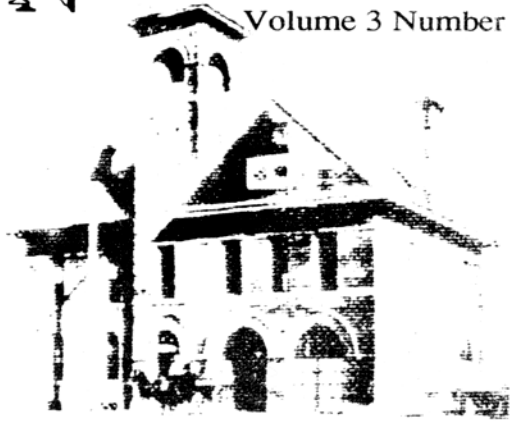
LIVINGSTON DOWNTOWN

Summer 1995

Volume 3 Number 1



# Playing With Fire

*By Nancy Kessler*

Cities stand as a testament to civilization, but fire has always challenged mankind's monuments to itself. Livingston suffered its first conflagration just one year after it was established in July, 1882. Dozens more structures were lost during the devastating fire season of 1885-86 and in many a major fire since then.

A volunteer fire department was formed in 1883, six days after that first fire. City fathers, however, held off until 1894 before hiring the first paid fireman and buying a one-horse hose-and-ladder wagon. It wasn't until the turn of the century that Livingston's Fire Department had a permanent home in what was then City Hall.

Current residents know the building at the southwest corner of Callender and "B" Streets as the Fire Hall Athletic Club. Few are aware that in 1896, the Livingston City Council floated a $10,000 bond for construction of the red brick building to house all city government offices. And few remember that City Hall was the scene of the murder of two prominent citizens.

Records regarding the building are sketchy. Unlike fanfare for the new County Court House, which opened Aug. 1, 1896, with a front page story in the *Livingston Enterprise*, the move to City Hall went practically unheralded. The newspaper reported only occasionally the progress made by general contractors Hornbeck & Day, and noted the Feb. 1, 1897, City Council meeting was held in the new chambers.

The name of the Fire Hall's original designer is lost in the ashes of history, but local architects agree the building is a mix of several competing design styles. Longtime Livingston residents remember the rectangular bell tower capped with a flagpole that rose above the arched doorway. The tower was removed in 1953 after officials determined it could collapse in an earthquake.

A third fire truck bay was added in the 1920s, but adding to the medley of architectural styles, the new doorway was constructed with right angles rather than the curved arches of the two existing bays.

The Fire Department began use of the building in November, 1897, when it was directed to construct "a proper place in the City Hall for drying fire hose." Three years later, most of the building was remodeled by Architect F. H. Palmer for firefighting use. The 1900 *Livingston Enterprise Souvenir* described the fire fighters' second-story home as follows:

"In entering the fire department by the flight of stairs ... the visitor finds himself in the firemen's dancing hall. The highly polished floor and ample room at once bespeak of the pleasure afforded to the public by an evening here. Oak chairs and an ebony Grand-square piano are the necessary furniture that complete the equipment ...

"In the front part of the building is the library and card room. Fine writing and card tables and leather upholstered chairs are comfortably arranged about the room, while the latest papers and magazines are found in sufficient numbers for the entertainment of its occupants. The floor is covered with a heavy tapestry Brussels carpet and the walls are adorned with oil paintings, among the best in the state. Artists visiting the city should not fail to leave without criticizing them.

"Leading to the rear from the library is the billiard room. It is large and furnished for the exclusive use of billiard players. On the floor is a soft Brussels carpet, and from the walls hang oil paintings of great value."

In fact, the *Livingston Post* reported in 1905 that the furnishings in just these rooms were worth $1,500.

The Fire Hall may be remembered for its opulence, but it is infamous as the sight of the cold-blooded murder of Livingston's police chief and a patrolman. On the morning of Aug. 21, 1929, Rollin Davisson, a Yellowstone Park soldier who had been court-martialed and dishonorably discharged, strode into the police room on the first floor, responded to Police Chief Peter Holt's greeting with an "epithet," and shot Holt point blank, killing him instantly.

Patrolman Martin Zollman reached for his gun, but Davisson fired a second shot, mortally wounding the officer. Nevertheless, Zollman managed to grab the assassin and the two struggled for several minutes before the patrolman succumbed to his injuries. J. P. V. Evans, a civilian also present at the time, avoided death only because the murderer's 9mm pistol jammed.

According to the *Park County News*, Davisson had seen the chief the previous day about a wage dispute and a complaint filed by Davisson's landlord. Wednesday morning Davisson told an acquaintance he was catching a freight out of town, and left a suitcase in the City Hall lobby before entering the police room.

"He had developed a grudge against the chief, and decided to finish the job and leave town," the *News* reported. "It is understood Chief Holt was his intended victim and he killed Zollman in an attempt to escape." Davisson, however, was immediately captured, and subdued "with a four-inch cube of bitulithic paving" by Fireman Clyde Neal.

The original County Courthouse was razed in 1974, to make room for the new City-County Complex. Livingston's elected officials chose to sell City Hall, putting it on the block in 1975, and allowing a corner of Livingston's lively past to be preserved.

# Preserving Our Heritage... Benefits For All

*Historic preservation efforts around the state and around the country made headline news this past winter. In some situations, preservationists and other concerned citizens succeeded, as in the conflict over Disney Corporation plans to build a giant theme park amid Civil War battlefields in Virginia. In other cases, the outcome is yet to be decided, as in ongoing efforts here at home to fund restoration of our state Capitol Building.*

*Montana Gov. Marc Racicot, and Richard Moe, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, recently addressed these issues, Racicot at the 1995 Montana Historic Preservation Award Ceremony and Moe in* Historic Preservation *Magazine. Their comments (edited for length) are reprinted herewith:*

## Governor Marc Racicot's remarks:

I personally--and officially--treasure Montana's Heritage... If we do not remember, appreciate and treasure our past, then we can never understand our future, let alone control it.

I believe that all Montanan's lives are more interesting and more informed when the places and structures from Montana's 13,000 years of human occupation surround us. As I travel all over Montana, I revel not just in our scenery and diversity but in the settings of prehistoric peoples, the passageways of explorers, the adits and mills of our early miners, the barns and homes of our settling ranchers and homesteaders, the little schools that drew remote communities together, and the solid, interesting homes and businesses of Montana towns.

I know that visitors to Montana feast their eyes and hearts on this heritage as well. We have quite a few visitors, of course, eight times as many visitors each year as we have residents. I've talked to many of them and I guarantee you they are not coming just for the scenery; they are coming for the total experience of Montana--our people, our way of life, our values and sense of community. And all of those values were shaped by our history.

I believe not only in the emotional good sense that preservation and historic building re-use makes, but in the economic value of preservation to Montana as well. Re-use and preservation support sustainable heritage tourism. Preservation is good conservation--of our infrastructure, of building materials, and of our land and our rural-small town values that encourage pedestrians to exchange friendly greetings.

Preservation supports intensive, craft-oriented employment. It provides functional, beautiful work and living space. There is no better example of a Montana historic building whose functionality and beauty still serve us so well than this very Capitol building. And we have made some proposals to the legislative bodies to help preserve and restore parts of this aging structure.

So, from that well of appreciation, I want to offer my heartfelt praise and appreciation to all of you who have invested your time and money and love in Montana's historic places. Many of you have researched their history for National Register designation. Others have wielded paintbrushes and hammers to preserve the buildings themselves. Still others have participated in local and state planning efforts to save historic buildings.... You have sacrificed for and invested yourselves in Montana's rich heritage.

... Whatever your particular role in Montana preservation, thank you! State government owns a few Montana treasures that we are now trying harder to maintain responsibly. But the preservation of our past rests most squarely on you--our citizens. The survival of Montana's heritage relies on your interest, determination, creativity and, importantly, on the diverse and countless new partnerships that we help forge.

I offer my deep respect and admiration--and gratitude--for your passion for Montana preservation and your practical work.

## National Trust President Richard Moe's remarks:

Prevailing in the confrontation with the Disney Company in Virginia gave preservation new strength and visibility while teaching us some valuable lessons. First, the fact that Americans care about preserving historic places was underscored. The threat of sprawl in a region of great historic significance became an issue that struck a chord with thousands of Americans, "ordinary "citizens from all walks of life who care deeply about their country's past and the places where history took place. They played a crucial role in the outcome.

Preservationists must work constructively to help resolve development issues as early as possible. It's not enough to react negatively to a bad project: we must be involved from the beginning and be prepared to attend planning meetings and zoning hearings to argue persuasively that historic sites deserve to be protected as assets with tremendous economic potential.

Some see preservationists as opposed to any development. To be effective in saving what's important in our communities, we must recognize the continuing need for jobs and other economic benefits and support appropriate development that meets this need.

State and local officials must take a more balanced and realistic approach to attracting new development. The master plan for the county where Disney wanted to build would allow almost as many square feet of nonresidential development as currently exists in Midtown Manhattan. This kind of planning and zoning sends one message to developers: Anything goes.

How much better if the county's plan factored its greatest resources (numerous historic sites, including the Manassas battlefield, spread across some of America's most beautiful countryside) into all land-use decisions. Properly protected and promoted, these sites can be great assets for the local economy.

Corporations need to be more sensitive in the siting of large developments. Disney used a method frequently employed by sprawl developers: Identify the cheapest available land without consulting anyone locally, buy or option the property (usually in someone else's name), and spring the package on a surprised community. As Wal-Mart and other super-store builders are learning, this strategy invites confrontation.

It would make more sense to work with officials, preservationists, and others--confidentially if necessary--to identify issues of concern and to reach consensus on project location, size, design, and other factors that impact the community. Besides preventing deep divisions and hostilities, this approach could save everyone unnecessary expense.

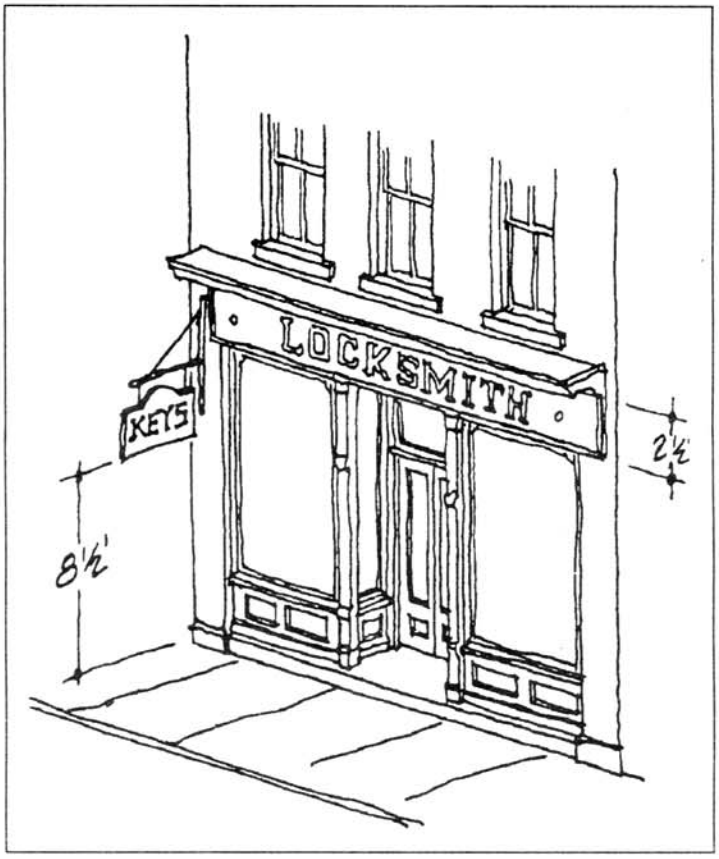
Perhaps the most important lesson is this: While the threat of sprawl has eased temporarily in one part of northern Virginia, it continues unabated in scores of communities elsewhere. Much remains to be done.

# *Keeping Up Appearances*

Signs are an integral part of every Main Street. Because downtowns exist to provide goods and services, almost every merchant, office and public facility requires some type of sign.

With a sign, you call attention to your business and create an individual image for your store. The best signs also give some clue to the products sold. But it is often forgotten that signs contribute as well to an overall image of Main Street, and so play an important role in the life of a community. Sometimes merchants try to out-shout one another with large, flashy signs, but the most successful signs reinforce the image of the downtown as well as serve the needs of the business.

What is the purpose of signs anyway? Mainly, they serve one mission: to let a new customer know where a business is located. It's been suggested that signs in small towns are needed only once -- the first time a customer looks for that store or office. After that, customers use other indicators (a familiar street corner, building recognition) to find the business.




While this theory is a broad generalization, it does raise questions about the necessity of oversized signs on Main Street. Big signs may be justified where customers pass by in automobiles at faster speeds than allowed downtown, as along a highway strip, but most downtowns developed on a pedestrian scale, smaller and slower-paced. Strip-sized signs are just too overwhelming for a downtown area.

What are the characteristics of effective signs?

- **Legibility:** Signs must be readable. A simple, easy-to-read typeface is best.
- **Clarity of wording:** The message (name of business or type of product) should be clear, direct and simple so the reader can immediately absorb it.
- **Placement:** The sign should be in a place where it will be seen by the intended viewers.
- **Attraction:** Some element of the sign should catch the eye and hold it long enough to get the message across.
- **Durability:** The materials and construction of a sign should weather well, presenting a positive image of the business to potential customers.

Many signs currently hanging in small communities lack some or all of the above characteristics. The misconception that bigger is better has afflicted many Main Streets, resulting in oversized, over-illuminated, overbearing signs whose collective effect is to cancel each other with visual clutter.

Consider the following guidelines when initially designing or replacing signs:

- A storefront should not have more than two signs – one primary and one secondary.
- A flush-mounted sign may extend the width of the storefront, but should not be more than 2 1/2 feet high. The sign should be mounted above the storefront display windows and below the second-story window sills. Generally, lettering should be 8 to 18 inches high and occupy about 65 percent of the sign .
- A hanging sign should be mounted at least 8 1/2 feet above the sidewalk and should project no more than 5 feet from the building. Size and location should be carefully considered so that it does not interfere with neighboring signs.
- Window signs painted on glass should not obscure the display area. The color of the letters should contrast with the display background. Light-colored letters or gold-leafed letters with dark borders are effective.
- Awnings also can serve as signs, with contrasting letters painted or sewn onto the valance. Usually, 6-inch to 8-inch letters are sufficient.
- Letters can be painted or mounted directly on a signboard, storefront or wall. Three-dimensional letters are available in a variety of materials.
- Sign colors should complement the colors of the building. Light-colored letters on a dark background are easier to read.
- Illuminated signs can be appropriate downtown if they respect the proportions of the storefront and the guidelines outlined above. Painted signs can be directly illuminated with florescent or incandescent lights. Internally lit signs are most effective with light letters on a dark opaque background. Exposed neon letters can be effective also, adding color and vitality to the street.

Finally, a sign design should be appropriate for the kind of store it advertises, and should reflect the merchant's perception of his or her own image. A high-quality jewelry store or commercial bank would not want a temporary, hand-lettered sign in the window; likewise, a discount store would not want its name etched in stone over the entrance.

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DOWNTOWN
City of Livingston
(406) 222-2005
414 East Callender St.
Livingston, MT 59047



This publication has been financed in part with Federal funds from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, through the Montana State Historic Preservation Office. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Department of the Interior.

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# *New Line for Lincoln School*

Reading and Red Lights, influenza and fishing, Livingston's Lincoln School has experienced dramatic changes since its construction 81 years ago.

Last fall, the Lincoln School Foundation purchased the vacant building for $325,000 as a space to further arts and crafts in Livingston. Local artists and retail merchants plan to open studios and stores in the historic structure this summer, and the International Federation of Fly Fishermen plans to lease space on the main floor for an education center and museum. The School District also will lease a portion of the building for the 1995-96 school year.

Back in 1914, Livingston was booming and the need for yet another school was pressing. But the site selected, at the corner of Lewis and B streets, was quite controversial, owing to the notorious "Red Light" district a block south on "B" Street. Scandalous fears aside, the new Central School opened in 1915 with a capacity for 425 students at a cost to taxpayers of $80,000.

In 1918, amidst an epidemic of influenza, the school was used as an emergency hospital. At the request of the Grand Army of the Republic, the name was changed to Lincoln School in 1926. Students continued to attend classes there until it closed in 1974. Ten years later, the building again was put to educational use, temporarily housing middle school classes. And during construction of the new City-County Building, Lincoln School was home to Park County government offices.

This grand old school has served the community well for four score years, and will continue to draw us through its doors, thanks to local efforts to preserve this fine structure.

"Livingston Downtown" is published intermittently by the Historic Preservation Commission, City of Livingston, 414 East Callender, Livingston, MT 59047.
Design and Production:
*Larry Raffety Architect*
*Rainbow Enterprises*
Writing and editing:
*Nancy Kessler*
Research:
*Lin Lee, Doris Whithorn, Doug Lobaugh*
Half-tones donated by:
*Livingston Enterprise*