

BIG ARM ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2007

Question? Ideas? call Alison 849-6628, Jan 5636, Kristin 5326, P.O. Box 11, BA or www.BigArmAssociation.org

“BIG ARM ASSOCIATION; A MODEL FOR OTHER COMMUNITIES..... The people of Big Arm didn't sit on their asses and moan about the state of things. They actually stood up on their hind legs and did something thing, actually taking charge of their own community. They should be very proud of what they've done.” Quote taken from an Porthole article by China Wall Slim

The above writer summarized the Association in a nutshell and everyone should feel very proud of themselves. Please let me know if you would like a full copy of this article. The only fact we need to correct is he wrote we accomplished our goal in two years when it was just one short year which makes our feat even more impressive. Let's hope that this wonderful community spirit will also help us save our historic school house so future generations can have a glimpse into the past yet have a unique building for the community to use and a park for everyone to enjoy.

Today February 24 is another community gathering day where we will be savoring the most delectable treats during the potluck dinner followed by a talk on Bear Safety by Ron Roberts a Leader of BAA.

He will be covering Encounters in the Neighborhood, in the Wild, Bear Facts and then a Q & A time. Ron is also arranging an official presentation on Bear Safety by Tribal Fish & Wildlife Experts sometime late April or early May

NEXT GATHERING : MARCH 26

POTLUCK 5:00PM

6:00 PM NUTRITION & YOUR HEALTH

a talk by Deb Weidrich a registered Dietitian.

If you have ideas for our meetings please call!

Renovation Updates: The tile floor is finally finished with the baseboard in place. Temporary acoustic panels have been hung with the hope they will solve the reverberating sound problem; more creative panels will be created eventually. The floors have been scrubbed and waxed and the painting has been completed both upstairs and down. Feb 26 automatic garage door openers will be installed which will save precious seconds on our brave firefighter's response time. Jim Brandenburg, with Jeff Meslin's help are in the process of bringing all the wiring downstairs up to code. Thank You! The landscape committee has had their first meeting and has agreed to meet beginning of March to physically mark parking areas, plant beds, irrigation, decorative rocks, walkways, handicap ramp and parking, natural grass areas etc. We will need a lot of willing helpers when this project starts, please call & join us in the planning process.

Treasurer's Report: \$10,532.64 is the fund balance. The door openers should cost \$1650.00, bill for stamps etc. for mailing January letter, repaired the Plexiglas on the reader sign, floor finish, floor tiles and misc. items to finish indoor renovations. We hope to have enough funds for the outside materials, gravel, cement, wood, plants, etc.

Fire Chief Tom Maloney submitted his resignation this month and will be moving to Washington State. We wish him great success in his new position and wish that he and his family will be very happy in their new home. A replacement chief will be chosen by Polson City Council with input from the Rural Fire District Trustees.

Community Use of the Fire Hall Meeting Room was established at the last PRFD Trustee meeting. Guidelines were drawn up by BAA leaders which the Trustees approved. A copy of these guidelines is hanging on the notice board. Home Owner Associations, Sewer Advocate Groups or any group which has a community related theme will be able to use the meeting room using these guidelines. Advanced notice must be given to check schedules, arrange for a caretaker etc. Fees will be due in certain cases. The cost of utilities, maintenance and supplies is at present being paid for by donated funds.

Visit our Wonderful Web Page where you will find all kinds of information. If anyone has some interesting local stories please forward to this site, this could become a real community site. If you would like to advertise your business it is an annual fee of \$10 for a name listing and \$25 for a business card advert. Money goes to help support this site.

Garbage Pick up Day is April 21 & 22 to make the job easier we will need at least 30 people, please sign up, thanks.

Leaders of the Association: We welcome new Leader Ron Roberts. We would love to have more of you participate in the decision making process, the more diversity in our leadership the more we will represent everyone. We meet once a month; please consider becoming a Leader.

Good Books Suggestions: 1) Tune on an Aspen by Gladys Bibee Price; a story of life on a ranch in Big Arm from about 1940 on. 2) When the Meadow Lark Sings by Nedra Sterry, a Big Arm resident; a story about growing up with her Mother who taught in numerous one room schools in eastern Montana. The Polson Public Library has both books.

Historic School House: The main goal for 2007 is to secure the future of this priceless piece of our town's history and to do that we will need everyone's help. We must convince the School District #23 that the proposal of a land swap is a win-win solution for everyone. Please help by writing letters of support to the local newspapers sending a copy to the School Board and to the County Commissioners. Please make sure you sign the S.O.S petition, and please contribute to this fund.

THANKS, THIS IS ONE TERRIFIC COMMUNITY!

BIG ARM Historic School

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The plan to save the school involves swapping a county owned block in the Township of Big Arm with the school building block. This is an incredible win-win solution! The school and it's land will be designated as "public reserve" ensuring its future as a Historical building to be used for the enjoyment of the community; the surrounding land will be turned into a park for the delight of all kids and local families. The School Board will have an equally valued piece of property to at their convenience (\$340,000 plus S.B. minutes 6/12/06) which would enable them to continue their laudable goals for the district's children.

There has been a multitude of different stories printed about the dilemma of saving/ selling the Big Arm Historic School which on behalf of Save Our School (S.O.S.) Committee, I would like to clarify. The plan offered to the Board of School District #23 in July 2006 is describe in the heading above. This is an incredible win-win solution fully backed by the County Commissioners and County Historical Societies.

Location: The school is in the middle of block 17 of Big Arm Township with a lot size of 400' x 300'. Its boundary neighbors to the south and east are Tribal allotments; to the north Tribal land leased to Polson Rural Fire District for the fire station; to the northwest 100' x 200' lot owned by Jay Gasvoda and to the southwest a 200' x 400'+ lot owned by Knucklehead Land Co./ BCJ LLC.

History: The Big Arm school district #65 was established on Sept. 1, 1911(district #65 was retired in 1962).

In 1911 Big Arm children attended school in one of the churches and after 1911 Indian children joined them.

Construction was sometime between 1911 and 1917 and was probably built if not paid for by those early Big Arm settlers. In 1918 the two room school was deeded to Flathead County (Lake County did not exist at this time).

The building has never been moved and since those early settlement days the land around the building has always been a playground for local kids and still has the original out-houses on the edge of the property.

Because of a boundary dispute the school closed for 2 years in 1935 but school continued in a shack on the Walker property.

From construction to 1952 the building was the center of the community as a school, a polling place, for community plays and community informational meetings.

Even though the school closed in 1952, Ross Hoyt being one of its last students, the building continued to be used as a polling place, and housed many community groups including the Big Arm Community Club, The Saddle Club, an informal library, and the Harmony Club. These clubs with their local community members continued to maintain and preserve the building.

In 1974 the School Board District #23 sold the building and land in block #17 to the Harmony Club for \$10.00.

For the next twenty one years the community enjoyed potlucks, card tournaments and a wide variety of entertainment in this wonderfully unique building. In 1995 the Harmony Club officially ended and the president, Johnny Cochran, gave the keys to Ross Hoyt entrusting him to be caretaker of the building. Ross has continued to inspect the building and community members have kept the land around the building mowed. Two or three years ago broken windows were reported to the School Board and plywood was installed.

Early in 2006, shortly after the Big Arm Association was formed, on behalf of the residents I started making inquiries into the possibility of leasing the building. After very little response we formed the SOS Committee and in May sent a formal request to the School Board.

In June our committee received a letter inviting us to a Board meeting, the letter included "discussing and taking action in favor of or opposed to the sale of the Big Arm property." During this meeting the Board discussed the appraised value of \$340,000 or more for the land and that the school had no historical value. The Chairperson said "it might be a candidate for a practice burn for the fire department" (S.B. minutes 6/12/06). Needless to say our committee was horrified and tried to persuade the Board but no decision was made that night.

The SOS committee concerned about the possible destruction of the historic school contacted the State Historic Preservation Officer who recommended we complete a Montana Property Record nominating the School to the National Register of Historic Places.

On June 14 the SOS committee met with the County Commissioners to discuss a possible land swap which the Commissioners supported. That same day the SOS committee met with the Flathead Reservation Area Historical Society and Country School Historians who gave their unanimous support in the form of letter sent to the School Board on June 30.

Press releases were sent to all local newspapers and a petition was circulated which now has several hundred names.

Since that time we have on several occasions tried to contact the School Board asking to be on their agenda for further discussion and to be included in a committee studying the problem. We fully understood that the School Board members are very busy and the welfare of the district's children is first and foremost on their minds.

The preservation of the Big Arm School which is such a wonderful piece of our local history is also vitally important especially to the Big Arm community who has volunteered to maintain and preserve the building for future generations.

The following is an excerpt from a letter from the Montana Historical Society date 01/25/07 addressed to the School Board:

"As you know, the school is a significant resource, conveying strong associations with the earliest non-Indian settlement of the area, the history of education, and architecture. These iconic buildings are rapidly disappearing from our cultural landscape, and we would like very much to help identify methods, resources, and options to keep the school intact."

The Save Our School Committee respectfully asks the School Board to join with the residents of Big Arm, the County Commissioners, the Flathead Reservation Society, the Country School Historians and the Montana Historical Society in taking the necessary steps to take full advantage of the proposed Win-Win solution of a land swap to preserve this priceless piece of local history.

SOS has hired a company to appraise the proposed "swap" land. SOS will be attending the next School Board meeting on March 12, other residents attendance would be wonderful.

PLEASE HELP SOS PRESERVE THIS WONDERFUL PIECE OF BIG ARM HISTORY, THANK YOU

Alison Meslin