherings occurred with women playing on Thursday nights and men on Monday nights.<sup>49</sup> Athletic fever took hold of the school at this time, reflected by the 100 percent turnout of the student population to participate in track events on a track constructed by the students.<sup>50</sup> Everyone partook with the "girls...holding their own beside the boys on the track...". Showing the desire to embrace as many kids as possible in the competitions, the athletic events also included high jumping, broad jumping, and potato and three-legged races.

Concurrent with the Paradise School's athletic opportunities, educational pursuits also occurred. In 1940, for the first time ever, Paradise School offered music instruction with a wide variety of instruments from which to choose. String instruction included violin and bass, woodwind lessons included clarinet and saxophone, brass instruction encompassed bass horn and trumpet, and snare drums also received a nod for instruction. Plans included the organization of a 20-piece orchestra by the end of the semester.<sup>51</sup>

In 1963, the idea of constructing a gymnasium for the Paradise School was resurrected. March of that year saw the circulation and acceptance by the school district trustees of petitions requesting a bond election for construction of the gym for an estimated cost of \$40,000. The bond election was slated to occur in conjunction with the annual school election the start of April.<sup>52</sup> Though close, residents narrowly approved the nine-mill levy to raise \$40,000 for the construction of a gymnasium next to Paradise School with a final tally of 38 "yeas" and 32 "nays."<sup>53</sup> Construction began in July and was overseen by Ed Hazelton, a Paradise contractor. In addition to serving as a gymnasium, the building would also house the new kitchen and dining room along with a second set of restrooms and showers.<sup>54</sup> A breezeway was also planned to connect

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<sup>47</sup> "This Is Paradise; School District Free From Debt," *The Independent Record*, 17 February 1938.

<sup>48</sup> "Paradise Planning School Gymnasium," *The Missoulian*, 8 February 1940.

<sup>49</sup> "Playground At Paradise," *The Missoulian*, 20 February 1940.

<sup>50</sup> "Paradise Youngsters in 'All Out' Track Support," *The Missoulian*, 18 April 1941.

<sup>51</sup> "Music Lesson in Paradise Schools," *The Missoulian*, 20 September 1940.

<sup>52</sup> "Gym Petitions," *Great Falls Tribune*, 15 March 1963.

<sup>53</sup> "Levy Approved," *The Missoulian*, 14 April 1963.

<sup>54</sup> The first hot lunch program at the school commenced in 1945-1946.

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the four-classroom school building to the gymnasium.<sup>55</sup> In 1974, a small stage addition was constructed off the east elevation, and a food storage area and garage were built off the north elevation in 2005.

That the Paradise School stood as a facility at which educators liked to teach is illustrated by the service of C.D. Thaxton. When Mr. Thaxton signed a contract to be the principal of the school in July of 1936, he began his 13<sup>th</sup> year of service at the building.<sup>56</sup> With his passing in August of 1964, Mr. Thaxton was recalled fondly by the town of Paradise for his interest in people and his drive. His employment with the school and role in the community earned him the nickname, "Mr. Paradise."<sup>57</sup>

Many educators moved from one nearby location to another, as illustrated by the arrival of Emerson Richardson as principal at Paradise School in 1940 after his tenure as a teacher at the nearby Plains High School.<sup>58</sup> The practice of rehiring teachers in successive years allowed for a continuation of established teaching styles and personalities that often eased the transition for kids as they matriculated upwards. Sometimes the retention of teachers from the previous year was also met with a financial incentive as illustrated by the rehiring of teachers in 1941, who not only learned they retained their position but were also given a "substantial raise in pay."<sup>59</sup>

Enrollment stayed fairly constant through the years for the Paradise School. The Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction indicates Paradise operated nine months per year, enrolled 70 students (no grade breakdown), and employed two teachers and a principal.<sup>60</sup> Ten years later, during the 1921-1922 school year, Paradise enrolled 49 students (15 listed as high school grades) and employed three teachers.<sup>61</sup> In September of 1939, 64 kids enrolled, a small decrease noted from the previous year, which boasted 70 pupils.<sup>62</sup> With the 1941-1942 school year approaching, an article in *The Missoulian* noted that not a single seventh grader was enrolled the previous year, portending the possibility that for the first time ever, the Paradise School might not boast an eighth grade graduating class the following spring.<sup>63</sup> By May of 1942, the article proved prescient. Although one eighth grader did in fact attend Paradise School, that student joined the students from nearby Plains for ceremonies. It marked the first time in Paradise School history that no graduating program was conducted.<sup>64</sup> By 1958, enrollment continued a slow decline. Forty students total spanned the grades with 11 kids in either first or second grade, eight in the third, three in the fourth, five in the fifth, five children in the sixth, four in the seventh, and four in the eighth grade.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> "Multipurpose Building for Paradise," *The Missoulian*, 3 October 1963.

<sup>56</sup> "Thaxton Signs Contract," *The Missoulian*, 4 July 1936.

<sup>57</sup> "With Passing of C.D. Thaxton, Days of Paradise High School Recalled," *The Missoulian*, 25 October 1964.

<sup>58</sup> "To Paradise School," *The Missoulian*, 2 September 1940.

<sup>59</sup> "Paradise Teachers Rehired," *The Missoulian*, 27 April 1941.

<sup>60</sup> State of Montana, Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1912, p. 21.

<sup>61</sup> Paradise School Teacher Registers, 1921-22, on file at the Paradise Center, Paradise, MT.

<sup>62</sup> "Paradise," *The Missoulian*, 10 September 1939; "Paradise School Starts for Term," *The Missoulian*, 7 September 1938.

<sup>63</sup> "No Eighth Grade Pupil in Sight," 2 June 1941.

<sup>64</sup> "Single Graduate At Paradise; No Commencement" *The Missoulian*, 23 May 1942.

<sup>65</sup> "Plains Student Gain in 14," *The Missoulian*, 14 September 1958.

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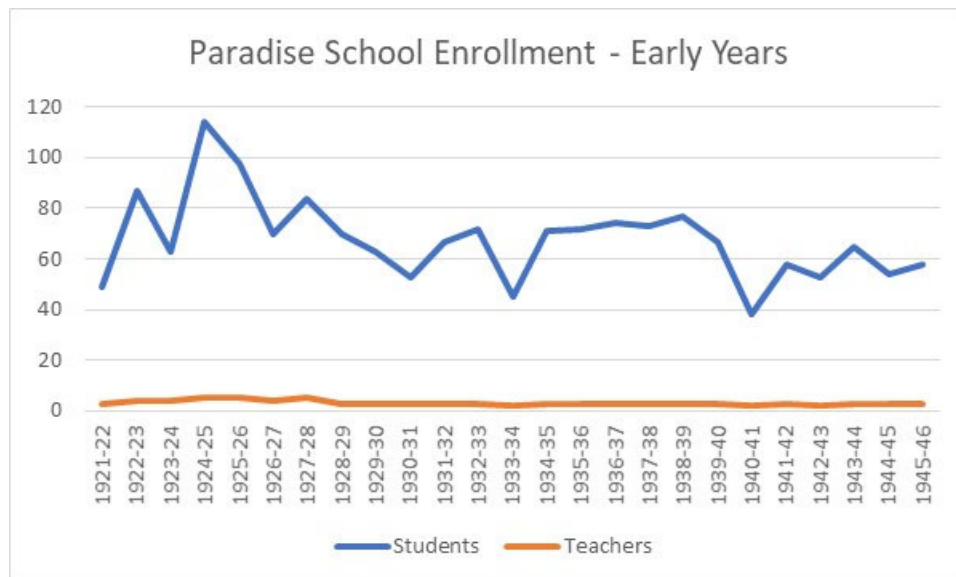
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Enrollment began to look up a bit during the 1960s as the year 1962 tallied 51 kids attending the school.<sup>66</sup> This number stayed fairly steady in 1963 as 59 kids enrolled.<sup>67</sup>

The following chart presents the number of enrolled students and teachers employed at Paradise School from 1921 to 1946.<sup>68</sup> The chart indicates the greatest number of students attending Paradise School during this period occurred in academic year 1924-1925 with 114 students taught by five teachers. The fewest number of students attended in academic year 1940-1941; that year only 38 students crossed the school's threshold for instruction by the two teachers. A log documenting the teachers employed in Paradise from 1906 (four years prior to the subject of this nomination) to 2013 (the last year the school operated) records 138 teachers who instructed the town's youth.<sup>69</sup>



An article in *The Missoulian* from 1964 explicates the pride the town had in both the school and those who attended. Called out in the article are O.J. Murphy who became the superintendent of the Northern Pacific tie-treating plant and Fred Mass who entered Montana State University as a 16-year old and graduated with a Forestry degree. Tom Willis and Jeannette Clark are also called out as the two top ranking students in a graduating class at Plains High School following their matriculation through Paradise School. Several students were noted to have attended Paradise School following in the footsteps of their parents or grandparents.

<sup>66</sup> "51 Enrolled At Paradise," *The Missoulian*, 6 September 1962.

<sup>67</sup> "Paradise Enrolls 59," *The Missoulian*, 13 September 1963.

<sup>68</sup> Chart prepared by J. Thorson from annual Paradise School Teacher Registers, 1921-22 to 1945-46, on file at the Paradise Center, Paradise, MT.

<sup>69</sup> Teacher log held at the Paradise Center, Paradise, MT.

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The loss in employment opportunities largely related to sawmill closures and railroad cutbacks began to take its toll in Paradise. By 2013, only five students remained at the Paradise School. The drastic decrease proved prohibitive toward the school's ability to continue to keep its doors open. In June, the Paradise School Board moved toward declaring the Paradise School District #8 closed. Per state requirements, the Trustees maintained the school for three years to evaluate if demographic changes in the area would allow the school to reopen. In 2016, the three-year waiting period ended and a group of concerned Sanders County residents formed a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization to preserve the school through adaptive reuse. Today, the school stands as the Paradise Center, a community, visitor and arts center.<sup>70</sup>

**Architectural Significance of the Paradise School<sup>71</sup>**

Architectural design of the Paradise School shares a common spirit with many other rural communities of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, where sturdy brick schools were erected to replace earlier frame buildings and drew their inspiration from the Italian Renaissance and the Craftsman styles. Buildings such as the Paradise School, the Potomac School, the Salesville School and others to be seen in Montana were modest but drawn by architects clearly aware of the architectural movements of the day. The Renaissance Revival in particular was expressed on public buildings in the work of such prominent architects as McKim, Mead and White, and was readily translated for schools in rural settings. On the Paradise School, the influences of Italian Renaissance are apparent in the prominent round arch on the bell tower, the formal and symmetrical massing with fenestration that combines round, segmental and flat arches, and the richness achieved through contrasting brick coloration on the arches.

In addition, Craftsman style touches were common to many early 20th century schools and buildings throughout Montana. The Paradise School presents several of these characteristics including the gentle pitch of the hipped roof, projecting eaves, and the use of naturalistic materials exemplified by the robust stone foundation that imparts a structurally solid base to the building.

The Paradise School was designed and constructed during the apex of the Progressive Era, the 1890s to the 1920s. The Progressive Era's emphasis was on improving American democracy through a more informed electorate, eradicating corruption from government (especially urban bosses), securing more political and economic opportunities for all people (especially voting rights for women), and greater efficiency in governmental and commercial operations. While the movement was more prominent in urban areas, Progressive-era philosophies influenced politics, economics, and education throughout the United States.

Public schools were challenged to provide students with broader educational opportunities in addition to vocational or homemaking skills. Educators borrowed an industrial trend, Scientific Management, to emphasize efficiency and the "one best way" to achieve desired educational outcomes.<sup>72</sup> Recommended or required standardized curricula for each grade, issued by state educational agencies, replaced uneven local school offerings. The design for local schools was less "home grown," and school architecture began to emphasize common themes and techniques as well. While these commonalities had their pull, architects

<sup>70</sup> The Paradise Center, found at <http://www.paradisecentermt.org/>, accessed 9 October 2020.

<sup>71</sup> This text from *Architecture of Paradise School Brochure* (2020).

<sup>72</sup> Wayne Au, "Teaching Under the New Taylorism: High-Stakes Testing and the Standardization of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Curriculum," *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, Vol. 43:1, 2011 pp. 25-28.

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still rendered innovative, unique, and regionally appropriate designs that nurtured progressive education, and some of these solutions leap-frogged across the country to be replicated in unlikely places.<sup>73</sup>

An overview of American educational architecture, *Modern School Houses*, was published in 1910, the same year the Paradise School opened.<sup>74</sup> The book, written by Professor A.D.F. Hamlin (Columbia University) and others, consists of “more than 145 pages of illustrations of recently constructed School Houses, from the four-room buildings to the Normal and Technical Schools . . .”<sup>75</sup> While no Montana school appears, the book captures the philosophies of school architects and engineers at the time of construction of the Paradise School.

In a nod to Scientific Management, the book’s main thrust is the importance of sound planning in school design. Specific recommendations are offered on the size and configuration of classrooms (“efficiency demands that [classroom capacity] should not greatly or often exceed 40”), exits, and hallways. This was a time of smallpox, polio, and tuberculosis; the authors spend considerable time on sanitation, as well as heating and ventilation, and lighting. Ample windows and electric lights helped serve these requirements.

These concerns were addressed in the Paradise School design. The classrooms are spacious with high ceilings. The numerous large windows provide ample light and ventilation. Early school records include reports to the state superintendent of public instruction documenting compliance with uniform curricular requirements and building conditions.

The emphasis on student health extended to vigorous play on the playground before and after school and during recesses. Surviving playground equipment at the Paradise School includes seesaws, swings, and a merry go round that appears in a 1920s photo of the school.<sup>76</sup>

### **Iconic Architectural Features**

Two architectural features—one seen and the other normally just heard—add historic character to the Paradise School. The first, evidencing concern for student welfare, is the iconic fire slide or “tube.” The threat of fire was a main concern for multistory buildings in the early 1900s. The invention of a “tube” fire escape in 1930, and some serious fires of the time, led to the addition of many such fire escapes on schools in the 1930s and 1940s including the Paradise Elementary School. The fire bell in the foyer announced regular fire drills and the school could be completely evacuated in less than one minute.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Lindsay Baker, “A History of School Design and its Indoor Environmental Standards, 1900 to Today,” National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities, January 2012, pp. 4-5.

<sup>74</sup> Hamlin, A.D.F., C.B.J. Snyder, William B. Ittner, Frank Irving cooper, William H. Brainerd, Charles Morris, Frank G. McCann, Charles F. Eveleth, and Leo H. Pleins. *Modern Schoolhouses* (New York: Swetland Publishing Company, 1910).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Pickering Interview. Ms. Pickering reports her father, Jerry Colyer, often said the merry go round was there when he first enrolled in 1925 as a 4<sup>th</sup> grader.

<sup>77</sup> In June 1930, an article in *Modern Mechanix* stated: “A PATENTED circular fire-escape has been developed by which people on the upper stories of burning buildings can slide to the ground below. The fire-escape consists of a large tube of galvanized steel which extends from an upper floor level to the ground. As it is set at an angle, people can slide through it without difficulty. The upper end of the tube enters the room. Over the entrance is a

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The second feature is the school bell located high in the bell tower. Although rarely seen, the bell made its presence known beginning in the morning and then at the end of school days, and during emergencies. Weather and age eventually took its toll on the bell tower due to its exposed position. In 2019, the Montana History Foundation awarded the Paradise Center a grant to undertake restoration of the tower.

The work on the structure, which included replacement of the glass and wood louvered panels, afforded the opportunity to inspect and research the bell. The still-legible lettering on the bell indicates it was made by the C.S. Bell Co. in Hillsboro, Ohio. The reference refers to Charles Singleton Bell and the company he founded in 1875. The company made bells during three time periods and under different labels: "C.S. Bell," a single proprietorship (1875-1882); "C.S. Bell & Co.," a partnership (1882-1894); and "The C.S. Bell Co.," a corporation (1894-1970s). The inscription on the Paradise bell indicates manufacture sometime between 1894 and 1912.

Although one might logically assume that the Paradise School bell was manufactured for school use, the words "Church Bell" are clearly legible on the yoke of the bell. Also, a diagram found in C.S. Bell & Co.'s 1891 *Steel Alloy Church and School Bells* catalog shows a church bell closely resembling the Paradise School bell. A raised, yet worn, numeral on the Paradise School bell appears to read "36," matching Church Bell No. 36 (inch diameter of the bell) on page 2 of the catalog. Unfortunately, efforts to determine the weight or original cost of the bell have thus far proved unsuccessful. The catalog indicates a smaller church bell (No. 30) weighed 335 pounds.

**Architects John H. and Josephine Kennedy**

John H. and Josephine Kennedy are credited as the architects of the Paradise School. Born in New York on June 24, 1852, J.H. Kennedy arrived in Missoula in 1889. A contractor, builder and architect, Kennedy also sold real estate and insurance during his career. In 1890, he married Josephine Stark of Manchester, New Hampshire, who joined his architectural practice. The Kennedys worked in Missoula during an era of rapid commercial and residential construction with local building booms from 1883 to 1893 and again from 1897 to 1917. Their known work includes the Forestry Building at the University of Montana (1914), as well as many residences and rural schools. Josephine is known for residential design in the Missoula area including the Sacajawea Lodge (1914) at 805 S. Orange St., named by artist E.S. Paxson, and where she and John lived out the latter years of their lives.<sup>78</sup>

Clarence J. Forbis studied with the Kennedys in 1912 prior to pursuing formal training at the University of Minnesota.<sup>79</sup> Upon graduating, he joined the practice with offices in the First National Bank building in Missoula. John Kennedy and Forbis worked together until Kennedy's death of kidney cancer in August

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door, so that no drafts will enter the room through the fire-escape. When fire is discovered, the people in the building sit in the upper part of the tube, slide down it, and land on the ground below."

<sup>78</sup> See "Local Building Record" of 1909, *The Missoulian*, 2 January 1910. See also William Babcock Jr., *Historic Resources in Missoula, Montana, 1864-1940* Multiple Property Documentation Form (documentation accepted 30 April 1990), Section E, p. 21. Documentation on file at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, MT. When the Sacajawea opened in 1914, it boasted eight apartments, each containing three rooms and a private porch that could be utilized for summer living or as sleeping quarters. In addition, the apartments had hardwood floors, concealed closet beds, steam heat, and gas ranges.

<sup>79</sup> "Local Brevities," *The Missoulian*, 18 September 1913.

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1916, a condition he endured for six years. After her husband died, Josephine remained with “Kennedy & Forbis” in the First National Bank building until her death in September 1922. C.J. Forbis practiced into the 1950s with architectural offices in the Western Bank Building as late as 1959. He died in Missoula on January 31, 1975.<sup>80</sup>

The Kennedys appear to have collaborated on many architectural projects making it difficult to ascertain who served as the lead designer of any particular structure; however, John’s name is given in most public listings of the practice. In addition to buildings, they were also involved in the design and construction of the Higgins Street Bridge in Missoula. Among their notable projects in western Montana were several school designs including the Sixth Street High School in Missoula, the Potomac School, and two brick schoolhouses in the Bitterroot Valley.

The still-operating Potomac School is located 25 miles east of Missoula on MT-200, and is listed in the National Register.<sup>81</sup> Much like the Paradise School, the design features a central bell tower typical of period schoolhouse architecture, and innovatively incorporates wide eaves, a hipped roof, multiple window groupings, and banded brick façades characteristic of the then-fashionable Craftsman style.<sup>82</sup>

### Conclusion

Since the people of the Clark Fork Valley rallied to save the Paradise School, it has become an inspiration and a symbol for preserving the community. The school now serves a three-fold purpose – community center, visitor center, and art center—collectively, *The Paradise Center*. With interpretive school and railroad exhibits, a state-of-the-art map of Glacial Lake Missoula, tourism displays, art studios and classes, the facility proudly welcomes summertime visitors and residents year around to step back in time and discover the cultural richness of Paradise, Montana, and its historic school.

<sup>80</sup> Babcock, Historic Resources in Missoula, Montana, Section E, p. 21.

<sup>81</sup> Chere Jiusto, Potomac School National Register nomination, listed 30 March 1992, NR# 92000244.

<sup>82</sup> Montana National Register Sign Program, *Potomac School, Historic Montana*, found at <https://historicmt.org/items/show/1666>, accessed 1 May 2020.

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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 # \_\_\_\_\_

**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** 3.34

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

- |                        |                        |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| A. Latitude: 47.387170 | Longitude: -114.797090 |
| B. Latitude: 47.387790 | Longitude: -114.795720 |
| C. Latitude: 47.386940 | Longitude: -114.794880 |
| D. Latitude: 47.386480 | Longitude: -114.795660 |

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The property includes all of the property presently associated the Paradise School and gymnasium. It encompasses the lot the buildings sit on and the original historic parcel. A 0.73-acre portion of land donated to the school in 1991 is also included. The property sits immediately north and east of a gravel drive that provides access to the school and gymnasium. See attached map Section 9 page 31; reference to the aerial view map confirms that boundary.

**Boundary Justification**

Per the Montana Cadastral, the boundary complies with the property's legal description of S21, T19 N, R25 W, PLAT SE & SD1, IN W2SW and includes 3.34 acres.

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Paradise School

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Sanders Co., Montana

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Chere Jiusto, Executive Director  
organization: Montana Preservation Alliance  
street & number: 44 W. 6<sup>th</sup> Ave, Suite 110  
city or town: Helena state: MT zip code: 59601  
e-mail: [info@preservemontana.org](mailto:info@preservemontana.org)  
telephone: 406-457-2822  
date: September 2020

name/title: John and Karen Thorson  
organization: Paradise Elementary School Preservation Committee  
street & number:  
city or town: Paradise state: MT zip code:

name/title: John Boughton  
organization: Montana State Historic Preservation Office  
street & number: 1301 E. Lockett, P.O. Box 201202  
city or town: Helena state: MT zip code: 59620  
e-mail: [jboughton@mt.gov](mailto:jboughton@mt.gov)  
telephone: 406-444-3647  
date: October 2020

**Property Owner**

Land & Buildings:

Name: Sanders County  
Street and number: P.O. Box 519  
City/town: Thompson Falls State: MT 59873

**Additional Documentation**

**The following items are included in this completed form:**

**Maps:** USGS topographic map (7.5 minute series) section indicating the property boundaries

**Additional items:** Google Earth Satellite Views of Paradise School

**Photographs**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

See Additional Documentation below.

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Paradise School

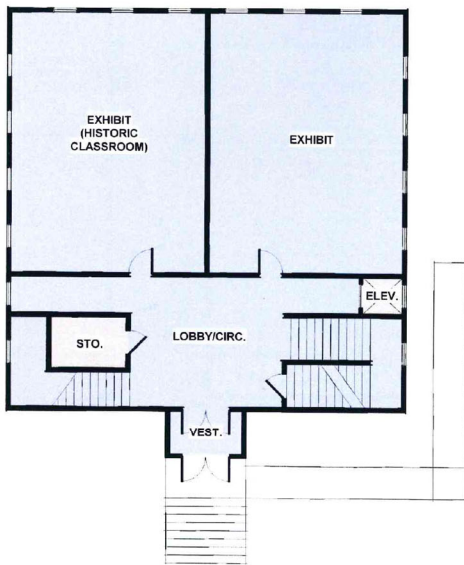
Name of Property

Sanders Co., Montana

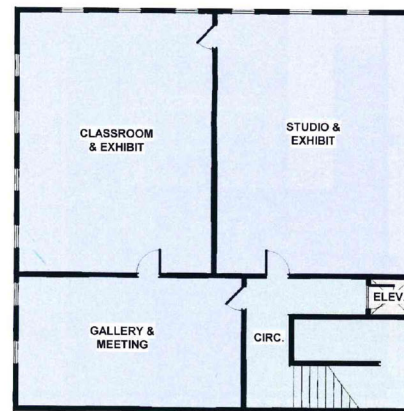
County and State

**Additional Documentation: Floor Plans**

FLOOR PLANS, HISTORIC SCHOOL



1 CLASSROOM BUILDING - MAIN LEVEL PLAN  
A3 3/32" = 1'-0"



2 CLASSROOM BUILDING - UPPER LEVEL PLAN  
A3 3/32" = 1'-0"



**Floor Plans for the Paradise School, Paradise, MT.**

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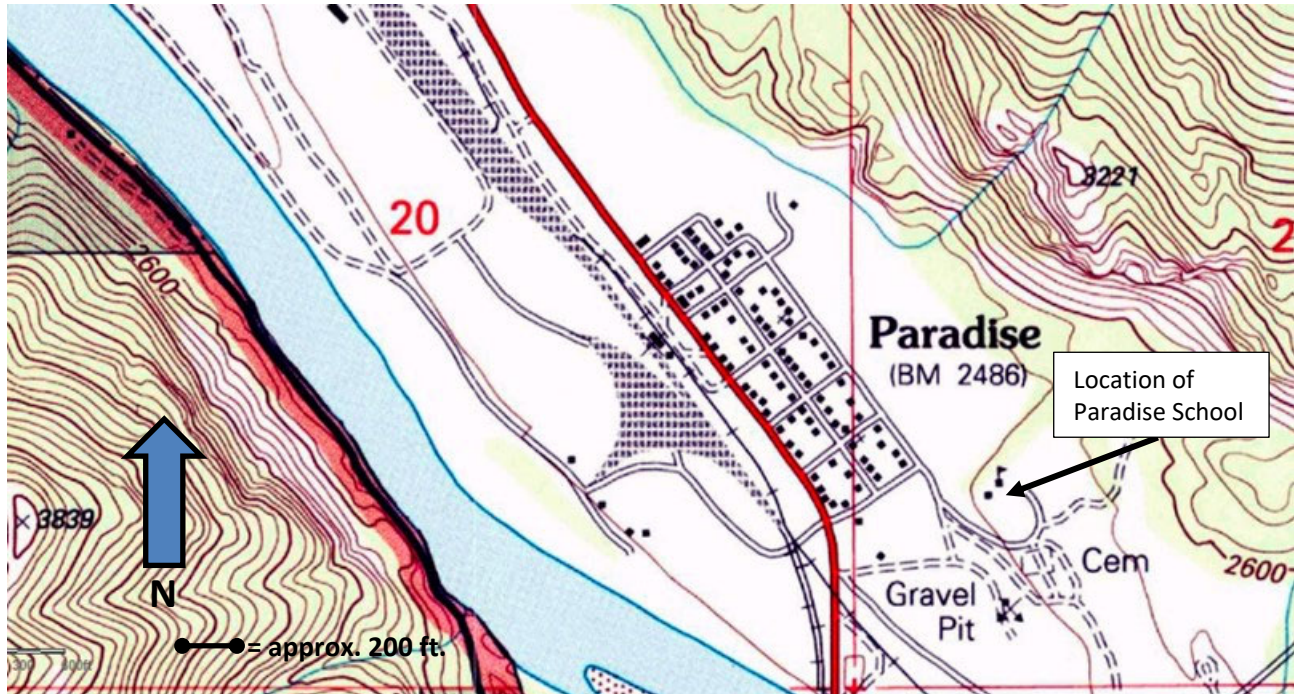
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**Additional Documentation: Maps**



Location of Paradise School. Found on the Paradise 7.5' Quadrangle map. For property boundary and associated latitude and longitude coordinates, see aerial map below.



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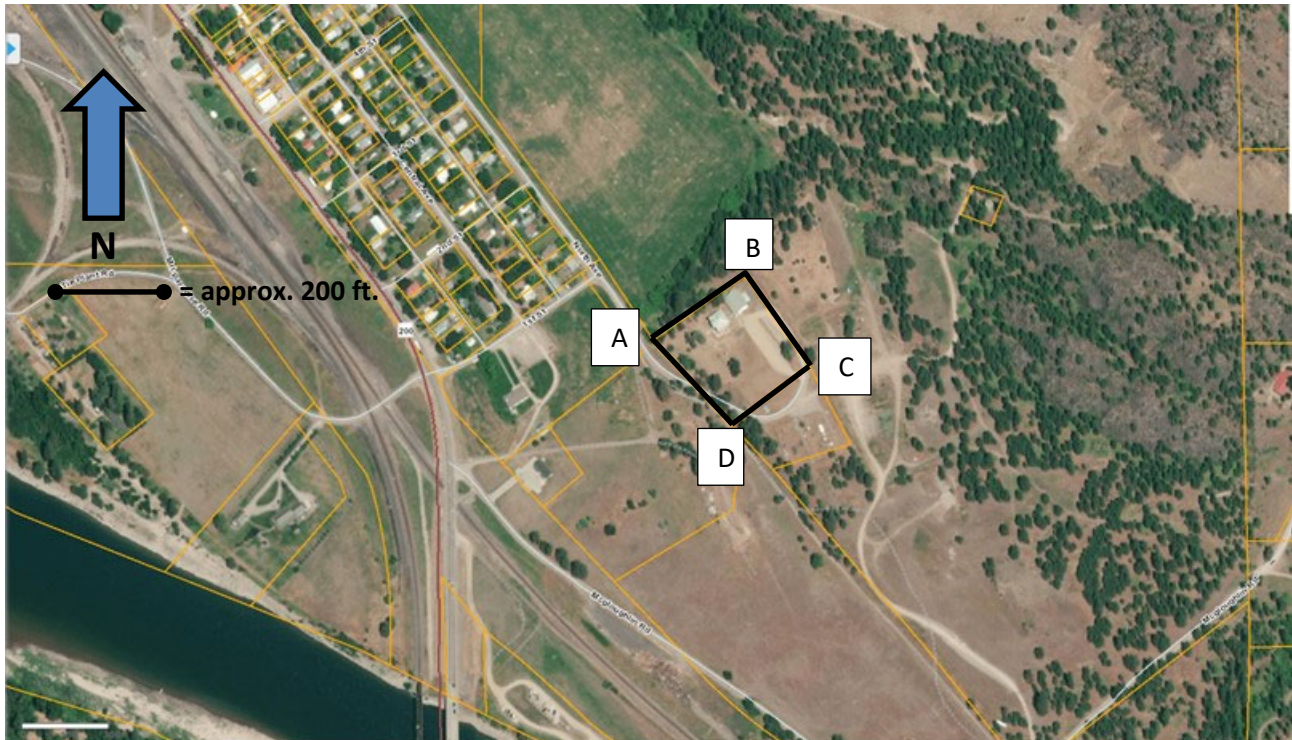
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**Aerial View showing location of the Paradise School in S21, T19 N, R25 W, PLAT SE & SD1, IN W2SW (and 3.34 acres).**

**Associated Latitudes and Longitudes**

A. Latitude: 47.387170	Longitude: -114.797090
B. Latitude: 47.387790	Longitude: -114.795720
C. Latitude: 47.386940	Longitude: -114.794880
D. Latitude: 47.386480	Longitude: -114.795660

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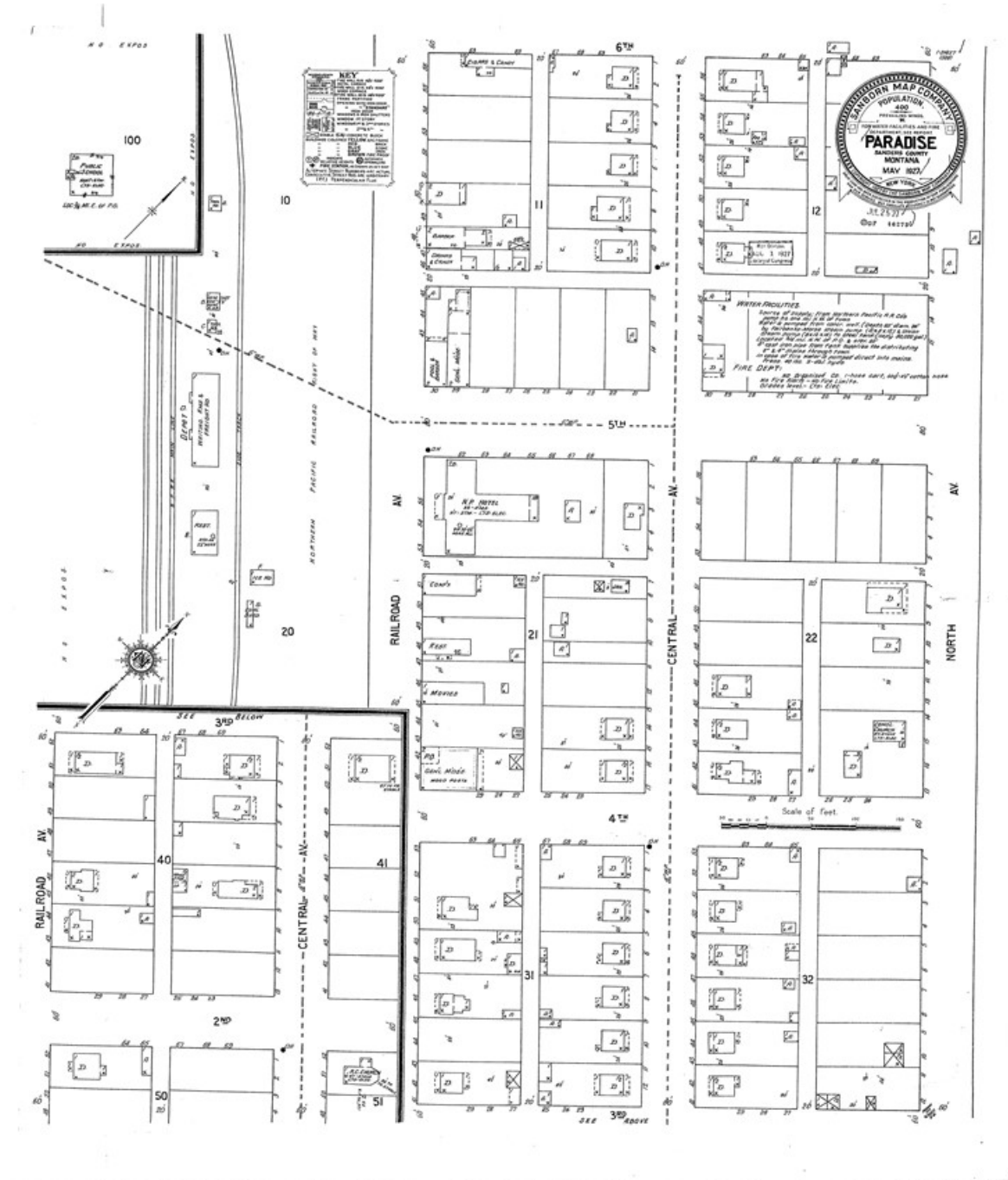
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1927 Sanborn Map. Paradise School Inset in top left corner.



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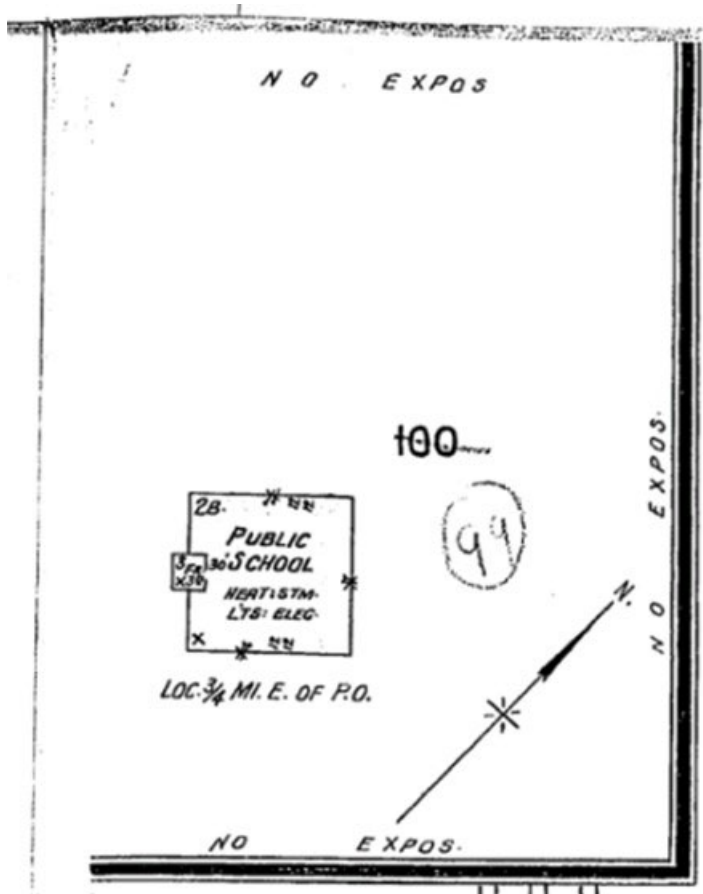
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Close-up of inset detail showing Paradise School property from 1927 Sanborn Map

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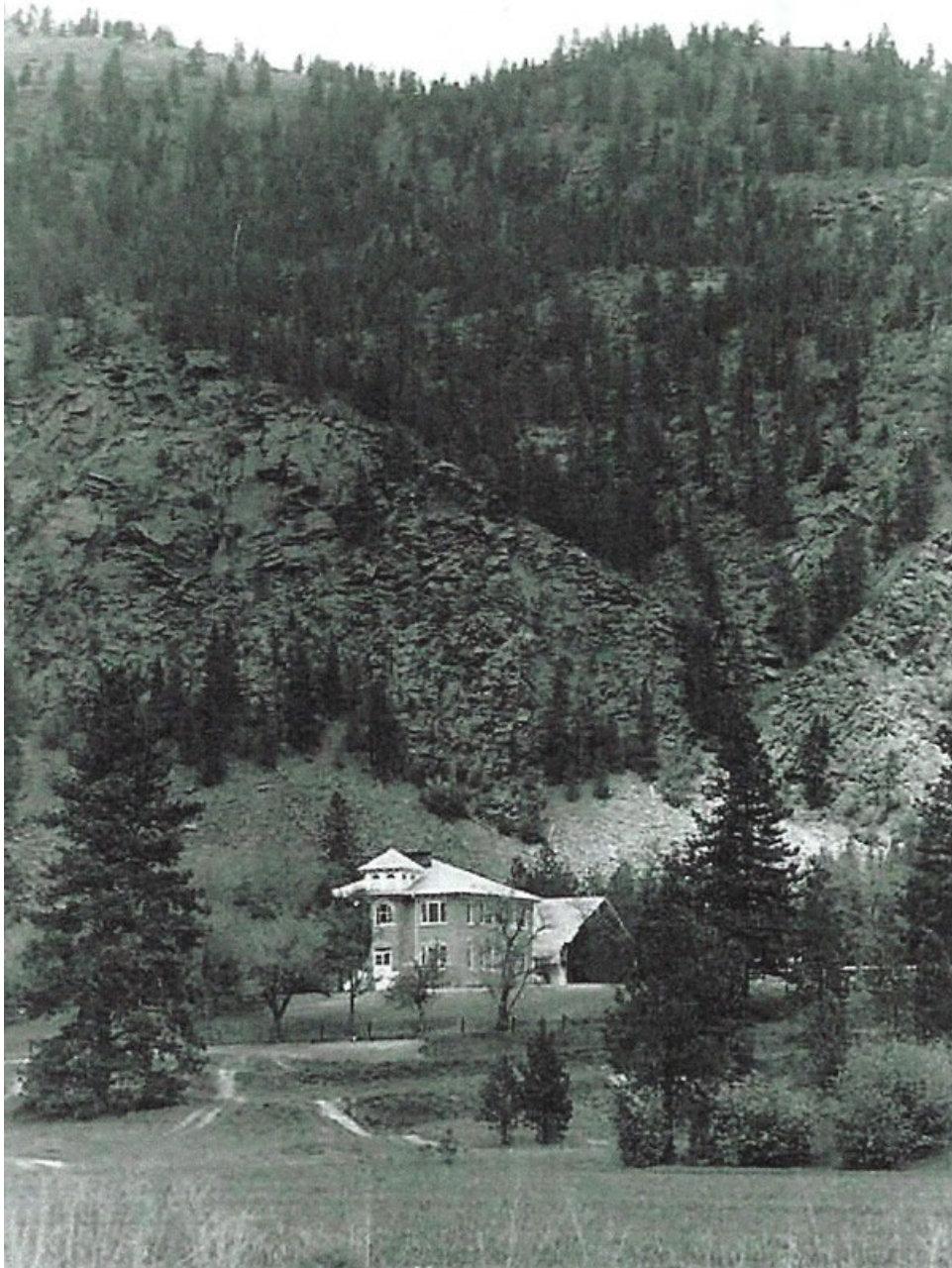
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**Additional Documentation: Historic Photographs**



**Paradise School (Post-1962) [Paradise School photo collection]**

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**Paradise School Students (Paradise School photo collection. Year unknown)**

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Historic Paradise School (c. 1920) [Paradise School photo collection]



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**National Register Photographs**

**All Photos**

Name of Property: Paradise School

City or Vicinity: Paradise

County: Sanders

State: MT

Photographer: Paradise Elementary School Preservation Committee

Date Photographed: 2018-2020



Description: Sign at entrance to Paradise School, view to the north.

MT\_SandersCounty\_ParadiseSchool\_0001

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Description: West elevation of Paradise School, view to the east.  
MT\_SandersCounty\_ParadiseSchool\_0002



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Description: West and south elevations of Paradise School, view to the northeast.  
MT\_SandersCounty\_ParadiseSchool\_0003

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Paradise School

Name of Property

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Description: South elevation of Paradise School, view to the north.

MT\_SandersCounty\_ParadiseSchool\_0004



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Description: East elevation of Paradise School showing fire escape and open walk to gymnasium, view to the west.

MT\_SandersCounty\_ParadiseSchool\_0005

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Description: East and north elevations of Paradise School, view to the southwest.

MT\_SandersCounty\_ParadiseSchool\_0006



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Description: Close up of north elevation of Paradise School showing wall and foundation, view to the southwest.

MT\_SandersCounty\_ParadiseSchool\_0007



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Description: Close up of Paradise School steps date of construction, view to the north.

MT\_SandersCounty\_ParadiseSchool\_0008



Description: South elevation of Paradise School gymnasium, view to the north.

MT\_SandersCounty\_ParadiseSchool\_0009

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Description: South and east elevations of Paradise School gymnasium with basketball court to the right (east), view to the north.

MT\_SandersCounty\_ParadiseSchool\_0010



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Description: East elevation of Paradise School gymnasium with basketball court in forefront and left, view to the west.

MT\_SandersCounty\_ParadiseSchool\_0011

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Description: North half of west elevation of Paradise School gymnasium, view to the northeast.  
MT\_SandersCounty\_ParadiseSchool\_0012



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Description: North end of west elevation of Paradise School gymnasium, view to the northeast.  
MT\_SandersCounty\_ParadiseSchool\_0013



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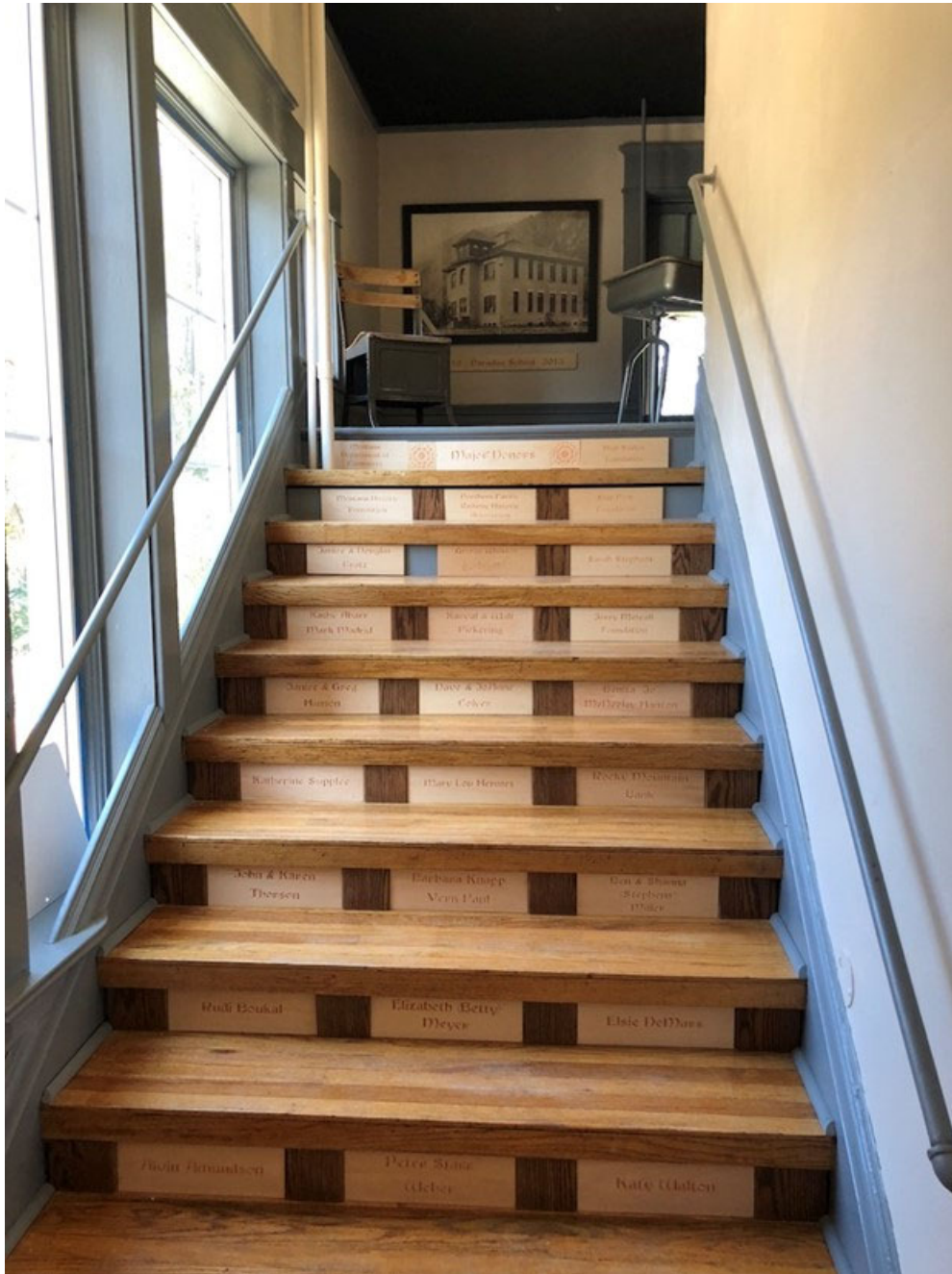
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Description: Paradise School stairwell. Staircase not completed during original construction.  
MT\_SandersCounty\_ParadiseSchool\_0014

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Description: Paradise School classroom.  
MT\_SandersCounty\_ParadiseSchool\_0015



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Description: Paradise School radiator.

MT\_SandersCounty\_ParadiseSchool\_0016

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Description: Interior of Paradise School gymnasium.  
MT\_SandersCounty\_ParadiseSchool\_0017

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Description: Interior of Paradise School gymnasium.

MT\_SandersCounty\_ParadiseSchool\_0018



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Description: Paradise School grounds, view to the west.

MT\_SandersCounty\_ParadiseSchool\_0019

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Description: Paradise School grounds, view to the south.  
MT\_SandersCounty\_ParadiseSchool\_0020



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Paradise School

Name of Property

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Description: Paradise School grounds showing embedded concrete stairs to front of school building, view to the east.  
MT\_SandersCounty\_ParadiseSchool\_0021



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Paradise School

Name of Property

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County and State



Description: Paradise School bell.

MT\_SandersCounty\_ParadiseSchool\_0022

United States Department of the Interior

**National Park Service / National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**

Paradise School

Name of Property

Sanders Co., Montana

County and State



Description: Paradise School merry-go-round.  
MT\_SandersCounty\_ParadiseSchool\_0023