

## THE TRAVELING SCHOOLHOUSE

The Big Horn Equestrian Center clubhouse has a long and colorful history. It has served numerous functions in various locations over its lifetime, has undergone renovations and facelifts any number of times and is still solid, busy and attractive – don't we wish that we could all say the same!?

In the early 1920s, Alfred Andrews and Custer and Maude Morrow initiated the formation of the Upper Beaver Creek School to provide a place for the education of all school-age children living in the Beaver Creek drainage. This building at one time provided space for eight elementary grades and two years of high school.

Located at what is now the entrance to the Connells' JC Ranch, at 521 Beaver Creek Road, the building originally had two rooms and two entry halls, each with a door which faced east. On each of its subsequent moves, the building was also sited with the doors facing east. There was no electricity at the site on Beaver Creek, hence the large windows on the south, east and north sides to provide light for the students in each room. Neither was there any plumbing, so a pail of water was carried to the school each day to be heated by the stove and provide warm water for washing up before lunch. Bathroom facilities were provided for with two outhouses – His and Hers – located at the edge of the schoolyard. The frame building was built with hardwood floors which endure to this day.

By the mid 1950's, the school had grown to 11 students, but only had one teacher. The center partition had been removed, by that time, so that all the students were in one large room. Transportation had become considerably easier by 1959, and teachers were hard to come by for a rural school, so the Beaver Creek School district was consolidated with the Big Horn School district. The building was sawed in half, from east to west, and moved to the grounds of the Big Horn School where it became a home for the First and Second Grades.

The old building was placed on a brick foundation at its new home, the south door was boarded over and the south hallway became two bathrooms and a water fountain, as you see it today. The west half of the building was again partitioned providing two well-lighted classrooms and the north door entered into a new cloakroom for boots, coats, and lunchboxes. The east side of the building became a small library for the primary grades and central heating was installed.

In that location, the little schoolhouse continued to serve as a home for the primary grades until a new elementary school was built in the early 1980's. It was then transformed it into a music building for several years. In 1986, when the space was no longer needed, the school district put the building up for bid. It was purchased by the Big Horn Polo Club for a mere \$1500 and moved to its current site (after being sawed in half AGAIN) at a cost of about \$30,000!

Shirley Taylor and Bob Connell collaborated to determine the best location for the new clubhouse on the east side of the new polo fields. Johnny Young and his wife Florence from Birney, MT, witched a site for the water well, which has provided excellent water for these 23 years. The building underwent several more remodel jobs – the partition in the west half was largely removed to provide a larger main room, the cloakroom with its east-facing door became a kitchen and sliding glass doors were added to access new, large porches on the west and south sides. The north and east sides still have the original windows and the original hardwood floors are still sound after almost 90 years!

Even with the newest addition of a patio and barbeque area on the south side, in memory of Skeeter Johnston and Kelly Howie, the old building can still be identified by its classic lines and a certain enduring character. In the hearts of many natives it will always be "the Beaver Creek schoolhouse". If walls could talk – what stories it could tell!