



North Fork Landowners' Association Spring 2017 Newsletter

FROM THE DESK OF THE PRESIDENT

Well, for those of you who scattered to points elsewhere in the Fall, you sadly missed a glorious good old fashioned North Fork winter with lots and lots of snow and sub-zero temperatures. Now it's time, though, to herald in the upcoming Summer, and what a Summer we have in store!

This year we will see the NFIA/NFLA's 70th Anniversary, with a variety of historical activities celebrating our great heritage. I would like to thank all those folks who contributed their efforts to the newsletter and calendar, as well as all those who contribute so much to our community!

*Randy Kenyon, President
North Fork Landowners' Association*

DON'T MISS THESE:

NEW: *1st Aid/CPR Training May 30 & June 20. Reservations required.*

NEW: *Historical Tour of Big Prairie July 13*

NEW: *Historic Indian Trail Presentation and Walk July 27*

NEW: *History Tour of Kintla Ranch August 30*

NEW: *History Tour of the Polebridge Townsite Sept. 16*

CONTINUING: *Firewise Day and Summer Interlocal July 19*

CONTINUING: *Fly Fishing July 6th with Irv Heitz*

CONTINUING: *Church Services Sundays 10:30 a.m. June 4 - Aug. 27*



HAPPY 70TH BIRTHDAY! By Lois Walker

On June 2, 2017, the NFIA/NFLA will celebrate its 70th birthday. The first meeting of the organization, with 24 people attending, was held at the home of Walter and Ethyle Block near Trail Creek. The stated purpose of the organization was "to promote the general welfare of the community." Ideas put forth at that first meeting centered around improving conditions on the North Fork, such as roads and bridges, fire prevention and control, wildlife preservation and mail service. With those aims in mind, they adopted the name North Fork Improvement Association, or NFIA. Dr. Jack MacFarland was elected as the first president. By the end of summer 1947, 56 people had applied to join. Dues were \$2 per person and \$1 for associate members.

So, who were these intrepid souls who came together to promote their shared interests? It was a mixture, actually. The first group represented the dwindling population of original North Fork homesteaders, people who had lived and toiled on their land since the 'teens and '20s. In this category were Matt & Mata Brill, Henry Covey, Ben Hensen Jr., Harry & Lena Holcomb, Joe & Martha Opalka, Ed Peterson, Tom & Marie Peterson, Ralph Thayer, and John & Harriet Walsh.

The second category of members were old-timers who, although not technically homesteaders, had been in the area for a long time—people like Tom Reynolds, Walt & Hazel Hammer, Scottie Beaton, and Glacier Park rangers Andy Fluetsch and Hugh Buchanan.

Thrown into this mix, and perhaps the catalyst for organizing, was a wave of newcomers. Some had arrived during the war years, including Ben & Annette Rover, who purchased the Polebridge Mercantile in 1943. Many others came just following the war, between 1945 and 1950, as more and more homesteaders sold their properties due to old age and other reasons. In a number of cases, their homesteads were subdivided. But the newcomers were attracted to the North Fork for many of the same reasons as their predecessors—great natural beauty, affordable land, abundant wildlife, and a chance to build a new future.

Their names echo in our history—Madge & Ollie Terrian, Frank & Edna Evans, Ruth & Hazen Lawson, Jack & Mary MacFarland, Orville & Helen Foreman, Loyd & Ruth Sondreson, and Bert & Ruth Coan.

Ross & Louise Wilson purchased Kintla Ranch from Matt & Mata Brill in 1947 and operated a guest ranch, primarily for fishermen. Their employees Fred & Lulu Rader and Phil & Ethel “Toots” Stevens also joined the organization. The MacFarlands purchased several homesteads on Big Prairie and established the Quarter Circle MC Ranch, offering guided tours in the Park. Until Sondreson Hall was constructed in 1953, community social events alternated primarily between those two ranches.

The North Fork old-timers had established their homesteads, survived the Great Depression, and lived through World War II. Newcomers, even though most were “summer people,” brought new energy and ideas and ambitions with them. It was an era of progress across the nation, and older members of the NFIA were, by George, ready to embrace it! Perhaps the North Fork Valley would finally be developed and settled the way many had envisioned it for more than 30 years. They wanted a much improved road (perhaps even paved, eventually), telephone service, improved mail service, and maybe even electric power under the Rural Electrification Act.

But a principal concern, from the very beginning, was how to accommodate all these people. Dances and social gatherings had been a part of North Fork life for decades, but the population was steadily increasing. They needed a place besides peoples’ homes to gather for social events and to conduct business. That meant getting organized and raising money. So, that’s what they did.

In 1952, the NFIA began seriously collecting donations for construction of a community hall. At the end of the year, \$271 had been contributed. Another \$422 was received in 1953. They may not have had much money (the treasury at the end of 1952 stood at \$397.73), but they had members who were more than accustomed to hard work and had well-honed building skills. Madge and Ollie Terrian volunteered to donate a piece of land. Loyd and Ruth Sondreson, who logged and operated a sawmill in the North Fork, offered to provide logs for the structure. Harry Holcomb, who acted ably as construction foreman, scheduled a series of work weekends in the summer of 1953, and they put their backs into it.

An old ledger book in the NFLA archives lists out-of-pocket expenditures for the project. \$170 to the Sondreson Lumber Co., \$100 to the Columbia Falls Lumber Co., \$50 to the O’Neil Lumber Co., \$106 to the Glacier Coram Lumber Co., \$332 to the Pacific Hide & Fur Depot for aluminum roofing sheets,

\$33 to Kalispell Mercantile for bolts and nails, \$19 to Montgomery Ward for lamps for the Hall, and plenty of money to Byrd's Groceries and the West Glacier Mercantile for the fine lunches that North Fork ladies provided to workers. In all, the organization expended about \$700 for construction for the Hall. Everything else was donated labor. On a humorous note, rumor has it that the building was chinked in part with Harry Holcomb's cast-off pajamas. At least one member remembers occasionally seeing strips of blue and white material dangling from the seams of the walls. Unfortunately, we have no minutes for the period 1948-1956, so we have no information on completion of the Hall or the grand opening celebration.

Meanwhile, local families still took time to have fun. Records show donations toward dances of \$70 in June and July 1948, and two payments of \$40 to the Hubert Hunt Orchestra for the dances on June 12th and July 4th. There was a big fish fry on the 4th, which became an annual event (if it wasn't already one). They also spent a good bit of money on ice cream from the Glacier Dairy, which was very popular in the summer months. Other expenses included a megaphone for \$3.50, a Roberts Rules Manual for \$2.10, an \$8 coffeepot from Sears & Roebuck, a record player and plenty of dance records, membership cards and stationery, penny postcards and stamps, typewriter paper from Woolworth's, a piano tuner, and taxes and insurance on the Hall. They set up the organization's first bank account at the Conrad National Bank of Kalispell (now First Interstate Bank).

As the NFIA became well established in the 1960s, it began to focus on a number of issues facing the North Fork. The new Camas Road was initially seen as a potential threat, since North Fork roads and campgrounds were inadequate to support increased visitation. Construction of the road, however, helped thwart construction of the proposed Glacier View Dam, which was a bigger concern. The state of the bridge at Polebridge was an issue following the 1964 flood. There was a petition to reopen the border crossing, which had been closed years earlier when the Canadian agent there committed suicide (he served as the U.S. agent, as well, under contract). The Hall was rented out to the County for the first time as a polling place for elections. There was an annual community picnic at Bowman Lake, sometimes with boat rides and a naturalist walk by a Park ranger. Favored fundraising activities were a food auction, white elephant sales, and trap shoots. And in 1963, there was the first motion to change the name of the organization, to deemphasize the improvement aspect of the association, since more and more newcomers favored keeping things just the way they were.

In the 1970s, environmental issues began to dominate the discussion. The NFIA opposed the Wild & Scenic River corridor, due to the unwelcome changes it would bring to the river. Members voted unanimously to oppose the Cabin Creek mine in Canada. They opposed the Pacific Northwest Trail passing through the North Fork, which would bring even more traffic to the area. And they "had speaks with" Fish and Wildlife authorities about relocating problem bears to the North Fork, especially after the hijinks of the Giefer Grizzly. They added screen doors to the Hall and began exhibiting photo displays. Fundraising included a chain saw raffle, auctions, and more trap shoots. Popular social events were the hat dance, a basket social, the ice cream social, pinochle parties, bingo, game nights, and the Halloween potluck. In 1975, the tradition of holding a community Thanksgiving dinner at the Hall began.

In the 1980s, the association received its 501(c)4 status. The Neighborhood Watch was established (now the North Fork Patrol). The Inter Local Agreement, a truly unique initiative still in effect today, was instituted in 1985. The NFIA adjusted the land surrounding the Hall and received an easement

to the spring behind the Hall in negotiations with Harold and Rachel Sweet. It opposed a joint Glacier National Park and Forest Service housing and visitor center on the west side of the river. It asked the County to post speed limits on the road, and the first official road survey of North Fork landowners was conducted. An annual arts and crafts fair began in 1985. Rachel Sweet continued her concerted campaign against noxious weeds. Association dues were raised for the first time from \$2 to \$4 per person in 1982.

Also in the 1980s, residents began to consider the merits and consequences of land use planning. A Land Use Planning Committee was formed, and a draft North Fork Flathead Valley Land Use Plan was issued in 1986. Environmental issues remained on the front burner. As is usually the case, changing ideas led to vigorous debate at business meetings—sometimes civil, sometimes not. Why should newcomers be able to dictate what old-timers did with their land? Why should a one-acre property owner have the same one vote in the organization as a person who owned hundreds of acres, or even thousands? What did all those wildlife studies accomplish, anyway, and what impact did environmental regulations have on logging and the local economy? The debate could get strident. In 1982, the North Fork Preservation Association was formed, and many who wanted to devote their energy toward “green” pursuits joined that organization while still retaining their NFIA membership. A consensus was finally reached that the NFIA had responsibility to keep landowners informed on issues, but that it should not take a stand, one way or the other, on divisive issues. And that members could disagree with each other, without being disagreeable. One result, however, was that the NFIA became more of a social organization in the ensuing years, for better or for worse. A unifying force was community response to the devastating Red Bench Fire in 1988.

In the 1990s, land use planning regulations were finalized. The 20-acre minimum lot size and other provisions went into effect in September 1993. Residents in the Trail Creek area and in Polebridge worked hard to establish local firefighting capabilities. The NFIA set up a Bear Committee to develop living-with-bears educational efforts. The organization opposed the Forest Service upgrading of the Wurtz and Sondreson airstrips, but also opposed closing the Forest Service road into Wurtz airstrip. A North Fork Stewardship Day was hosted by the Nature Conservancy. Hen hikes became popular, the Glacier Chorale performed at the Hall on numerous occasions, and joint NFIA/NFPA meetings were held. Fundraising events included raffles, a carnival, and casino nights. Dues were raised from \$4 to \$5 in 1990.

In the decade following the turn of the century, the organization continued to grow and change. A change to the name of the organization, initially proposed in 2001, was finally adopted in 2005. The NFIA became the North Fork Landowners Association. The North Fork received designation as a Firewise Community and began a major effort to promote fuels reduction grants. The organization joined others in requesting a baseline study of water quality in the river. Another road survey was conducted in 2006, and the NFLA Road Committee worked closely with the County to address dust abatement and maintenance issues. The North Fork Road Coalition for Health and Safety formed in 2006 and funded a University of Montana dust hazard study in 2007. Revised Flathead County Zoning Regulations, including the North Fork Neighborhood Plan, were adopted in 2008. Dues were raised from \$5 to \$10 in 2002.

The NFLA website came on the air in 2007, created by Richard Wackrow and subsequently managed by Patti Craig-Hart. In 2008, Don and Sue Sullivan began offering community worship services on Sundays at the Hall. In 2009, the North Fork History Project began collecting

information and interviews to document the history of the community. Major improvements at the Hall included a wood shed constructed by Duke Hoiland, a new covered front porch, new vinyl windows and casings, a dropped ceiling over the kitchen, and more photo displays. Attempts to drill a water well for the Hall came up dry. Firefighting capabilities developed over the last decade were put to good use during the Wedge Canyon Fire in 2003.

Since 2010, The NFLA has participated in the Whitefish Range Partnership to make recommendations to the Forest Service regarding the Flathead Forest Plan revision. We have established a Cooperative Weeds Management Area, hosted annual Firewise workshops, and celebrated our 10th anniversary as a Firewise Community. Repairs and upgrades to Sondreson Hall have included refinishing the wood floor and installing tile and new flooring in the kitchen and around the wood stove, plus a roof and handicapped ramp on the back porch, repairs to fencing, and a new vault under the outhouses. A fuels reduction project in 2014 surrounding the Hall will have lasting benefits. Dues were raised from \$10 to \$15 in 2014. A series of informational programs precedes most business meetings these days, and major fundraisers have benefited the History Committee, the floor project, and facilitated publishing of the North Fork Country Kitchens Cookbook. The association continues to flourish!

As the NFLA enters its eighth decade, we now have members who are third and fourth generation descendants of original homesteaders. Much has changed, but much has stayed the same. What is most important and amazing is that the North Fork is still a tight-knit community, with people who care about their neighbors, the community, and the resources that we all enjoy.

To learn more about the history of the NFLA, come hear historian Lois Walker's presentation ahead of the September 2nd NFLA business meeting. Note: If you have old photographs or documents you would like to contribute to the September presentation, contact Lois at 406-407-2791 or lewalker@nvdi.com.

The History of Dancing on the North Fork By Debo Powers

The hardy settlers who came to live in the isolated North Fork Valley spent most days conducting the hard work of surviving in a cold climate with a short growing season. The trip to town was long and arduous and seldom undertaken. Homesteads were scattered and distant from each other. Community get-togethers became a highlight in their lives - a way to connect with other people and share fun and food.

After the establishment of Kintla Ranch and the Quarter Circle MC Ranch in the 1940s, square dances were regularly held, alternating between the two places. Families would come with plenty of food to share and

the dancing would last all night long. These dances were famous for their midnight suppers after which the adults would keep dancing while the children slept on the sidelines. Once the Community Hall was built in the 1950s, square dancing on the big wooden floor became a regular social occasion. Square dances were held after most NFIA (North Fork Improvement Association) meetings.

Over the years, many callers from town were hired to lead the square dancing. Naomi Hoiland's father, Larry Gaffney, took calling lessons so that he could stand in when other callers weren't available. Some very good

bands such as the Hubert Hunt Orchestra and the Fredenberg Band played for square dances. Contributions for the band and the caller were taken at the door and a stapler was used to affix a ribbon to the clothing of those who had contributed. Later, square dance records and a record player were purchased for the Hall which took the place of callers and bands.

We carry on the historical tradition of square dancing at the Hall during the summer and everyone is invited to participate and/or watch. Each square dance is taught by the caller which makes it easy for beginners to join in. Children are welcome in the squares, just as they were long ago. Ruth Sondreson taught many youngsters to dance in the old

days. This summer, there will be square dances following the annual Pie & Ice Cream Social in July and the Crazy Hat Dance in August.

During this past winter, we started a different kind of dancing at the Hall. North Forkers met weekly for dance lessons in Waltz, Two Step, and East Coast Swing. The lessons culminated in a Winter Ball in February. There will be a Spring Fling in June preceded by a refresher dance lesson.

Dancing has historically been a great way to get neighbors together in the North Fork. Every time that we dance at the Hall, it is good to remember all of the generations of North Fork dancers who came before us.

NFIA-NFLA Memories by Larry Wilson

It is hard for me to imagine that this year is the 70th birthday of The **North Fork Landowners Association**, formerly known as the **North Fork Improvement Association**. What makes it hard to imagine that it is that old, is the fact that I have been involved for that entire time.

Of course, when the organization began in 1947 I was more of an observer than an active member since I was only 10 years old. The organization was much different in 1947 than it is today in 2017. As a result I was more active than 10-year-olds are or could be today.

North Forkers always had an active social life. This involved dinner parties, card parties, and occasional community-wide gatherings.

When the NFIA was first organized its main purpose was to provide community voice to promote road improvement, communication

improvement and to bring electricity to the North Fork. There was also a social element. To encourage attendance at meetings it was decided to hold a monthly dance right after each business meeting. These dances featured live music and always lasted at least until midnight. The Hunt Orchestra provided the music with a fiddle, drums and piano and a caller and the cost was \$40 for the band.

That is how I became actively involved. Dave McFarland, youngest son of Jack and Mary McFarland, was given the job of collection for the dance. Fee was one dollar per adult and children were free.

Dave and I each had a coffee can with small bits of colored ribbon and a stapler. The ribbons were a different color each month. We would collect the dollar and then staple a ribbon somewhere on the person's clothes. At least in my memory we always collected enough to pay the band with a little left over.

Over the years the organization has evolved. There have been times when the road and endangered species and land use planning overshadowed everything else and meetings ranged from unpleasant to almost dangerous. There were also years when the NFIA became a social club to avoid argument.

Today, the group tries to maintain a balance. We gather information and try to educate the community. We try to avoid confrontation and only take stands when the folks are pretty united. Mostly it works. It really isn't that hard to disagree without being disagreeable.

What do you think?

Fire Mitigation Committee Report by Molly Shepherd

Firewise Day: The Fire Mitigation Committee is planning for the **North Fork's 2017 Firewise Day, which will be held from 9:30 a.m. to noon on July 19, preceding the Summer Interlocal.** The North Fork has been recognized as a Firewise Community since 2006.

Byron Bonney will be our featured speaker. He has been instrumental in working with landowners on hazardous fuels treatments in the Bitterroot. We expect him to tell us about the effects of those treatments in the area burned by the Roaring Lion Fire last summer. Although many homes were destroyed in the fire, almost all of the homes whose owners had created defensible space around them were spared. The treatments brought fire to the ground and limited the fuels that could be ignited by flying embers. They also improved the chance of survival for neighbors' homes downwind. As you will hear at the workshop, the fire provided important corroboration of the value of defensible space.

Hazardous Fuels: We have at least \$10,000 left in our 4th hazardous fuels grant, with about 55 acres already treated and 35 in process. So far, landowners and community members have provided over \$80,000 in cash match and in-kind labor. Special thanks goes to Flathead County, which donated almost

\$8000 in equipment and labor for chipping the slash that resulted from our Trail Creek Project. The Fire Mitigation Committee will probably apply for a 5th grant if it has the opportunity.

The Flathead Economic Policy Center administers the grants and provides landowners and the committee with invaluable technical assistance. We've learned that our friend Mason Richwine, a FEPC forester who has worked with many North Fork landowners, is retiring in order to concentrate on hunting and fishing. We wish him success. Bill Swope will continue to work with us. Information about participation in the grant program is available from Bill Swope, who may be reached at 406-250-9812 or at bhswope@gmail.com.

Community Wildfire Protection Plan: Flathead County is launching another revision of its Community Wildfire Protection Plan. The Fire Mitigation Committee expects to update its North Fork Wildfire Mitigation and Planning Report in conjunction with the county's revision. We'll need community input in the process. We'll also need to update maps of the significant public and private work that's been done on the North Fork since the fires of 2003.

Early Mail Service in the North Fork by Arne Boveng

The North Fork of the early 1900's was full of interesting historical events. For instance, in 1914, mail service was brought to the upper North Fork Valley. Mary Schoenberger was the first postmistress and she and her husband, Charles, set up part of their cabin in Big Prairie to accommodate the post office, officially registered as Kintla, Montana. A few years later, Charles built the magnificent two-story larch home, reportedly all by himself, which is still in beautiful shape today. His descendants, the Cusicks, still own it. The original homestead cabin housing the post office, was back behind the Cusick house, closer to the river.

Theo Christensen and William Raftery traded back and forth the eight-year contracts to haul the mail up from Belton, once weekly, then later twice, along the old "Inside North Fork Road." Raftery was a neighbor there in Big Prairie, which is north of Polebridge but in Glacier Park. Christensen was the ranger at the old Blackfoot Ranger Station in Big Prairie. It was Christiansen, who first showed and recommended the surveyed land to Mr. Schoenberger for his homestead claim.

You can find and read about these old North Fork history facts from many different sources today. What makes them fun, however, is making connections between them. What was going on at the time and who were the people involved? What motivated them? Why in the heck did William Raftery want to haul mail when the homestead he lived at was three miles from the main road in Big Prairie? If you ever walk the old historic road that leads back to his place, you'll feel as if you're out in the middle of Glacier Park, because, well, you are.

A hundred years ago, the families and bachelors who made up the wonderful community, along both sides of the gorgeous North Fork River, or The Flathead, as it was also known, were very connected to each other and their relationships could be complex. Much more so than today. They relied on each other heavily, traded with and hired each other and sometimes married their neighbors, or their children did. Some family members filed claims right next to each other, such as brothers and sisters, sons and daughters in-law and their parents too, increasing the total family land holdings. Keeping track of it all, community genealogy, can boggle your mind. On the other hand, knowing something about their relationships with each other might shed some light on why an event happened, like why was Mary Schoenberger doling out mail?

A couple of years ago, when my good friend, Larry Wilson claimed he had an old homesteader's map deep down in the bowels of his history museum, I paid attention. It's not often that genuine new material surfaces after you've read everything you can get your hands on. Maybe there's a puzzle piece here. When I called him on it (requiring a drive to Trail Creek) he couldn't find it. Then when he did locate the map, it was all torn to tatters and he talked about needing to have it professionally repaired. I wasn't sure the day would come I'd actually see it. So, imagine my delight when true to Larry's word, I got a copy in my hand and found the answers to several, long-standing questions I'd had.

It wasn't exactly a homesteader's map but a snapshot in 1913 of all the land patents and claims then existing in the upper North Fork. You see, when the Forest Homestead Act came about in 1906, there were only a few years then remaining to submit your documents, land surveys, and other

requirements, before Glacier Park was established in 1910. Some didn't make it. Others, for whatever reason, cancelled or abandoned their claims.

One such cancelled claim stood out to me right away, that of James Yakes. It was situated in between the homesteads of William Raftery and the Schoenberger clan. I had heard Mary Schoenberger's interview she gave to the Park Service in 1981, who by then was one of the last living homesteaders in Glacier Park. She mentioned a man by the name of Yates and that he had built the cabin that 70-year-old homesteader, Anton Schoenberger, moved into. Scottie Beaton, the famous lookout sentry, later lived in this cabin with his wife Minnie Schoenberger, until 1950. As to Yates though, searches for his name led nowhere. Who was Yates and why didn't the Park's archives have record of him? And it was a strange coincidence to me that the Schoenberger family came from Yates City, Illinois.

But now with Larry's map in hand, I knew she meant to say Yakes, not Yates. I had a new name to search for. Thanks to fellow North Forker Pat Walsh, who spent countless hours digitizing all of the old newspaper editions of *The Columbian*, it took me about two seconds to find an article from 1911, announcing the new mail service coming to the upper North Fork community. James Yakes was the guy who got it started. His neighbors around him could help make it happen. A few of the puzzle pieces fit.

Four years later, in 1918 Mary passed off the job and post office to neighbor Harriet Walsh. It's not so hard to imagine all these neighbors and relatives, their homesteads adjoined, working things out and sharing opportunities like mail contracts. They were building a community.

WINTER INTERLOCAL MEETING

The Winter 2017 North Fork Interlocal meeting was held on February 15, 2017 in the Community Building at Glacier National Park. Park Management Assistant Lauren Alley presided.

Due to space limitations, the notes from the Winter Interlocal Meeting can be found on the NFLA website at www.nflandowners.com.

SUMMER INTERLOCAL MEETING AT SONDRERSON HALL:

Date: July 19, 2017, 1 P.M.

(Potluck Lunch at Noon, Please bring a side dish)

Host: The North Fork Preservation Association

North Fork Landowners' Association
Secretary-Treasurer
P.O. Box 1603
Columbia Falls, MT 59912



See enclosed 2017 NFLA Calendar for more exciting events! Something for everyone!

*Join the
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as we Celebrate 70 Years
1947 - 2017
NFIA/NFLA*

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