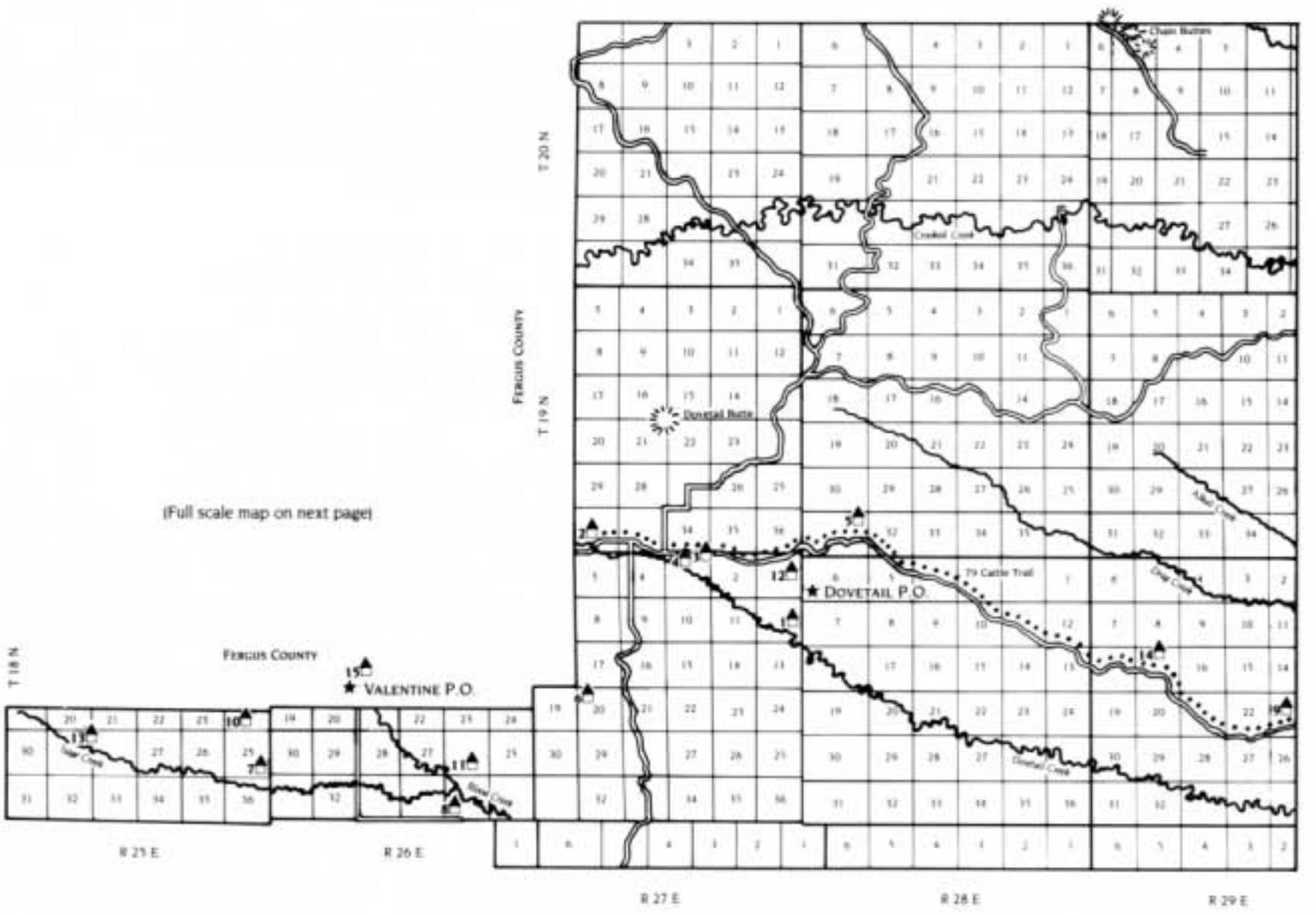
Dovetail — Valentine



(Full scale map on next page)

SCHOOLS

1. Carrell
2. Conolly
3. Dovetail
4. 1st Dovetail
5. Franklin
6. Gomer
7. Harts (Lone Tree Coulee)
8. Long (Paradise Valley)
9. Mecaha (Nordquist)
10. Nettleton
11. New Long
12. Rigg
13. Sage Creek
14. 79 (Kastner - Killham - Kirkendall)
15. Valentine

School
Post Office
State Highway
County Road (1986)
Trail
Railroad

0 1 2 3
MILES

N

PETROLEUM COUNTY

Mowing hay in early days. Note height of uncut hay.

Lady in riding skirt helps brand! (L to R) Sadie Hagen, Art Busby, Emil Hayfield, Mr. Busby, Nick Hayfield, William Busby Jr., Mrs. Busby (outside fence)

Sam and Zell Conolly with their children out for a Sunday drive at the Coffey homestead in 1923.

Doc Jackson, Mrs. Dobner, Anne Gotzinger, Carl Jackson, and John Gotzinger in the car

Dovetail Butte as seen from the northwest

Dovetail — Valentine

Dovetail and Valentine are being combined in this chapter because these communites have always had close ties.

Valentine had the first post office in the area. It was officially designated on May 10, 1903, with Maud Lorimer as postmaster. There were very few other post offices in all of eastern Fergus County at the time. Grassrange and Flatwillow had opened in 1883, Roy in 1892, Edgewater in 1900 and Weede in 1901. Winnett did not have a post office until 1910.

The Dovetail post office was designated on April 18, 1916, with Martin Rigg as postmaster. A mail route ran from Valentine to Dovetail for many years. The mail carrier dropped off mail at the various homesteads along the route between the two post offices. The other people had to go to one or the other post office to pick up their mail.

Many of the homesteaders came to Lewistown, Hilger or Roy by emigrant train with all their belongings. (The railroad came into Lewistown in 1903, to Hilger in 1911 and to Roy in 1914.) They would load up their wagons and set off for Valentine where they could replenish supplies before going on to their homesteads in the Dovetail area. Stores and services at Valentine supplied many of the things needed by the homesteaders and often saved them long hard trips to Roy, Winnett or Lewistown.

School District #169 was created November 14, 1916, and it served both Dovetail and Valentine until 1920 when Valentine became part of a new district. One set of trustees hired all the teachers and took care of the business of all the schools for a very large district.

From Dovetail North to the Missouri Breaks

The Dovetail Butte has always been a well-known landmark, especially from the north side. There is still part of a travois trail on its flanks made by the Indians before the settlers moved into the area. They used the butte as a lookout point because from the top they could see so far in every direction. From the south, the butte looks like a tall hill and is not really noticeable among other hills.

From the north, however, it shows up for many miles — from the Little Rockies across the Missouri, up to the ridges by Roy, and east to the far side of the Musselshell Breaks. The butte was named because of a large triangle of trees and brush near the top that show black from a distance. This triangle divides the butte so it looks like a dove's tail, hence "Dovetail Butte."

Dovetail Creek was named because of the way the head of the creek was formed by two separate branches that came together in the shape of a dove's tail. Naturally the area around these landmarks became known as "Dovetail."

The *Heritage Book of Original Fergus County* says "The '79

outfit (named for 1879, the year they began running cattle) was started on Sweetgrass Creek by John R. Murphy, using 79 for his brand. 79 Coulee, 79 Springs, and 79 Trail were names of places used by the outfit. 79 Coulee was their horse camp. They trailed thousands of cattle and sheep along the 79 Trail, across the Musselshell and back as they needed fresh grass." The road that runs from Valentine, past the Dovetail School and on down to the Musselshell River is a part of the Old 79 Trail.

The influx of homesteaders came to the Dovetail area about 1912, and soon there were settlers on almost every 160 acres trying to cope with a land that averaged 10 to 12 inches of moisture each year. There were no running streams in the area except the rivers that bound it on the north and east. Some of the homesteaders were lucky enough to find springs of good drinking water, but the others had to dig wells, or haul water from the springs.

Much of the water from the wells was too alkaline for people to drink, so they had to continue hauling their drinking water, and used the water from the wells for the livestock and cleaning. Later they built stock dams to catch the runoff from rain and melting snow. This helped take care of their water needs, at least part of the time.

Meat was not a big problem for them as there were deer, antelope, rabbits, sage hens, and grouse in abundance. The homesteaders all grew big gardens of vegetables to eat fresh, and to can or preserve for use in the winter.

The best gardens were the ones that could be watered. Bucket after bucket after bucket of water was carried to the garden and carefully applied to do the most good. This chore came around every week or more often and, to the kids who had to help, even the thought of the good things to eat didn't take away all the irritation

Fruit and jams were not readily available, but the homestead mothers and kids picked the wild fruits of the area when they were in season and made jams and jellies that were delicious. The fruits found in the area were chokecherry, buffalo berry, and wild plum. Have you ever tried chokecherry jelly or syrup on hotcakes or hot bread? M-m-m-good!

The corner grocery store was from 30 to 50 miles away so supplies had to be bought to last about a year as the trip to town took two days each way, and people couldn't afford to go very often. The trips were usually made in the fall so they could take in a load of grain to sell.

Imagine the grocery list! It must contain all the staples needed such as kerosene for lamps, flour, sugar, salt, dried beans, rice, dried fruits, spices, soda, baking powder, etc. Then remember, you still have to figure out how much of each you need. Oh yes! Don't forget the ingredients for the home remedies needed for sickness. And what about clothes, or at least material so mother can make them?

Dad usually brought home a treat of candy to top off the load. It was a red-letter day when the family spotted the wagon coming home, and all were waiting anxiously for Dad to get there so they could find out what he brought.

Besides the garden, most of the homesteaders had at least one cow for milk, chickens for eggs and meat, a hog or two so they would have home-cured bacon, ham and sausage for winter. The rest of the meat was either canned or eaten right away so it didn't spoil. The sausage was usually kept in large crocks of lard in a cool place, and the hams and bacon were hung where they would stay cool and dry.

Unlike much of the rest of the county, wood was quite readily available because there were pines and cedars in the draws and cottonwoods along the creeks and rivers. The homesteaders hunted out the dead wood as it was cured and ready to use. It had to be hauled home, chopped into stove lengths, then carried into the house as needed. Since wood was the only source of heat, it meant a lot of chopping and hauling.

Cottonwood is a clean burning wood, but the pitch in the pine created a lot of soot which meant that the stovepipe must be taken down often and cleaned out to get rid of the unburned soot. Many a cabin burned down because the soot in the stovepipe started to burn and the intense heat started the cabin on fire. The shortage of water made it almost impossible to put out a fire once it got started.

The homesteaders settled on the lands where there were flats and rolling hills. They picked the areas that looked workable, and basically avoided the sharp breaks along the rivers. A lot of them settled on the river bottoms and raised good hay crops and later, alfalfa seed. The breaks were mostly used for grazing because of the steepness and roughness of the land. As one homesteader said, "You get more land (in the breaks), because it all stands on end and they can fit more in that way."

The soil in the area ranges from heavy gumbo to shale to gumbo to sand to gumbo. When gumbo is wet it is called the "friendly mud" because it all wants to go with you. Walking through it, your feet get bigger and bigger until your tracks look like elephant tracks. As it dries it forms a crust, like cement, that plants can't get through. If you peel off the top crust, it is often muddy underneath.

From Crooked Creek to the Missouri Breaks one can find bits of petrified wood, pieces of petrified fish, etc. The most spectacular rocks, however, are the granite boulders of all sizes and colors — blues, yellows, orange, reds and greens. Many a fireplace has been made with these rocks, and they are beautiful.

The first priority of the homesteaders when they arrived was shelter for their family. Some of them built tar-paper shacks. Most of them built log houses, some of which never had a floor. Some used "dug outs" — holes dug into the side of a hill as far back as they wanted to go, the walls shored up to prevent caving, then roofed over and a front fitted with a door for an entrance. Later rooms could be added to the front for additional space.

There were some sod huts. These were built with layers of sod laid like bricks, with walls up to three feet thick.

Marguerite Coffey at Dovetail Post Office

One "soddie" in the area was still a home in the 1940s.

The first post office at Dovetail was at the Martin Rigg home. It was established on April 18, 1916. Riggs also ran a small store, the only one in Dovetail. In about 1921, due to ill health, Mr. and Mrs. Martin Rigg left Dovetail. The post office was moved to the A. G. Coffey place, and Mrs. Coffey was appointed postmaster. Coffeys kept the post office until the government closed it on July 31, 1945. In the early days, mail came on a route from Valentine twice a week, but for the last 35 or 40 years, it came on a route out of Winnett, still twice a week.

There were no doctors in the area. The closest one was in Winnett, some 30 to 40 miles away. The homesteaders had to find remedies for the illnesses that beset them. Many of the ladies had brought recipes for assorted home medications and these were all put to good use. Some of the remedies used for colds and coughs by Mrs. Loesch and Mrs. West were: onion syrup, egg whites whipped with alum, oil of eucalyptus, kerosene with sugar or lard. For the bad chest cold they used a mustard plaster on the back, and rubbed the front with Mentholatum or goose grease, then to bed to try to sweat the sickness away. Lard and sulfur were used for the itch.

Midwives helped the mothers have their babies. They came on call and stayed as long as their help was needed — cooking, washing and caring for other children. Among the ladies who served Dovetail as midwives were: Mrs. Percy Jeffery, Mrs. Charlie Myers and Mrs. Lillian Carrell. Mrs. Myers and Mrs. Jeffery were both nurses and a great help with illness or accident.

The schoolhouses were the community centers in each locality. The school Christmas programs were one of the highlights of the year, and well attended by everyone in the community whether they had kids or not. Dances were held regularly and drew people from all over the country. Some came as far as 20 to 30 miles to go to a dance.

To make money for community projects, box socials were held. The ladies fixed up beautifully wrapped boxes filled with enough food for two people, and these were raffled off to the highest bidder. Of course, part of the prize was the opportunity to eat the lunch with the lady who prepared it. Some of the love-smitten young men had to pay a hefty price for the box he thought his love had prepared, or sit glumly by while someone else dined with her! Sometimes he got the box he wanted only to find it was the wrong one. Love was hard at times like that.

Many communities had baseball teams made up of the local residents. Great rivalries existed and baseball was played each Sunday of the summer, usually with a potluck picnic to feed the people who came to cheer on their team and to visit.

The people put on many home talent plays. Everybody went to the plays and it was great fun for the players and the audience. There were picnics and potluck dinners. Any excuse for gathering was a good one, as long as people could get together with their neighbors for a visit.

Church was held at the schools when a preacher was available. Sunday school was held at the same time. The services were greatly enjoyed, and the people liked to lift their voices and sing the old hymns they had grown up with. The youngsters usually had a week of Bible school shortly after the regular school had closed for the summer. Young men and women from the Bible colleges would come, teach Bible school for a week, have a program to show how the children had learned, and be off to the next school.

Times were tough. The people worked hard, but they seldom had much money. There was little desire to "keep up with the Joneses" as Joneses didn't have any more than anyone else. The children helped with the work and chores and accepted what their parents provided. Speaking as a homestead kid — I didn't know we were poor until I went into Winnett to high school and some of the smart-mouthed town kids informed me we were poor. I feel we got something from the homestead that couldn't be bought. We had pride in ourselves and our family, and we knew that we could find a way to weather whatever came along. (Ruth Iverson Laugeman)

Valentine

Valentine was formerly the headquarters of the Benning Bean Ranch. When Mrs. Mary Bean succeeded in getting a post office designated, she named it Valentine Post Office after the Valentine Springs a short distance away. For details see the Bean story.

It was not until 1914 that the *Polk Directory* listed any businesses in Valentine. At that time five business people were mentioned: B. M. Bean, U. S. Commissioner; Mary Bean, postmaster; G. F. Budweiser, land attorney; Eugene Becotte, blacksmith; and Bunnell and Gotzinger, general store.

In October 1914 J. E. Galloway surveyed a plat for a townsite, and in January 1915, Benning M. Bean donated the surveyed plat for use by the public as the Valentine townsite. By 1916 the *Polk Directory* listed several additional businesses — another general store, a newspaper, another blacksmith shop, a lumberyard, and Dr. T. W. Nickel's doctor's office.

G. F. Budweiser was a land attorney. He also started a newspaper, *The Valentine News*, which thrived for several years. It filled the requirements for the homesteaders to advertise their intention to file. In about 1922 there was no more land to file on and many homesteaders were leaving, so he closed his office and printing shop and moved away.

W. E. Bunnell was the owner of the first general store in Valentine. He sold tobacco, whiskey and supplies. C. G. Kiameloft was also listed as a general store operator in 1916.

The Stage from Valentine to Grassrange

Ole Lunn (or Lund) — in addition to Eugene Becotte — had a blacksmith business. Ole lived northeast of Valentine on land adjoining Adolph Lashat. Later Forrest Tindall was the "smithy."

McCain and Johnson had a lumber business.

The Rigg Brothers opened a general store in 1917 or 1918 and sold groceries, tools and some clothing. Most of the clothing came from Sears Roebuck or "Monkey" Wards, however.

The 1918 Polk Directory listed tri-weekly stage fare to Grassrange for $3.00.

There was one old boy that used to bake bread there, too. He used to be called "Kill-a-man-off." No one remembers what his name was or what kind of bakery you'd call it, but the oven he baked the bread in was like a dugout. It was good bread, too, even if it didn't look good.

A gathering at Valentine hall. White building in background is the Valentine School.

There was a schoolhouse, a line of log cabins set end to end to form a hotel, a building called the Annex for storage, a dormitory (run by Mrs. Clyde Stevens for a time, then taken over by Mrs. Addie Bevis) and numerous cabins and homes.

Community spirit was not lacking. The Winnett Times reported the following item October 28, 1921. "The high school football squad and a number of local businessmen spent Thursday working on the roads in the Valentine country. This is the start of a movement that will eventually assure us of a good north road." (It says something good about "kids.")

The people of the area used to hold dances and plays at the schoolhouse. They also had a fair in the fall where everybody would take their vegetables, grain and flowers to show. The prizes were furnished by the businesses in Winnett and some of the local people, too. The prizes and donors would be listed in the Winnett Times, along with what the prizes were for — the biggest pumpkin, the best peck of wheat, etc.

The fair always brought in a big crowd and all of the Dovetail people would come too. Then there was a dance after the fair. The schoolhouse was just too small to handle the crowds, so they decided they needed a community hall, and that they would build it onto the schoolhouse.

They started taking donations for the hall. They gave pie socials, box lunch dances, baseball games, rodeos and anything else they could think of to raise more money for the hall. The Winnett Times gave recognition to the project with this article in 9-24-26: "The Valentine community appreciate the value of a community hall and are cooperating and working hard to erect such a structure at Valentine.

"All the rough boards have been sawed out of native timber at the Neil Harris sawmill, which brought the costs down to very little. Finishing lumber, windows, doors, and cement is all the material that will need to be purchased to complete the building. Men of the neighborhood plan to do the carpenter and concrete work themselves, and thus save on labor costs."

Lester Bevis was a young man in the community at the time. These are some of his memories of the building project.

"The men went up to the hills on the Harris place to cut logs. They sawed the logs into rough lumber right there, then hauled the lumber down and started building the hall. The only lumber they had to buy was the finish lumber and, of course, doors and windows. I remember helping lay the hardwood floor. They had a carpenter who was very particular. If you happened to smash a groove or a lip on the hardwood, he would get pretty hostile.

"The groove had to fit over the lip of the last row put down. You used a piece of scrap hardwood and tapped the new one into place, then tap the end to make that seam tight. You nailed your new piece in with special nails that went into the board on a slope from the top of the lip. The nail had to be flush or the next board didn't fit. It was a heck of a job, but we sure had a nice smooth floor to dance on."

The schoolhouse, attached to the hall, was opened into the hall, so it could be used as a kitchen and food served to crowds easily. A nursery was set up in the west end of the school building so the little ones could sleep while Mom and Dad danced. A stage was built across the north end of the hall. It came in handy for home-talent plays and other entertainment."

Les continues, "The hall was finished in 1926 or 1927; it measured 40 x 60 feet. It was initiated with a bang up, wall-to-wall dance. People came from all around for the celebration — Dovetail, Winnett, Roy and all the other communities near enough to come — and I can tell you that was one humdinger of a dance."

Valentine Baseball team in 1927. Back row: Clyde Lind, Roland Matthews, Gib Walters, Frank Parrish (mgr.), Tom Hogan, Cliff Marsh. Front row: Eddy Atkinson, Andy Lewis, unknown, Tiff Myers, and Ham Morrison in background.

Ladies Day — Back row, L to R: Elsie Messenger, Florence Lewis, Viola Sinclair, Jennie Lewis, Sadie Hagen, Della Trimble, Della Sinclair and baby. Front row: Eva Trimble, Jeane Hagen, Grace Trimble, Marjorie Cooper, Wanda Sinclair, Margaret Hagen. Small children are Helen Lewis and Tommy Hagen.

In late 1933 work was begun on the construction of a dam on Blood Creek just west of Valentine. It was started under the Civil Works Administration but the CWA was cancelled in the summer of 1934. Other programs took its place, but there were many delays in the funding for the dam. It was eventually completed under the WPA in late April 1936.

This brought in a great many men with teams to build the dam. The hall was lined with cots for the men, and food was served cafeteria style from the kitchen. Many families came with the men and lived in the hotel or available houses at Valentine. There was already an operating school for the children so it worked out well for the families.

The dam was to be used for irrigation for the places below, but due to the drought, most of the homesteaders had been forced to leave before it ever filled with water. Very little irrigating was ever done from the dam as the irrigation project was dropped when the people left. The dam was used for fishing, boating, and water skiing for many years until it washed out on June 15, 1962. A five to six inch rain took out a 200' section of the middle of the dam, washing out fences, roads and bridges all the way to the Musselshell River.

As more and more homesteaders left, the businesses also left, and "Valentine" faded away to once more become the headquarters of a ranch, this time owned by Sam Conolly. Paul Pitman owns the ranch now, but lives about ½ mile north of the Valentine site. (Memories of Bernard Lewis and Lester Bevis)

Schools of the Dovetail Area
District #169

One thing the homesteaders were particularly determined about was the education of their children. A joint school district including Dovetail and Valentine was formed in 1916 and numbered 169. In the Dovetail area, the first school was held in the one-room log cabin that had been the Iverson home until Tom Iverson had time to build a larger house for his family.

The first teacher was Geneva Galloway, who had a homestead west of Valentine. She was an artist and several of her paintings hung in the Gem Cafe in Lewistown for many years. The first pupils were: Altha and Blanche Payne, Rhea and Raymond Dobner, Andrew and Isaac Iverson, and Jeanette Hedman who stayed at Iversons and attended school there for a time. Mrs. Sam Conolly taught the school the next few years.

As more families settled in the area, and more children were old enough, there was a need for more schools. In 1917, one school was built on the ridge south of Dovetail Creek and was named the Gomer School because it was on land owned by Bill Gomer. Another school was built near the Dovetail Post Office and called the Rigg School because Rigg owned the land it was on. In 1919 the Rigg School was closed and another school was built right on Dovetail Creek, surrounded by the Carrell families, and called the Carrell School.

A new school was built in the northeastern part of the district. It was on the William Franklin place and called the Franklin School. The Conolly School was also built at this time. It was located about three miles west of the present location of the Dovetail School and was close to the border between present-day Fergus and Petroleum Counties. It was called the Conolly School because Zell Conolly was the teacher. About the same time, the Gomer School was put into a different district.

Families began to leave the area and teachers were hard to find. At least one year, Zell Conolly taught four months at the Carrell School and four months at the Conolly School so children would be able to attend in each area.

In 1923 it was decided to move one of the vacant schools to a midway point between the Carrell School and the Conolly School. Tom Iverson donated the land for the school and the Franklin schoolhouse was moved to the site. This school was known as Dovetail from then on.

It became easier to get teachers as there were many young girls just out of college who were eager to find a school to teach. The first year at the new Dovetail School, the teacher was Peggy Spicer from Lewistown. She boarded with Conollys.

Not only did a teacher have to teach all eight grades, she also had to get to school early enough to get the fire built and the schoolroom warm for the students. She was the janitor, too, and had to keep the room swept out and clean. She had to make all the busy work for the students as there were no workbooks in those good old days.

Many of the children rode horseback several miles to get to school. Each brought a bag of oats to feed their horse at noon. A barn was built at the school for shelter for the horses through the day.

A woodshed was built, and the different families took turns furnishing the wood for the school term. Drinking water for the children was furnished in the same way.

The children brought their lunches in lard pails, syrup buckets and even pretty metal cans that looked like baskets and had come filled with tobacco. When the weather was bitter cold, all the lunches were set around the stove to keep the food from freezing. There were days when the pupils had to pull their desks as close as they could to the stove so they could stay warm. If the

The last Dovetail School as it is now

The first Dovetail School in Tom Iverson's one-room homestead house. Students (L to R) Raymond Dobner, Blanche Payne, Andrew Iverson, Geneva Galloway (teacher), Isaac Iverson and Altha Payne

School at Dovetail after the Franklin schoolhouse was moved to a central location. Students (L to R) Guri Ann Iverson, Ole Olson, Robert Walsh, Agnes Olson, Andrew Iverson, Kefas Sikveland, Merle Pickard, Kenneth Walsh, and Isaac Iverson

Moving the Conolly schoolhouse to the Dovetail School location

RECESS!

weather was really bad, either their folks would come to meet them, or they would stay over at Iversons which was only a quarter of a mile from the school.

The school board had a swing erected (two tall poles with a heavy crossbar on the top, and two swings suspended from the bar). This was the first swing most of the kids had ever seen, and they kept it swinging any time they had free time.

The year Marie Kintzi taught, the school board found out she could play the piano, so they bought a piano for the school. The piano afforded much enjoyment for the community for many years.

The teachers boarded at Conollys until Conollys moved to Valentine. After that they boarded at Iversons.

The many young bachelors of the community were greatly attracted to the young lady teachers. Some won the girls' hearts and after marriage, these teachers became part of the community. For example: Helen Wagar and Andrew Iverson, Alzora Prewitt and Clairmont Clark, Virginia Huffman and George Carrell, Nora Kinsella and Lars Lund, Norma Powell and Richard Jeffrey, Mae James and Carl Jackson, and Inez Houts and Dennis Jackson.

In the summer of 1928, the school board decided to bring in the Conolly School to add to the Dovetail School in order to have more room for school activities and community functions.

In the early days, where there were kids, there was school. There was a school near the Kirkendall place about eight to ten miles from the Dovetail School, known as the 79 School. Old tales tell of a school near Mecaha that was moved from one side of the Musselshell River to the other, depending on where there were the most pupils. Some families were so isolated that they hired tutors for their children. No matter where they lived, the homesteaders saw to it there was schooling for their families.

The children went from these country schools to high school and then on to college for the ones who desired and could afford to go. They ranked right up with the "townies," as far as education went. We all owe many thanks to the dedicated teachers who came in to teach these country schools. Without them, a lot of kids would have been hard put to realize their full potential. (Ruth Iverson Laugeman)

Valentine Schools

The first schools listed in the Valentine area were the Valentine School and the Stephens School. The Valentine School was always close to Valentine, although it was moved several times. The Stephens School was held at the Stephens home, and Mrs. Regina Stephens was the teacher. There was another school about seven miles to the west of Valentine called the Sage Creek School. This school was near the Clifford Clark place and Mrs. Clark was one of the first teachers there.

In 1914 Charley Long gave the land and built a school near his home, so they could have a school for all the children in that area. The school was called the Long School. This school was burned down in the late twenties, so another school was built to replace it. They called the new school the New Long School. It served generally the same area.

None of these schools are operating now.

Valentine School — Back row L to R: Margaret Hagen, Eva Trimble, Katherine Wright, Mona Bevis, Nan Weingart, Zell Conolly (teacher). 2nd row: unknown, Bob Hagen, Theron Conolly, Wayne Conolly, George Trimble. Front row: first three girls — unknown, fourth girl — Mary Jane Casteel