

THE FOUNDING OF THE CITY OF THREE FORKS

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE MATERIAL FOR THE CITY CENTENNIAL

BY PATRICK FINNEGAN

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INTRODUCTION

In September 2008, the City of Three Forks will be 100 years old based on when the original plat was filed and approved by the Gallatin County Commissioners. This document is intended as a resource for teachers who want to add a bit of local history to their curriculum and need a starting point. There are many other, in-depth, resources available, but it is hoped that the information contained herein will be a fun, fasinating jumping off point.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FOUNDING OF THREE FORKS, MONTANA

In 1905 the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul (CMSP) Railway Company made a bold decision to expand its track all the way to the west coast. At that time, the most western terminus was Evarts, North Dakota. The company, with roots back to 1847, already had 6,596 miles of track. The expansion would add 2,300 miles and was estimated to cost \$45 million.

Unlike the Northern Pacific and Union Railroads, the CMSP was not awarded land grants by the government. It had to purchase land or buy smaller railroads to extend its lines. Track was laid or purchased through five major mountain ranges in just three years.

The Montana Railroad, sometimes called the “Jawbone,” ran from Harlowton and connecting to the Northern Pacific line at Lombard, seventeen miles NNE of present day Three Forks. The CMSP bought into flagging company and eventually took it over. To continue its drive to the west coast, a bridge was built over the top of the Northern Pacific tracks and over the Missouri River at Lombard. The CMSP was built down the western side of the Missouri, with the Northern Pacific on the opposite side.

From upper Missouri River canyon, track was laid to mouth of the Jefferson River canyon. Here the CMSP had to buy right-of-way rights from the Northern Pacific in order to build its tracks parallel to the NP through the Canyon.

Many of these land purchases and right-of-way deals were managed by John Quincy Adams of the Milwaukee Land Company, a wholly owned subsidiary of the CMSP. He was one of several General Land and Townsite Agent and he was rewarded for his efforts. He was granted permission to build a town. This reward also would help the railway company by bringing new settlers to lands who, in turn, would use the railroad to send their goods to other towns.

The old town of Three Forks had been around since 1882. It was struggling but surviving and still had a post office. But Adams thought the land to the southwest was a good spot for a good-size city and had W.H. Penfield survey and lay-out a plat for the new town of Three Forks. Penfield filed the plat on September 5, 1908. The County Commissioners accepted and approved the plat on September 15, 1908.

The original plat of Three Forks consists of 264 residential lots (12 are the not full sized 50x 140) and 130 business lots (10 are not the full-sized 25x 140 ft). The lots went up sale and an auction was held on September 17, 1908 in the only building in town, the nearly completed railroad depot. This date marks the official founding date of the City of Three Forks. 72 people bought lots that day included all but 10 of the commercial lots.

In mid-December 1908, the business men of the town formed

the “Three Forks Commercial Club,” a forerunner of the Chamber of Commerce. This club was the unofficial government for the first year of Three Forks. Members promoted the town, gathered money to do public works projects and acted as constables and firemen. Ben Reynolds, Jr. was the first President of the Commercial Club.

Recent arrival and lawyer Martin Vetleson was hired by the Commercial Club to get the town incorporated and Vetleson drafted a petition, got it signed presented it to the County Commissioners. At their November 1, 1909 meeting, the Commissioners approved the petition and appointed Vetleson as census taker. If the census showed more than 300 inhabitants, the commissioners would call an election for the incorporation of the town, which they did on December 13, 1909. The polling place was the office of the Milwaukee Hotel and Vetleson was the election officer. He took the election results to the County Commission, and in a special meeting, they declared Three Forks an incorporated town on December 15, 1909.

In January 1910, residents of Three Forks met in a caucus to nominate candidates for Mayor and Wardsmen. Herald Editor P.S. Dorsey, an adamant promoter of Three Forks, was elected Caucus Chairman. When he called for nominations for the office of Mayor, Martin Vetleson was the first to be recognized and “in well chosen words stated the duties and responsibilities which would befall the first set of officers” and nominated P.M. Abbott for Mayor.

Unfortunately, Squire Abbott did not win the Mayorial race. William Parnacott was elected Mayor on January 17, 1910. Joseph Menapace and L. R. Thomas were elected first ward Aldermen, while Charles Ellison and E.C. Bryant were elected aldermen for the second ward.

At February 21, 1910 meeting of the Council, Vetleson was hired as the Town’s attorney until May. In the meantime, he was directed to set up the annual election in April. At this election, the Mayor and both Aldermen from the first ward were replaced,

J.W. Ross becoming the second Mayor and L.W. Thomas and B. H. Everett aldermen.

Notable People

John Quincy Adams - One of several General Land and Townsite Agent for the Milwaukee Land Company. Founder of Three Forks, Montana and patron to many early businesses of the town.

HISTORY OF J. Q. ADAMS

(From Headwaters Heritage History)

John Quincy Adams was the founder of Three Forks. J. Q., as he was commonly called, was a sweet, gentle man, enormous in stature, courtly with women and persuasive as a salesman.

He bought the right-of-way for the Milwaukee Railroad from Minnesota to Washington state. As he went from state to state he was accompanied by a T. E. Hunter from South Dakota. The two men were opposites in their dealings. Mr. Hunter was as tough and firm as J. Q. was charming.

Upon completion of the right-of-way purchasing "the land agent could choose a town-site to develop. Mr. Adams fell in love with the Three Forks site.

"J. Q. Adams was born June 16, 1848 at Troy, Vermont. On December 23, 1874 he married Frances Cornelia Smith, who was born August 7, 1852. He was, at one time, mayor of Spencer, Iowa. Mr. and Mrs. Adams lived at Okoboji, Iowa. His brother was Charles E. Adams who lived in Three Forks. The brothers were both members of the Iowa chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution.

The father of J. Q. and C. E. Adams was Benjamin Stearns Adams. My father had the same name." (Information from John Clarke Adams, grandson.)

J. Q. was a great promoter and a leading inspiration of the development of the city of Three Forks and the surrounding country. His faith in this area was unbounded and he spent of his abundant wealth lavishly.

It was he who built the Sacajawea Hotel, the Three Valley's State Bank, Mestad's Bakery (first the little building behind the bank, then the present Burlington Northern freight depot). He furnished the capital for the Robertson Drug building, now Bi-Rite Drug. He donated the land for the hospital, and a tract of land near the present school to be used as a tourist park. He donated and had installed, the first five street lights in Three Forks. He was an extensive investor in farm lands and his properties were developed and improved as rapidly as men, machinery and conditions would permit.

The original company name was "The Milwaukee Land Co." Later there were name changes: The Adams Realty Co., Adams Investment Co., Coast Line Land Co., and The Three Forks Land Co. *(Editor's Note: Milwaukee Land Co. never changed it's name. J.Q. Adams bought into or started several real-estate companies over the years usually with his brother, Charles as the front man of the business.)*

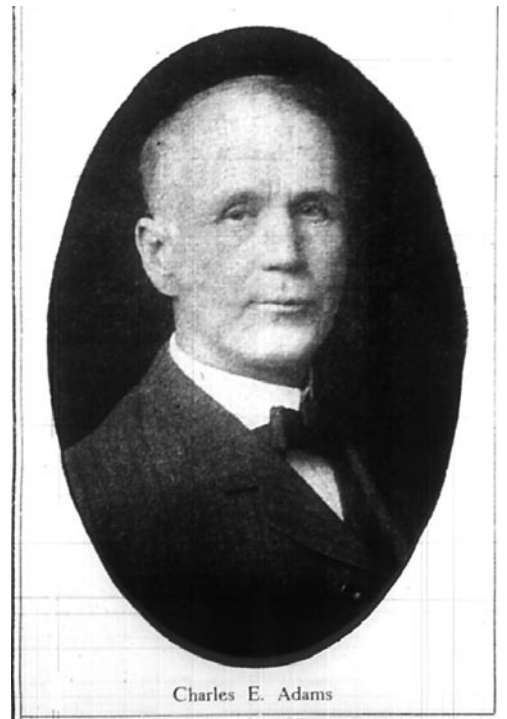
Mr. Adams commuted freely between Chicago, Iowa and Three Forks. The eastern apartment in the north wing of the Sacajawea Hotel was home for Mr. and Mrs. Adams when they were in Three Forks.

The town prospered and flourished, but by 1915 some of the dreams began to fade. Mr. Adams passed away in Chicago in December 1919. He was survived by his wife, a son, Ben, and a grandson, John Clarke.

Charles E. Adams - Brother and part-time employee of John Quincy Adams. Later became a real-estate broker and was the Mayor of Three Forks for a time.



J.Q. Adams



Charles E. Adams

CHARLES E. ADAMS

(From Headwaters Heritage History)

Charles E. Adams was born May 12, 1844 in Troy, Vermont, and in 1856 moved with his parents to Bristolville, Ohio. He enlisted in the Union Army in 1862 and was honorably discharged in February of 1864. After the Civil War, his brother John Quincy Adams, took him along as an assistant while he was land agent for the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul railroad to obtain land for the company's right-of-way.

Three Forks was a division point and became a favorite stopping point for Charles E., who eventually established his home there. He served as mayor for the town from 1923 to 1927. He was deputy commander for the Montana G. A. R. and affiliated with the Knights Templar and other orders of the Masonic Lodge. In 1930 he returned to Austinburg, Ohio where he died in January, 1933.

Charles E. married Sadie Emerich on February 12, 1872 in Rochester, Minnesota. Sadie died May 8, 1902. Their infant daughter, Edna, was born Sept. 17, 1872 and died in Minneapolis July 21, 1873; son Alfred Ashley, and son Earl Emerich, who was born Aug. 28, 1878 and died October 1946 in San Jose, California.

Charles E. owned the Ruby Ridge ranch southeast of Three Forks where he also had an apiary, specializing in clover honey. Charles E. had four grandchildren, Avery, Francis, Faye and Beatrice Adams, and four great-grandchildren. It has been reported, at one period in his life he had seen seven generations in his family.

P.S. Dorsey - Founder of the Three Forks Herald

PAUL SHAW DORSEY AND WIFE, NELLIE

(From Headwaters Heritage History as written by Bob McCulloch)

Paul S. Dorsey was born in Harper's Ferry, west Virginia in 1858. He was lamed in early childhood by a bout with polio. When he was five years old, his father was conscripted into the Confederate Army at the time of Lee's invasion of the Virginias. His early life was scarred by the horrors of war which raged back and forth through Harper's Ferry and surrounding country. He and his brothers were raised by their grandmother.

Mr. Dorsey was apprenticed as a printer's devil at age 14 in Salem, Ohio, and worked hard most his life. He finished his apprenticeship on the long defunct Chronicle in Washington, D.C. Later, he was a compositor and special reporter on the Chicago Tribune and subsequently telegraph editor on the St. Louis Republic. In 1891, he left newspaper work to homestead in Minnesota. Two years later, he started a pioneer paper known as the "Shell Prairies Advocate" at Park Rapids, Minnesota. Having sold the Advocate, he again went to Chicago where he married Nellie Shaw. Their only daughter, Mattie Mae, was born and educated here. The family moved to Clarissa, Minnesota, where they started a successful newspaper, the "Clarissa Independent" which is still published. Here, their daughter married the agent of the Great Northern Railroad, Mr. Frank A. McCulloch. To this union were born three children, Robert, Nellie and Pauline.

In 1908, the Dorsey's moved to the new townsite on the Chicago-Milwaukee railroad in Montana, to be known as Three Forks, named after the old town already in existence some two

miles east. The first several issues of the Three Forks Herald were published by Mr. Dorsey in a large tent. Two other tents were also set up, one a grocery store, the other a temporary restaurant. All were surrounded by a plowed

furrow for protection against prairie fire. The only elk Paul Dorsey ever shot was with a civil war musket while standing at the door of his tent. The elk went almost to the Jefferson River before it dropped.

After establishing the Herald, he built the first two room house in Three Forks on a site about fifty yards south of the old bank building; (now the Masonic Temple). He was very active in public affairs and enthusiastic in promoting interest in the new community until his eyesight began to fail. The "Herald"

was sold to Mr. Lyle Williams in the early twenties. Mr. Dorsey and his wife moved to Gig Harbor, Washington, where he edited a small newspaper, the "Bay Breeze". He and his wife passed away a few months apart in 1939.

Their daughter and husband and children became residents of Three Forks where Frank McCulloch was freight agent for the Milwaukee railroad. Mrs. McCulloch spent many years in the real estate business in Three Forks and Bozeman. Their son, Robert, and daughter, Paulie Schlechten reside in Bozeman and their daughter Nellie Zion, lives in Helena.

Col. Harry Hilman (Hillman) - Auctioneer for the lot sale in the new town of Three Forks, Montana on September 17, 1908

A.D. Jones - An Immigrant Agent for the Chicago, Milwaukee and St Paul Railway Co. See "The Great Promoter" below.

William Parnacott - A grocer in Three Forks, ran his business out of a tent for several months before his store was built. He and his partner and nephew Claude Sterling operated Parnacott and Sterling from a building were the Frontier Bar now stands. Parnacott was the first Mayor of Three Forks.

PARNACOTT and STERLING

(From Headwaters Heritage History as written by Audrey Gilbert)

Claude Sterling and his Uncle William Parnacott purchased lots during the Milwaukee Land Company lot sale in 1908.

They were to form a partnership and establish a grocery store to be named Parnacott and Sterling with a side line of dishes, glassware and jewelry. Later years they purchased the adjoining building and sold feed. They also had an ice house in the back. The store was to continue operation into the early forties. Two homes were built a block back of the store on 1st Ave. East. All buildings are still kept up by their present owners.

Cyrus and Mary Sterling, mother and father of Claude, moved later to Three Forks with their young daughter, Eunice who completed school there, attended the University of Montana and returned to Three Forks as a bookkeeper for Parnacott and Sterling, later marrying Lawrence Bucklin and had two children, Bill and Marsha. Bill living in Lansing, Michigan and Marsha in Florence, Montana.

William and Rose Parnacott had no family. William died in 1943 and Rose in 1947. They were both active in the Catholic

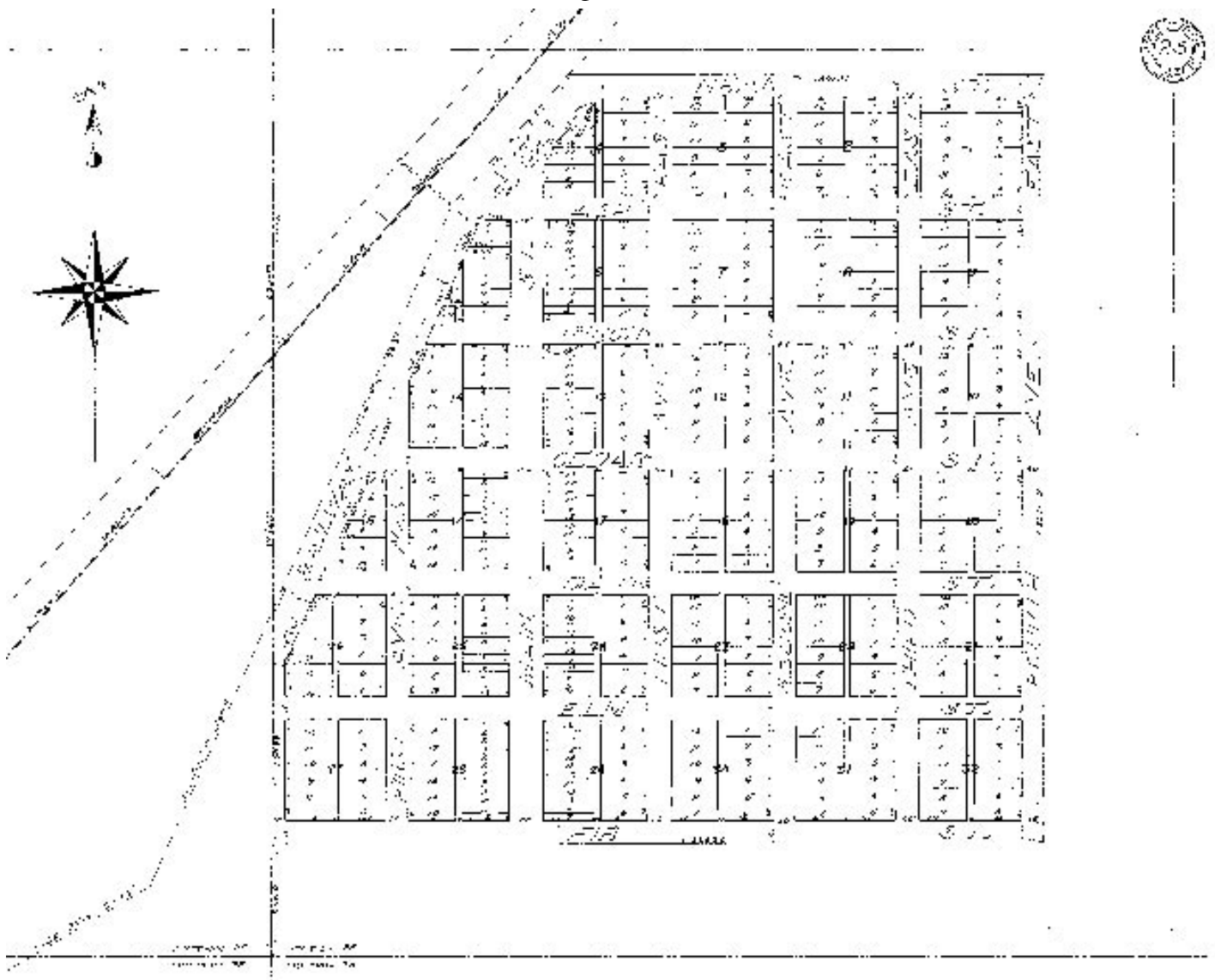
Church, B.P.O.E. and all civic projects. Bill serving as acting mayor before the first election.

Claude and Bess Sterling had four children, Stewart, Leola, Wayne and Audrey. All graduating from Three Forks High School and going on to higher learning. Bess and Stewart were accomplished musicians playing for many dances in the area. Claude died in 1940 and Bess in 1957, Stewart died in 1955 and Wayne in 1980. Leola, Mrs. RE. Davis, lives in Longview, Washington and Audrey, Mrs. Jay Gilbert, in Hamilton, Montana.

Audrey Gilbert

Martin Vetleson - Lawyer and key player in the incorporation of the Town of Three Forks. See excerpt from *Before My Time* below.

Original Plat of Three Forks, Montana
as approved by Gallatin County Commissioners
on September 15, 1908



Firsts in Three Forks

Excerpt from *Before My Time* by Patrick Finnegan

Squeezed into the unfinished freight room of the Milwaukee depot, men and women from all over the United States were bidding on the newly platted lots of Three Forks, Montana. Who among them would be the first to build, the first to go bankrupt, or the first criminal? There is a first time for everything and here are a few firsts for Three Forks, Montana.

Two lumber companies were the first to purchase lots in Three Forks in anticipation of the furious building activity to come; The Flint-Lynn Lumber Co. and the Clark Lumber Co. Both companies experienced delays in getting materials to keep the town's contractors going. Many tents were used to house the workers and businesses of the day, and a 12x19 wall tent was the first item in what today would be a classified ad.

In the first issue of the Three Forks Herald on September 24, 1908, a list of the first lot buyers is given. The first person to buy a lot on that rainy day auction the week before was Mr. T. A. Levinson of Chicago. The seventh buyer was the first woman to buy a lot was Mrs. Emma Belstrom of Harlowton. The first person in the list to give their address as Three Forks was D. P. Brower. His construction crews built many of the first homes and businesses in Three Forks.

Thomas J. Candler, purchased the ninth lot up for sale and built the Kentucky Club bar and pool hall. He was the first Justice of the Peace. His first court case involved a drunken fist fight behind the Dance Bros. saloon between George Davis and Fred Riggins. Candler was also the first businessman to go bankrupt in Three Forks, having quite the stock of liquor and cigars to sell off to pay his debts.

The first union in town was the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners. The first President of the Commercial Club (forerunner of the Chamber of Commerce) was Ben Reynolds. He was a partner with William Hunt in a hardware business before moving to Manhattan.

The first fire in Three Forks was set by its first arsonist, E. L. Thomas. Thomas owned a small paint shop in the rear of the Silver Dollar saloon and was disappointed that he was unable to sell it. After indulging in a bit of "corn juice," Mr. Thomas set fire to his shack.

The first true native of Three Forks was the eight pound baby boy of Mr. and Mrs. Booth. The boy arrived at two o'clock on the morning of February 22, 1909 and was delivered by Dr. Stroyer. Mr. Booth was an Engineer on the Milwaukee railroad.

Miss Rachel E. Murry of NY and Mr. Enoch Marvin Brooke of Pony were the first couple to be married in Three Forks on June 1, 1909 at the Catholic Church (which had been moved from Old Town).

Three Forks organized its first baseball team in April 1909, and had their first practice game. The game was held on "the new grounds south of the city." Could this be the where rodeo arena now stands? Thomas Thompson was the first manager of the team which was first financed by the Commercial Club.



First National Bank was the first bank in Three Forks. This building later housed J. C. Menapace General Merchandise, Hamilton Grocery, and Three Forks Saddlery. The bank moved into its new brick building (now the Masonic Lodge) in late 1909.

Photo courtesy of Headwaters Heritage Museum

Below - C. E. Adams, brother of founding father, J. Q. Adams, was the first to use the "3 forks" logo in his real estate advertisement in the Three Forks Herald.



Martin Vetleson

Excerpt from *Before My Time*
by Patrick Finnegan

The names of the men who were influential in the early days of Three Forks are many and recognizable; Adams, Abbott, Miller, Parnacott, Menapace, Dorsey, and Bryant. But one name seems to be consistently left off the list, but played a vital role in the formation of this city nearly 97 years ago.

On September 17, 1908, 73 men and women bought lots from the Milwaukee Land Company and began to lay down roots in Montana. A year later, the TF Herald of September 2, 1909 notes that "Martin Vetleson, of Ruby, North Dakota is in town this week and looking over the field with a view of establishing himself in the practice of law." The Herald goes on to say that Vetleson, who was 26 at the time, came with high recommendations from citizens of his former state. Vetleson and his parents were born in Minnesota, among the Norwegian immigrants of that state.

A perusal of the local paper would make it seem that Three Forks was the perfect place to get in on the ground floor. The Justice of the Peace, P.M. Abbott, was busy dispensing justice, the First National Bank had just opened its doors, and real estate firms were booming. Seeing some opportunities, Vetleson set up an office above the drug store (now Joanie Marie's) by the end of September.

Within a month, he had one of his first clients, The Three Forks Commercial Club. The Commercial Club was a Chamber of Commerce, a booster club, and the unofficial government of the Town rolled into one. Vetleson was called upon to guide the town's incorporation process through the legal terrain. A petition was drafted and signed by many of the residents of the unincorporated town and Vetleson presented it to the County Commissioners. At their November 1 meeting, the Commissioners approved the petition and appointed Vetleson as census taker. If the census showed more than 300 inhabitants, the commissioners would call an election for the incorporation of the town, which they did on December 13, 1909. The polling place was the office of the Milwaukee Hotel and Vetleson was the election officer. He took the election results to the County Commission, and in a special meeting, they declared Three Forks an incorporated town on December 15, 1909.

In January, residents of Three Forks met in a caucus to nominate candidates for Mayor and Wardsmen. Herald Editor P.S. Dorsey, an adamant promoter of Three Forks, was elected Caucus Chairman. When he called for nominations for the office of Mayor, Martin Vetleson was the first to be recognized and "in well chosen words stated the duties and responsibilities which would befall the first set of officers" and nominated P.M. Abbott for Mayor.

Unfortunately, Squire Abbott did not win the Mayoral race. William Parnacott was elected Mayor on January 17, 1910. Joseph Menapace and L. R. Thomas were elected first ward Aldermen, while Charles Ellison and E.C. Bryant were elected



MARTIN VETLESON
CANDIDATE FOR
POLICE JUDGE

B. A. Y. Willow Creek Home
stead, meets every
FIRST AND THIRD SAT. EVENING
at the school house. All visit-
ing brother and sister Archers
welcome.
Mrs. Lizzie Walbert, Cor. Paul Woodward, foreman

MARTIN VETLESON
Attorney-At-Law
Practices in State and Federal
Courts and before United
States Land Office.
Attention given to Renting and
Insurance of City Prop-
erty.
Three Forks, Montana
Date St. One Door East of the
Menapace Store.

THE
THREE FORKS DAIRY

is the sanitary dairy. The milk
goes from cow to bottle
without coming in con-
tact with the human
hand.
Our buildings are sec-

At left, a 1915 campaign ad, and on the right a 1914 Professional Card ad, both from the Three Forks Herald.

Courtesy of Headwaters Heritage Newspaper Archives

aldermen for the second ward

At February 21, 1910 meeting of the Council, Vetleson was hired as the Town's attorney until May. In the meantime, he was directed to set up the annual election in April. At this election, the Mayor and both Aldermen from the first ward were replaced, J.W. Ross becoming the second Mayor and L.W. Thomas and B. H. Everett aldermen. In May, the new Mayor and Council decided not to continue the services of Vetleson.

Vetleson did not let the loss of one client stop him. By June 1910, Vetleson was the local U.S. Land Commissioner. As Commissioner, Vetleson oversaw the homestead claims and proof of claims for the area. And 1910-1915 saw a lot of homesteaders making claims or proving claims. Things got so busy, that by 1912, Miss Pearle Buchele arrived from Burlington, Colo., to accept a position as stenographer in U.S. Commissioner M. Vetleson's office. Over the years Vetleson had many different locations for his office; above the First National Bank, above the Ruby, in the Independent Telephone Co. building, in the Herald Office, above the Post Office Drug Store, and one door east of the Menapace store as noted in the ad above.

Vetleson eventually married his stenographer and they had a son, Norman. The family lived in Manhattan for a number of years and Vetleson went on to become the Park county attorney in the mid 20s. Vetleson died in Tacoma, WA in 1967. So much history is made by people behind the scenes, but for a brief time, nearly 40 years after his death, Martin Vetleson stands in the spotlight.

The Great Promoter

Excerpt from *Before My Time*
by Patrick Finnegan

After many years of debate among its executives, the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul railroad decided to expand northwest in 1905. Key to the success of the expansion was ensuring that the tracks were kept busy. To do this, the railroad launched a tremendous promotional campaign that brought people west to seed new towns and homesteads.

John Quincy Adams (no relation to the President) was the General Land and Townsite Agent for the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway. It was his job buy land for the railroad and also to set up new towns along the right-of-way that would generate traffic. Three Forks was but one of these towns. Dozens of towns west of St. Paul got their start and names from the agents of the Milwaukee Land Co. Adams County in North Dakota was named after J. Q. Adams.

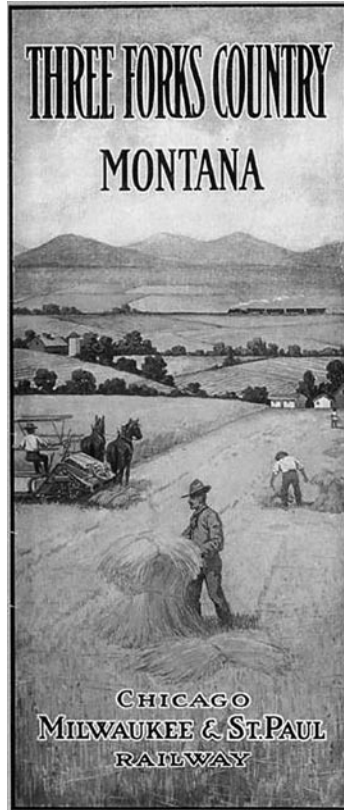
A.D. Jones was an Immigrant Agent for the Chicago, Milwaukee & Puget Sound Railway Co. It was his job to lure homesteaders to sites along the railroad. Brochures, discounted fares, and exclusive excursion tours were used to promote the west. Dry land farming was touted as the next best thing and many a lecturer or seminar was given, again to lure farmers to western homesteads

A.D. Jones, C. E. Adams (J.Q.'s brother) and the Crowley brothers were also proprietors of the Three Forks Land Co. For a short time the Three Forks Land Co. was the local agency working with the Milwaukee Land Co. The second automobile in town was purchased in 1909 by the Three Forks Land Co. It was "a Buick touring car of the latest model." Jones and the Crowley brothers (Michael and William)

could give touring excursions of the area to potential buyers.

But Jones and the CM&PS Ry were not the only ones to promote the west. The Northern Pacific, with a spur line to Butte just south of the City, did its share of promoting. Shortly after the founding of Three Forks, the N.P. upgraded its track-side storage shed to a full fledged depot, so that by June 1910 the "Better Farming Special" had a nice place to stop. The Special was loaded with new farming implements, and a number of professors that gave demonstrations and lectures on agronomy, horticulture, husbandry, and veterinary medicine. The turn out in Three Forks was low since many farmers were in the middle of hay season.

In 1916, the Three Forks Herald hailed A. D. Jones as "one of the vigorous men who had an important part in establishing the new City of Three Forks, and in bringing to the attention of eastern farmers, capitalists and laborers the great opportunities for investment here, and it was due largely to his efforts that the Three Forks country has been settled by a sturdy, progressive people."



Left - Cover of promotional brochure c. 1908.

Above - C.E. Adams and A.D. Jones in front of their offices. Photo courtesy of the Headwaters Heritage Museum

Right - A. D. Jones photo on the front page of the Three Forks Herald May 1916.



HON. A. D. JONES

Below - Photo of the "Better Farming Special" stopped at the Northern Pacific depot on the south end of town, June 1910.

Photo courtesy of the Headwaters Heritage Museum



Dreams for Sale

Excerpt from *Before My Time*
by Patrick Finnegan

On the dreary morning of September 17, 1908 a special train of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul stopped to let off passengers at the still incomplete depot at northern end of the newly platted town of Three Forks. On the southern end of town, the Northern Pacific railroad passengers were unloaded at a small depot not much larger than a two-hole outhouse. The N.P. had given these passengers special excursion rates to reach Three Forks. Town lots were for sale and people came from around the country to buy them.

The auction was to be held on Main Street, which looked much like a wide-open prairie. Between the two depots there were only a few tents and two lumber yards. The number of people wondering the prairie that day was estimated between seven hundred and a thousand. Unfortunately, it was drizzling rain and the hopeful masses crowded into the freight room of the C.M.&S.P. depot for the auction.

One can imagine the mix of people in that room; bakers, bankers, businessmen, contractors, farmers, painters, land speculators, lumber yard managers, railroad executives, real estate agents, reporters and many spectators and family members. Of the hundreds gathered around the auctioneer Col. Harry Hilman of Sioux City, IA, there were only 72 people who ended up with lots that day. Among the spectators were E.M. Mestad, who later opened a bakery, and Fred Studebaker, an itinerant painter, who became the manager of the town baseball team only to disappear shortly afterwards.

As one would expect, many of the lot buyers were from towns and cities to the east of Three Forks, especially from towns down the Milwaukee line. Buyers from "Harlowtown" were predominate, but Lombard, Terry, Martinsdale, Lavina, Miles City, Roundup and Ruby MT were represented. Out-of-staters mostly came from North and South Dakota; Bowman, Dickinson, Edgeley, and Marmarth ND and Armour, Haley and Lemon, SD.

Butte was the most represented with thirteen lot buyers including E. A. Barrett who was moving to Three Forks as the new Superintendent of the Rocky Mountain Division of the Milwaukee.

The original plat of Three Forks had 130 lots on Main Street and, according to the next week's Three Forks Herald, all but 11 of those lots were sold at the auction. Lots went from \$160 to \$1000 each and the auction lasted well into the evening.

Mrs. Emma Bilstrom, of "Harlowtown," bought eight lots, selling most of them within a few years for a profit. She stuck around and built the Bilstrom building (now the southern portion of McKreanor's) which housed the Traveler's Cafe, where she was the proprietor.

Ida R. Wolfe, of Miles City and apparently not a triskaidekaphobic, purchased lot 13 of block 13, where Fred's Place and the Big Sky used to be.



Milwaukee Depot c. 1920



Cover of a Milwaukee promotional brochure c 1910





Upper Left: One of the rotor / turbines for the Madison River Power Plant.
 Upper Right: Rotor on the scow.
 Middle Right: Madison River Dam & flues.
 Above Right: Completed power plant
 Above: 25 horses and five men move the rotor up the Madison valley.
 Right: The interior of the power plant.
 Left: Street lamp on the corner of Cedar and Main St. Three Forks, c. 1917



Madison River Power Company

Excerpt from *Before My Time* by Patrick Finnegan

Today, one takes for granted that if a switch is flipped, lights will come on or music will play. But, it was just 100 years ago that the Gallatin Valley got powered up.

The Madison River dam was constructed in 1903 and it was two years before the power plant was completed. Part of the difficult was getting materials to the relatively remote location just a few miles from Norris and Redbluff. After the dam, flues and power plant building was constructed one last challenge remained to finish the plant, getting four rotor / turbines to the plant and installed. The rotor weigh several tons and had to have special wagon to move it. It took 24 horses and five men to get the four rotors, one at a time, from the rail station at Logan to the mouth of the Madison canyon. There, the rotor was transferred to a scow and floated up river to the construction site.

Power lines were run to Bozeman and they had their first electricity in 1906. Power lines reached Trident and Three Forks about the same time. To help give impetus to the idea, J. Q. Adams, founder and patron of the City, pledged the funds to buy and install six street lamps and the two banks in town, Three Valleys Bank and First National Bank pledge one street lamp each. So, on December 8, 1912 the fancy five-globed electrified lights of Three Forks were turned on for the first time.

The Madison River Power Company paid a annual \$25 business license fee to the City in 1911. Only the bars and hotels paid higher annual fees (\$50+).

Butte Electric and Power Company merged itself and its three subsidiaries to form the Montana Power Company on December 12, 1912. Madison River Power Company was one of the subsidiaries, along with Billings and Eastern Montana Power Company and the Missoula River Power Company. By 1917, Montana Power had an office in town (at the Ruby Theatre), and through the years the office changed locations.

The N.P. Restaurant and the Mestads

Excerpt from *Before My Time*
by Patrick Finnegan

In 1908 many families had the luxury of traveling by rail to the west. Homesteaders could load all their clothing, furniture, equipment and animals in railcars and came west with the hope of starting fresh in the wide open spaces of Montana. One family that took advantage of the rails was E. M. and Jessie Mestad. The Mestads had visited many of the new towns along the Milwaukee railroad but got off the train on September 17, 1908, the day of the first lot sales in the new town.

The Mestads were down to their last few dollars and were unable to buy any land but they were experienced restaurateurs and bakers. With help of the Adams family, the Mestads built a small bakery behind the American National Bank building (on the alley behind the present day Museum).

The bakery was so successful that J.Q. Adams provided financing to build a larger building in 1911. Despite the town being predominately a Milwaukee town, the Mestads called their new business the N.P. Restaurant. The location of the building is



given as the old Burlington Northern freight depot (now Stageline Pizza). (Photo courtesy of Headwaters Heritage Museum)

E.M. Mestad was the postmaster for a few years, starting in 1932. He was also active in organizing "The Townsend Plan," an old age revolving pension fund in the 30s. The Mestads were in business for 28 years and later moved to Las Vegas in the mid 1930s.

Three Forks, Montana

By "The Cowboy Author"

If you're living in a city
Where it's hard to make ends meet,
Where the money that you're earning
Won't buy what you'd like to eat,
Then come out to Old Montana
Where there's Trout and Buck and Doe,
Free – enough for ev'rybody –
Where the big red apples grow.

If you're working in a fact'ry
Where the air is filled with smoke,
Where your lungs are growing weaker,
And at night you cough and choke,
Then come out to Old Montana
Where the air is clear and pure;
You will live a great deal longer,
And need no consumption cure.

If you're farming in the country
Where the soil is poor and light
Where the droughts and floods and cyclones
Keep you guessing day and night,

Then come out to Old Montana
Where crop failures are unknown,
And you'll reap a goodly fortune
From each acre you have sown.

If you're tired of rainy weather,
Mud and fever, grip and chills,
And it keeps you busy while you're well
To pay your Doctor bills,
Then come out to Old Montana
Where such things are never found,
Where's there's Health and Wealth and Sunshine
Ev'ry day the whole year round.

If you're tired of your position,
And you don't know what to do,
Just buy yourself a ticket
On the old Milwaukee through;
Have it read "Old Montana,"
And if you would have it nice,
Stop off at GOOD OLD THREE FORKS
And taste of Paradise.

C. E. Wendel ----Northwest News
Three Forks Herald, Thursday July 23, 1914

DEFINITIONS

Land Grant - The Property Clause of the Constitution (Art. IV, sec. 3, cl. 2) gives Congress the power to “dispose of” land owned by the federal government. Under this clause, Congress distributed most federal land through sales or grants to states, firms, or individuals. Many grants were made specifically to support education, the construction of railroads, or other beneficial activities. *Answers.com results for Land Grant, Railroad*

Plat - A map drawn to scale, showing the divisions of a piece of land. *Wikipedia.com*

Right-of-way - An easement that permits one to travel across the real property of another, or the strip of land subject to such an easement. A right-of-way may confer rights to an individual (such as a neighbor), entity (such as a railroad) or the public as a whole. *Wikipedia.com*

(Municipal) Infrastructure - Typically includes transportation, sewer, reservoir, potable water supply systems, police station and local jails under the jurisdiction of a local government. *Wikipedia.com*

OTHER RESOURCES

The following books are available for purchase at the Headwaters Heritage Museum

Growing Pains by Fran Denning

Call of the Headwaters by David A. Miller

Taylor Made: Gallatin County's First Census

by Patrick Finnegan

Hills by the Headwaters By Edward Fenlason

Before My Time by Patrick Finnegan

Headwaters Heritage History On CD by Three Forks Area Historical Society

Available for perusal and checkout from Headwaters Heritage Museum or Three Forks Public Library

Headwaters Heritage History by Three Forks Area Historical Society

Gallatin County: Places & things, past & present by Grace Bates

Exclusively at the Headwaters Heritage Museum;

Microfilm newspaper archive

The Three Forks Herald

The Pink Reporter

CLASS LESSONS OR PROJECTS

One lesson would be to have students consider what issues city government must deal with. A project would have students design a city clearly showing or stating how the elements below would be placed and maintained.

Planning a City

Infrastructure

Water

Sewer

Storm Water management

Streets and Alleys (transportation)

Street / park lighting

Fire Protection

Other Services

Police Protection

Parks

Other Issues

Ordinances

Zoning

Permitting

Taxes

Non-Governmental Services

Garbage disposal

Electricity

Natural Gas

Telephone

Cable TV / Internet

Mass Transit