

Chapter 3

The Boom of 1916

1916 was probably the most prosperous year for Melstone. Along with many new buildings and businesses, 100 new settlers moved to the Melstone community.

1916 also saw the building of a freight house. The building is now being used as a shop for John Balock.

The new creamery was a big contribution to Musselshell County. It was the only creamery in this county and it was built at a price of \$4500. Cream was sold by many homesteaders and this was their chief means of cash money.

Other buildings built in 1916 were the Chapman Hotel, the Chapman Feed and Livery Stable (owned by the Chapman Brothers), which is presently the site of Oster's home, A.F. Warner's Land Office, Searl's Tailor Shop, Hedges Hospital, Larson's Blacksmith Shop, the Melstone Picture Show, the new Antlers Cafe, the Grant Cafe, which was owned, then, by Carl Edenfeldt, the Melstone Garage, owned by T.E. McNew, and the Musselshell Livestock Company.

A city hall was built for the accommodation of the fire fighting equipment, the city officials, municipal water works, and the electric light plant.

The businesses hit their peak about 1916. The mining business, the railroad and the stores and businesses of Melstone had grown to six hundred people within the city limits.

On May 4th and 5th of 1916, the town officials decided to have a Real Community Gathering to better the future of Melstone and make it one of the popular small communities of Montana.

The guest speaker, Mr. Nels Darling, was an efficient and widely known speaker on community upbuilding in the United States at that time.

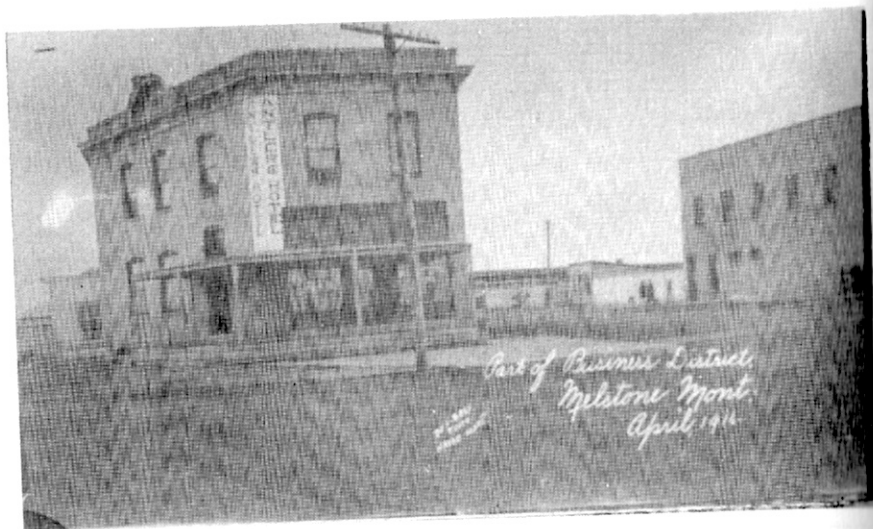
The town people realized that Melstone needed assistance of some sort to excel. The Real Community Gathering was to attract families into town to hear Darling speak and to join in the dancing and entertainment.

This gathering eventually led to the monthly gathering later to be called Market Days.

Melstone, being located on the C.M.St.&P. Railroad, was dependent upon the railroad not only for many of the people living in town but also for transportation and supplies. Prior to 1918 the only road that existed between Roundup and Forsyth was a wagon trail which had very little maintenance, if any to keep it passable. The earliest significant construction on what is now U.S. 12 between Roundup and Forsyth was done by Musselshell and Rosebud County Road crews in 1918. Even this construction by county road crews did not put the road in a good enough condition to be serviceable year



Melstone in 1915 (above)



Antlers Hotel (above) .

around. The road was a graded dirt road which when muddy had ruts so deep that it was impassable. Snow also played havoc with the road as drifts got so deep that cars couldn't get through and county road crews were unable to keep them open.

Discussion had begun as early as 1916 concerning the building of an all weather road between Roundup and Melstone. The county construction work in 1918 was all that had come out of the discussion and this was far from an all weather road.

Finally in August of 1932, assurance was given the people of Melstone, that work would start on the grading and improvement of the road but no starting date was set. Petitions were started to obtain signatures to get the governor and the highway commission to begin work on the project under the Emergency Act. Surveyors began work on the Electric Highway in late October of 1934. By January 31, 1935, the survey crew was about two miles east of the Star Mine which is located on the east side of Musselshell Hill. The survey combined a preliminary survey with grade staking. Bids for the construction of the road were planned to be let in May of 1935.

It was not until May 27, 1937, that the first contract was awarded for the construction of the highway between Roundup and Forsyth. The first contract to be awarded was for the 34 mile stretch of road between Roundup and Melstone. The contracts that were being awarded were for grading and gravel surfacing the roads, not for oiling. This 34 miles of road was finished on December 14, 1937. The next section of road to be worked on was from Ingomar to Vanada. The contract was awarded on December 21, 1939 and work was completed by August 14, 1941. Finally on November 25, 1941 the contract was let for the construction of the 26 miles of road between Melstone and Ingomar. The completion of this contract on May 4, 1942, was the finish of a graded and graveled road from Roundup to Vanada, a distance of 83 miles. Work on the 18 miles from Vanada to Forsyth was not completed until 1959 to signify the end of what is now U.S. 12 between Roundup and Forsyth. The total cost of the various construction contracts amounted to approximately \$2,000,000, which was considerably more than the estimate of \$170,000, made in 1916, when the project was first considered.

By May 25, 1939, work was rapidly progressing on the oiling and improving of the new road. A contract was let for oiling the 21-mile stretch of highway west of Melstone. More equipment was being brought in and unloaded in Musselshell with plans to work both east and west out of there. It had taken a long time for the dreams of a paved road to be realized but everyone will agree that it was worth the wait although it has possibly led to the decline of the railroad.