

Firsts in Three Forks

Squeezed into the unfinished freight room of the Milwaukee depot on September 17, 1908, 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 be 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, 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 the 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.

C. E. Adams

THREE FORKS



MONTANA