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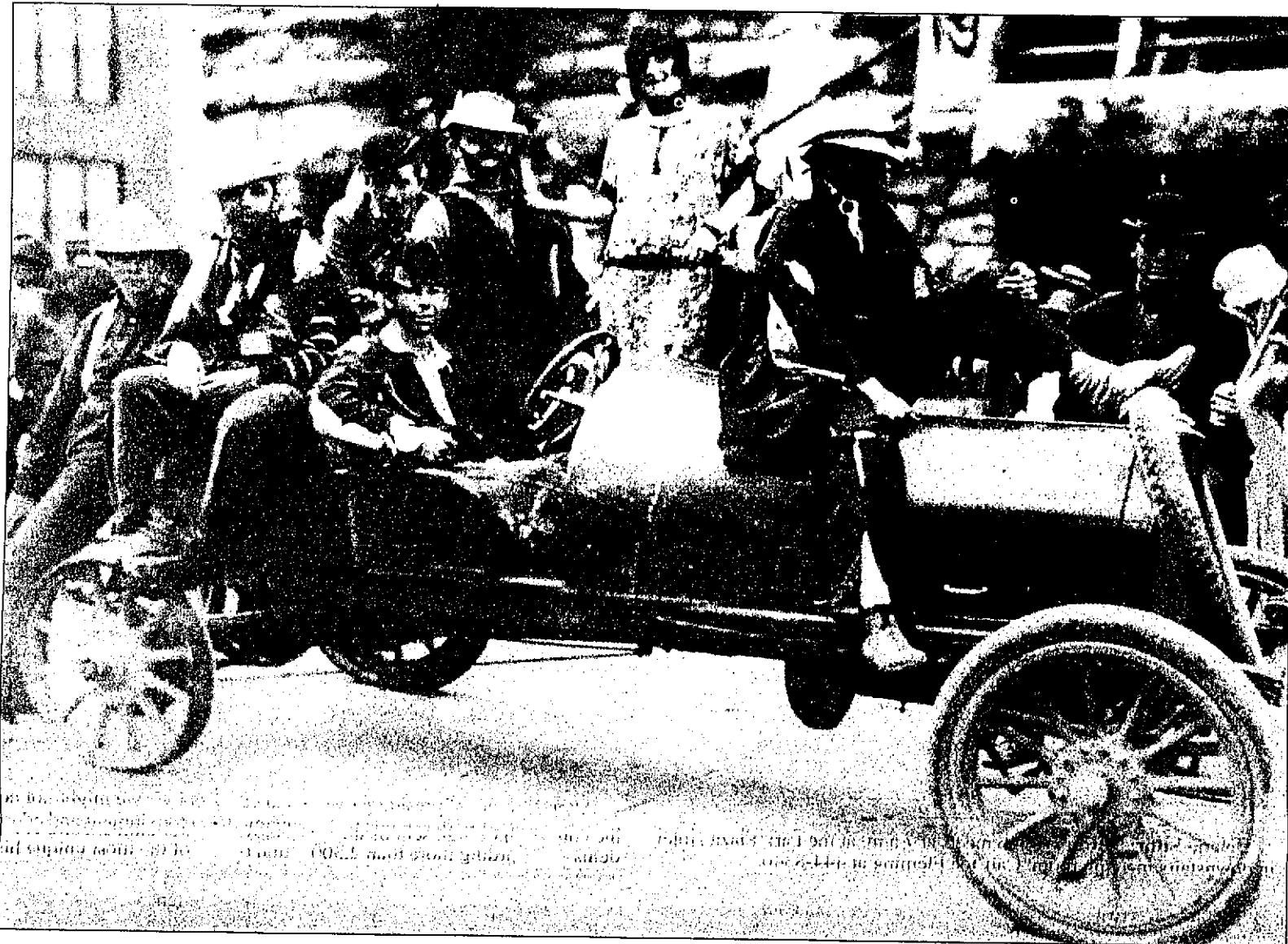
The Independent Record

Thousands will crowd along Helena Avenue, the Gulch, Broadway and Park Friday for the traditional noon start of the Vigilante Parade. The Vigilante not only depicts the rich history of our region, but it also has an interesting history of its own.



Helena High principal A.J. Roberts instituted the parade 75 years ago.

Vigilante pageantry



Photos courtesy of the Montana Historical Society

The parade was founded to deal with the spring frenzy of the students.

This year the Vigilante Parade celebrates its 75th anniversary. When Helena High principal A.J. Roberts instituted the first Vigilante Parade in 1924 to redirect student angst and hostility, he hardly thought his proposal would endure until the century's end and perhaps beyond.

Professor Roberts, a dapper man with a classical education, became the principal of Helena High School in 1907. He came from Albion College, Mich., where he was educated as a history teacher; later he went on to post-graduate work at Leipzig, Germany, and Paris, France. He taught history for several years at Helena High before becoming principal. In a news interview soon after his appointment, he accepted the fact that he would "inherit many school traditions and activities" from his predecessors, and he was right.

One of these activities was the infamous "senior-junior fight," a holdover from the "Gay Nineties," he drolly presumed. The event was customarily enacted during the first week of May each year when seniors hung a banner — extolling the virtues of their class — on the flag pole between Central school and the handsome new stone high school building on Warren and Lawrence. When the juniors noticed the banner they made every effort to bring it down and "trample it in the dust." The battle was on with bloody noses, black eyes and knocked-out teeth.

HARRIETT MELOY



MORE FROM THE QUARRIES OF LAST CHANCE GULCH

In the mind of the troubled principal, the struggle was "subversive to discipline, caused injuries to people, and was hostile to good work and the reputation of the school."

To deal with the frenzy of the students, Roberts explored several alternatives. One was "Sneak Day," when students were not obligated to attend school but could take the day off. Another was an activity called "Old Clothes Day" or "Hard Times Day," when a few creative classmates dressed in old costumes and paraded the streets. Neither of these seemed to fill the bill.

Then in 1924, students and teachers suggested a historical parade. Some persons were doubtful, saying the idea was too tame and would never replace the "fight." However, principal Roberts reminded the students that they were living in the "wild and woolly west," the land of the pioneer, cowboy, Indian, vigilante and miner with plenty of drama from which to fashion ideas for a giant pageant. One advantage to this plan was that all students could enter floats, while only a few boys and girls had participated in the previous activities.

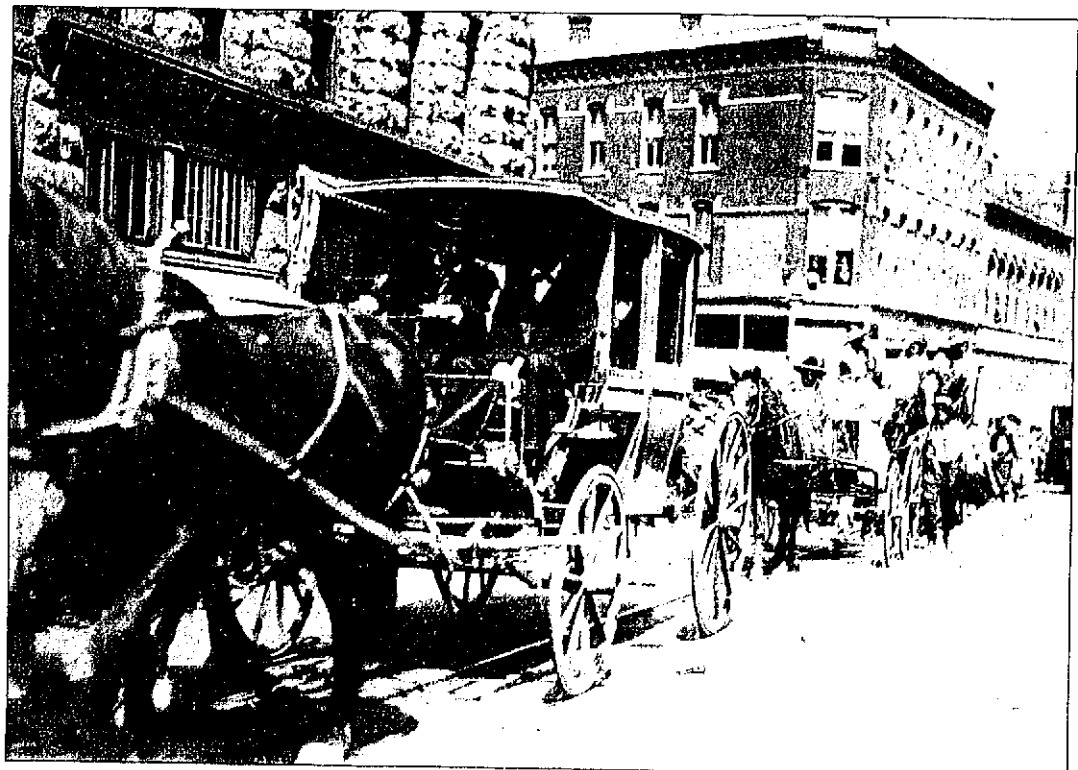
THE IDEA OF HISTORICALLY COSTUMED young people marching in a parade caught on. On May 17, 1924, the first Vigilante Parade filed down the Main Street of Helena. Commenting on the occasion, the Helena Independent reported that "originality in costume effect fairly screamed from the parade line. Buckaroos on piebald bronchos, Gotham fashion-plates, plain rubes, and other characters, historical and otherwise, including the irresistible flapper, were represented."

High school students were not the only ones to share in the fun; parents were recruited to contribute in some surprising ways. Fathers loaned trucks and helped build frames for cabins and scaffolds. Mothers frantically sewed yards of cotton together for pioneer petticoats and dresses. In the 1930s during the Depression, one father helped his daughter secure a horse for the parade by driving a friend to White Sulphur Springs where there was an available horse. The friend rode the steed from White Sulphur Springs to Helena and the daughter, costumed as a cowgirl, happily rode down Main Street on parade day.

WEATHER WAS ALWAYS an unpredictable factor. One participant in the 1960s, remembers heavy snow falling for at least three of the years. During stormy weather many Indian characters suddenly became fur traders or trappers; still some mostly naked brown bodies on floats remained true to their depictions. And the onlookers often huddled along the parade route, cheering despite the inclement weather.

Helena's parade became well known when film companies began to recognize the news value of the event beginning in 1931 when Fox and Paramount shot movies for distribution throughout the country.

In 1939, Helena's Diamond Jubilee Year, Crown Prince Olaf and Princess Martha of Norway were visitors in Helena. Among many activities offered the royal couple, the Vigilante Parade was predominant. The prince and princess saw the parade from a reviewing stand



Early-day parade scene through downtown Helena.

(More PARADE, page 5A)

Race for the Cure



IR photo by Amie Thompson

Ann Komac, a Montana Race for the Cure committee member, holds up the quilt that is being raffled off in conjunction with the race.

Star quilt donated for race benefit

On Saturday, not only will several thousand people be racing for the cure of breast cancer, many of the participants will also have a chance to win a beautiful star quilt donated by a mother and daughter in Glasgow.

The past two years the Montana Race for the Cure has raffled a quilt to help raise additional funds to aid in the battle against breast cancer. This raffle provides an opportunity for those who can't attend the race to participate in the fundraising efforts and have the chance to win a beautiful prize.

This year's quilt is a hand-quilted star quilt in various shades of blue with white highlights.

Maggie Longtree, a member of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation and her daughter, Jennifer Limberhand, a member of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe out of Lame Deer, donated their time and energy to provide this year's quilt. Longtree and Limberhand have also donated a similar quilt to the Governor's Mansion.

The drawing for the quilt will be held at the awards ceremony immediately following the race on May 15 in Helena. The winner doesn't have to be present to win. Tickets can be bought by completing the quilt raffle ticket request form in this year's race registration pamphlet or by calling Ann Komac at 443-3125. Tickets also will be available during race registration and packet pickup at the Capital Hill Mall on May 13 and 14 and the morning of the race on May 15.

Today in History

There are 232 days left in the year.

Among the key events on this date:

■ On May 13, 1607, the English colony at Jamestown, Va., was settled.

■ In 1842, composer Sir Arthur Sullivan, who collaborated with Sir William Gilbert in writing 14 comic operas, was born in London.

■ In 1846, the United States declared that a state of war already existed against Mexico.

■ In 1917, three peasant children near Fatima, Portugal, reported seeing a vision of the Virgin Mary.

■ In 1918, the first U.S. airmail stamps, featuring a picture of an airplane, were introduced. (The airplane was printed upside-down on some stamps, making them collector's items.)

■ In 1940, in his first speech as prime minister of Britain, Winston Churchill told the House of Commons, "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat."

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