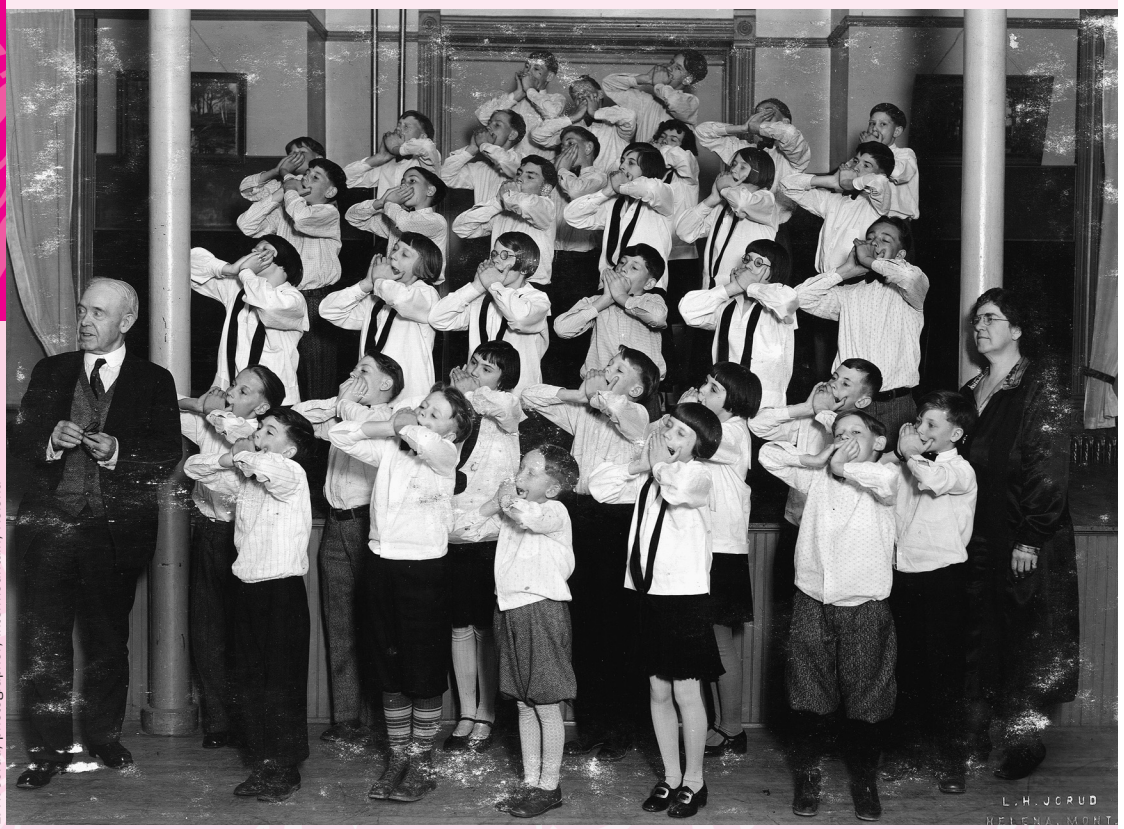
Montana Deaconess School to Intermountain

In 2009, Intermountain celebrates its one-hundredth anniversary of caring for children. Founded in 1909 as the Montana Deaconess School by the Reverend William Wesley Van Orsdel and Methodist women, the school has guided generations of children to better lives. Here the school's harmonica band, including Patty Williams (third row, second from left), poses with volunteer A. I. "Daddy" Reeves (left) and school principal Helen C. Piper (right) in 1929.

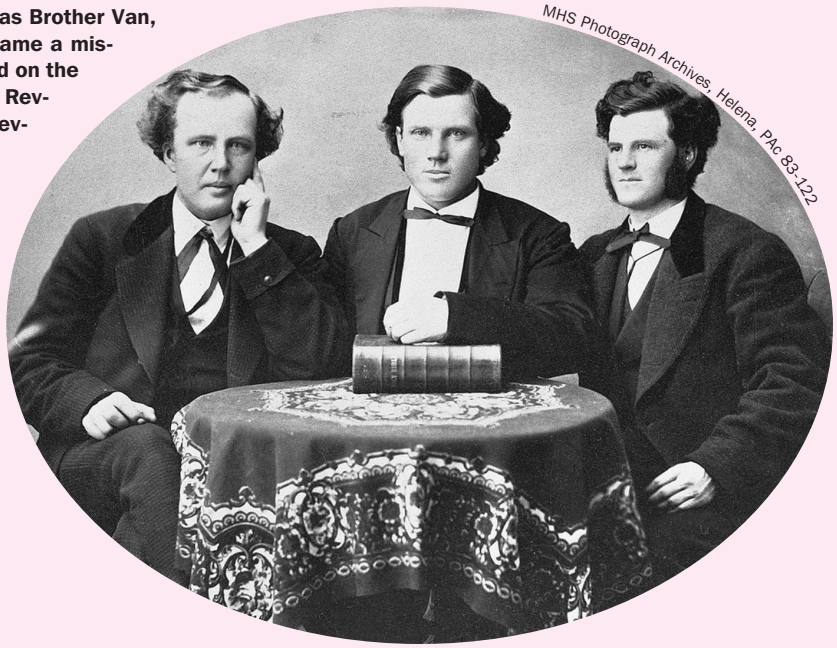
Patty Williams posed for her eighth-grade graduation picture in 1932 wearing a lovely dress, grown-up stockings, and new shoes. Even as she did so, Patty harbored mixed feelings about the event, for it meant that she would be saying good-bye to the school that had been her home since she was eight years old. Her mother had died when she was very young, and when she was in the second or perhaps the third grade, her father put her on the train at the Great Falls station, bound for Helena and the Montana Deaconess School. Her only companion was her doll.



L. H. Jorud, photographer, Intermountain, Helena

A Centennial of Restoring Hope for Children, 1909–2009

BY ELLEN BAUMLER



MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, PAc 83-122

Reverend Van Orsdel, better known as Brother Van, arrived in Montana in 1872 and became a missionary in the territory. He is pictured on the left with fellow Methodist ministers Reverend Thomas C. Iliff, center, and Reverend Francis A. Riggin in 1874.

At the school, Patty settled into the routine and grew into a capable young lady. At every step, her teachers watched and encouraged her, as they had hundreds of other boys and girls before her. Helen Piper, longtime teacher and superintendent, commemorated Patty's graduation with a heartfelt note:

> Patty dear—What a little girl you were the day you first came to us with your doll in your arms. This is the way you greeted me: "I came all by myself." And now you are leaving us, we hope better prepared to meet the High School world than had you not been with us. Remember we are interested [in you] now and will always wish for you the very best in life.[1]

For Patty, like hundreds of other children across the Northwest in the early twentieth century, the Montana Deaconess School provided a strong and well-rounded education. Beyond that, the Helena-based school was part of a larger movement. The founding of the school, the only Protestant boarding school between Chicago and the West Coast, was one important outcome in the national effort to further the cause of Protestantism in the United States. As the school, now known as Intermountain, celebrates its centennial in 2009, it honors its heritage as well as its evolution into one of the nation's leading treatment centers for children under severe emotional distress.

The Reverend

William Wesley Van Orsdel—"Brother Van," Montana's pioneering Methodist minister—became one of the first champions of the Montana Deaconess School. The twenty-four-year-old, self-taught evangelist from Pennsylvania arrived at Fort Benton on the steamer *Far West* in 1872. Soon thereafter, he set out for Helena to present himself to Reverend J. A. Van Anda, presiding elder of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Montana Territory and pastor of St. Paul's, the only Methodist church in the territory at the time. En route, Brother Van abandoned travel by wagon and adopted a horse he named Jonathan. In Helena, Reverend Van Anda appointed the young man missionary-at-large for the territory, and over the next eighteen years Brother Van, and Jonathan, traveled extensively across the territory "to preach, to sing, and encourage people to be good."[2]

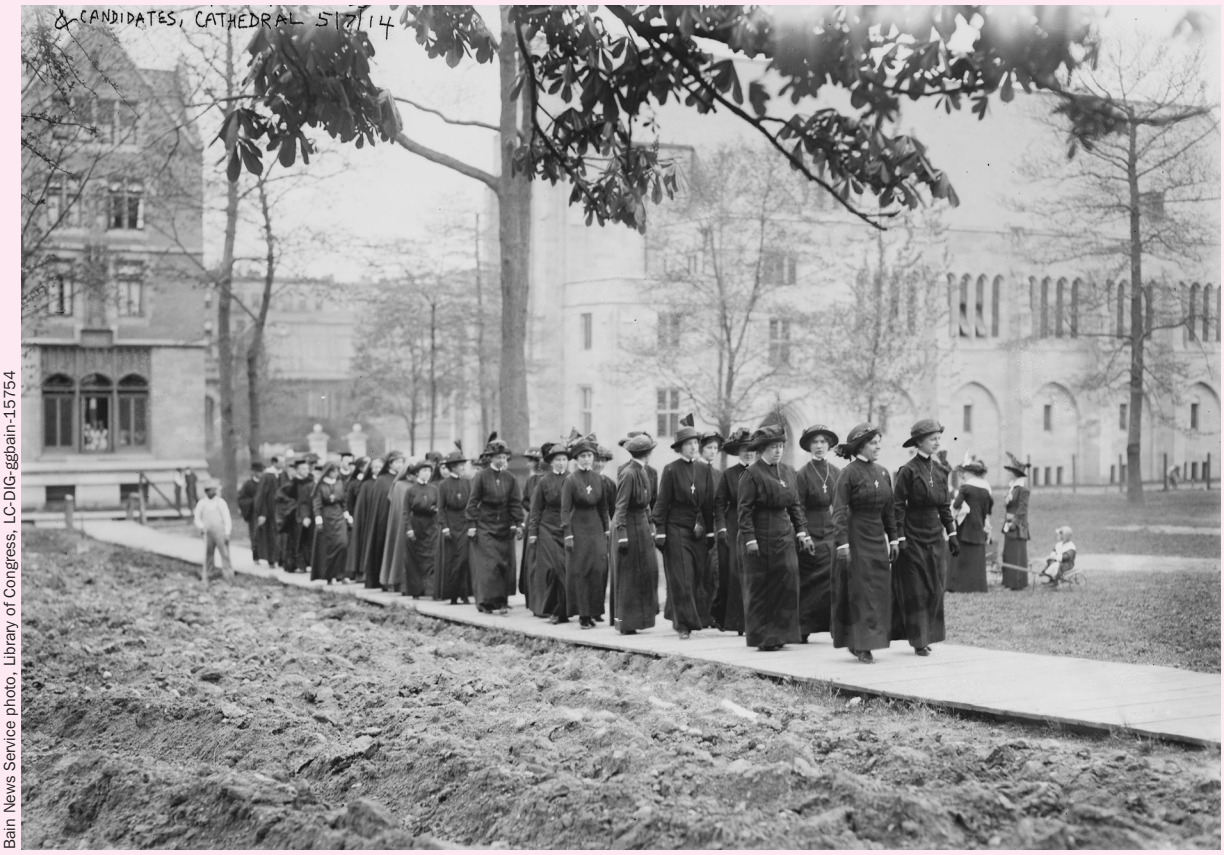
In 1890, Brother Van stabled his horse and took up a new post as the presiding elder of the church's Great Falls District. By this time, Montana had a number of hospitals and schools staffed largely by Catholic priests and sisters. Methodists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians recognized an imbalance and began work toward providing their own form of health care and education for the state's population. Their earliest efforts were rewarded when Montana's first college, the Montana Collegiate Institute at Deer Lodge, privately endowed in 1878, affiliated itself with the Presbyterian Church a few years later. Then,

in 1883, the Episcopalians of Helena established St. Peter's Hospital, and in 1890 the Methodists opened Montana Wesleyan University in the Pricky Pear Valley near Helena.[3]

Other nondenominational, Protestant-based social service institutions sprang up in Montana's capital city in the late 1890s. The Florence Crittenton Home, founded circa 1897, was part of the national Florence Crittenton Mission, whose original aim was to provide housing and medical care to young women in need. Its services complemented those of the Catholic House of the Good Shepherd for "wayward" women and girls. The Montana Children's Home, also founded in 1897, was a Protestant orphanage that evolved into today's Shodair Children's Hospital. It was the first Protestant alternative to St. Joseph's Home for Orphans in Helena. These early institutions, both Catholic and Protestant, fulfilled real needs not only for the community but also for a much wider, regional population.[4]

In the meantime, Brother Van was personally seeing to the building of scores of churches across the state. Just as importantly, he was the principal player in bringing a national Protestant movement to the state. In 1896, when he assumed chairmanship of a committee charged with investigating the possibility of establishing a Methodist hospital, he turned immediately to Chicago and the leaders of the Deaconess Movement. This endeavor, which rose from within the Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopal, and other Protestant churches, sought to incorporate professional women in ministerial duties. By the end of the nineteenth century, various Protestant groups actively trained deaconess sisters to serve as medical and social service missionaries in the United States.[5]

The model dated back to the beginnings of Christianity when women had an important place in the ministry of the early church. It lived on through the centuries in the religious orders of women, particularly within the Catholic tradition. Now the Deaconess Movement sought to provide single Protestant women of the Victorian era with similar educational and career opportunities. Unlike Catholic sisters, deaconesses took no perpetual vows. A woman could



Bain News Service photo, Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ggbain-15754

The Deaconess Movement, supported by the Methodist, Episcopal, Lutheran, and other Protestant churches, trained professional women to serve in medical and social service ministerial duties. The procession of deaconesses and candidates above was photographed on May 7, 1914, probably in New York.

leave at any time, but if she chose to remain a deaconess and single, she was assured of care in times of illness and in old age. These dedicated women earned no salaries but, rather, worked in exchange for their living expenses and the small stipends supplied by their institutional boards. By the late 1880s, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Methodists, and others were collaborating on interdenominational projects through the Deaconess Movement.[6]

By 1895, there were five hundred Methodist Episcopal deaconesses in the United States. However, their work was not widely understood. Many people perceived deaconesses as well-intentioned women who climbed the back stairs, patted children on the head, and then went home to write reports. At the eighth annual conference of Methodist Episcopal Deaconesses in New York City that year, the church's men and women came together to assess contributions and challenges. There was no doubt that deaconesses "sometimes do good where ministers are shut out," but they had not yet achieved the status of the Catholic sisters, who enjoyed a "glorious history." Determined to enlarge the number of deaconesses serving the church, Lucy Rider Meyer, founder of the Deaconess Movement in the United States, opened the Chicago Training School to prepare women to minister to disenfranchised populations, including the sick, orphaned, elderly, and destitute. Its graduates were "to break down barriers of class, race, and gender through their services as teachers, nurses, and advocates of social reform."[7]

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Louise Stork, from the Chicago Training School, came to Montana in 1905 to assist Brother Van with an expansion of the Montana Protestant Hospital in Great Falls and stayed to help him establish the Montana Deaconess School as a Protestant boarding school.

Deaconesses trained by the Chicago School would be central to projects in Montana. In 1897, Methodists established a Board of Control for Deaconess Work to prepare for the opening of a twenty-bed hospital in Great Falls, and a year later the first contingent of deaconesses arrived to staff the Montana Protestant Hospital (later renamed the Montana Deaconess Hospital). For years thereafter, student nurses came from Chicago to attend the hospital's training school. Its graduates staffed the deaconess hospitals that opened in Havre, Billings, Bozeman, Butte, Sidney, and Glasgow over the next three decades.[8]

Although the largest Protestant groups in Montana at the turn of the twentieth century were Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Lutherans, their combined numbers fell far short of the number of Roman Catholics. A federal census of religions taken in 1906 found that 74 percent of those practicing a religion in the state were Catholic, twice the national percentage. The statistic caught the attention of Brother Van and his colleagues, who lamented the fact that while there were fifteen Catholic schools in Montana at the time, there was not a single Protestant boarding school in the entire Northwest. Looking to the Chaddock Boys School at Quincy, Illinois, which operated under deaconess management, Brother Van felt that Methodist deaconesses might solve the need for such a school in the region, especially one dedicated to the education of children whose parents, for whatever reason, could not provide a nurturing home. He now bent his efforts to establishing such a school.[9]

Louise Stork, a deaconess and social worker trained by the Chicago School, strongly endorsed and supported Brother Van's vision. Stork had come to Montana in 1905 in connection with the expansion of the hospital at Great Falls. Within a year, she and Brother Van were discussing the idea of a school, and at his request, she planted the seed among Chicago deaconesses. But deaconesses were few, the demand for them great, and even Lucy Rider Meyer felt an undertaking in Montana, which she considered to be a frontier environment, would be fraught with hardships. She favored more deaconesses, not more institutions.[10]

Undaunted, Brother Van and Louise Stork continued to conspire. They focused on the possibility of converting the now-abandoned campus of Montana Wesleyan University into a school. In 1909, Brother Van and a dozen colleagues hired teams and drove out to the site to assess its potential. They found the five-story building in total disrepair. Nearly every window

Detail, MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, 953-410

Van Orsdel and Stork obtained the abandoned Montana Wesleyan University building near Helena (above, 1890) for the new school. Stork recruited other Chicago-trained deaconesses, and together they repaired and outfitted the building. The Montana Deaconess Preparatory School opened in September 1909. The school dropped "Preparatory" from its name after the first year.

was broken, vandals had carried off all the copper plumbing, and a thick layer of mud and dirt covered the floors. Despite the opposition of some members of the Wesleyan board of trustees, Brother Van saw nothing but possibilities in the building. Convincing the board that the empty campus was a "black eye" on Methodism, he persuaded the board to lease the site to the deaconesses for twenty-five years at the cost of one dollar per year.[11]

By this time, Louise Stork had secured a staff of women who agreed to repair and maintain the building. But it was barely more than a skeleton crew: Miss Stork assumed the role of superintendent while Hattie Kissell came to Montana as housekeeper and boys' housemother; Sarah Simmons came as matron and girls' housemother; and Nellie Rouse was the teacher. All were Chicago-trained deaconesses. When a fifth deaconess, Mary Sweet, who was to have acted as principal, gave in to her parents' forebodings about life in Montana and backed out of the venture, Stork herself shouldered the added responsibilities.[12]

In the summer of 1909, the women sewed curtains, hemmed towels, solicited donated furniture, and made ready to move into the school. In the twilight of a late summer evening, they arrived at the abandoned campus. Miss Stork later described the scene:

> By the time we got there and unloaded it was quite dark. The lights from Helena already began to glimmer in the distance. In the dark the great empty

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For its first forty years, Methodist women managed and staffed the school, taught the children, and tucked them into bed. Louise Stork was the first of three deaconess principals. She was followed by Roxana Beck in 1910 and Helen C. Piper (above, third from left) in 1929. Piper served the school for over forty years. In the early 1920s, her widowed mother, Minnie (second from right), joined her and took over care of the school's "linen department."

> building did not seem very inviting. The coyotes were howling seemingly not far away, and in order that the chickens might be safe through the night, they were placed under boxes and tubs in the front hall. Doors [were] slamming, for every lock had been broken and transoms were rattling for they too were loose and hanging. One or two windows had not yet been put in so the wind swept through the hall, keeping everything loose in motion. It took real courage to enter. I prayed for the will to finish what we had begun.

Gathering their nerve, the women descended the eerie stairway to the basement, where they found a stack of groceries that had been delivered earlier in the day. They assembled some crates to sit on, rummaged through the packages, and found the makings of a cold dinner, then lit kerosene lamps and set up makeshift beds in one of the rooms. With morning light, they began their work. Two weeks later, they had many of the fifty-six rooms of the derelict building furnished and homey.[13]

The Montana Deaconess Preparatory School opened on September 14, 1909, with nine students. Upon its formal dedication one month later, there were twenty-four students, then thirty. When the school year ended in June 1910, the rolls showed an average of thirty-five students in attendance during the year.[14]

Although women of the Methodist Deaconess Association managed the school under the auspices of the Methodist Episcopal Church, it was an ecumenical venture, with several of Helena's Protestant churches represented on the school's board of trustees. Mining engineer J. Henry Longmaid, an Episcopalian, was the first president of the board. Brother Van and Reverend Edward Mills, one of those who had originally opposed the plan, served as vice presidents. Cornelius Hedges Jr. and L. K. MacNeill, both Presbyterians, and Richard Lockey and his son, who had no religious affiliation, were also original board members. The first promotional literature described the school as nonsectarian and the only such Protestant school for boys and girls west of the Mississippi. "Protestantism," the pamphlet's introduction declared, "must care for her own!" Ministers of Helena's Protestant churches took turns driving out to the valley to conduct Sunday services.[15]

Despite his earlier reservations, and those of other Wesleyan trustees, Dr. Mills now advocated for other

deaconess schools not only in Montana but in every state. "Failure to provide them," he wrote, "compels Protestants to send their children to secular or Roman Catholic institutions." The problem, according to Wesleyan president C. W. Tenney, was that children sent to Catholic schools throughout the grades would then come to the university indoctrinated in Catholicism, "and we are able to do very little for them in a religious way though they may not be Catholics."[16]

The Montana Deaconess School, having dropped the word "Preparatory" from its name, opened for its second year in the fall of 1910. Deaconess Roxana Beck took the position of principal, and the staff doubled. That fall, Lucy Rider Meyer traveled from Chicago to visit the school. When she arrived, she found a beautifully appointed building that was perfectly adapted to the work at hand. Attendance was far beyond what she had hoped for, and she pronounced the school in better shape than many established institutions. However, because of all the work required to repair and maintain the premises and the expense of keeping the children fed, clothed, and warm, the ample funds raised through the sale of bonds and private donations had been depleted. The board became alarmed, and some members advocated the school's closure. Still, those people to whom the school owed money—such as the coal dealer and the furniture store owner—were patient and did not demand payment.[17]

In the meantime, Louise Stork directed all her energies toward keeping the school open, soliciting cash donations from local churches and businesses alike. The work was stressful, and in the fall of 1911 Miss Stork's doctor told her that she must move to a warmer climate or risk losing her health. Ignoring this advice, she spent the fall canvassing for funds for the school. Rigorous fund-raising in Butte yielded a thousand dollars but took a severe toll on her health. Stork, now feeling that the school was on solid ground financially, announced her plans to retire.[18]

Two dynamic leaders would follow Louise Stork. Roxana Beck, like her predecessor, was a deaconess trained in Chicago. She came to Montana from the Chaddock Boys School in Illinois and thus was well prepared to build the school on the foundation already laid. Beck assumed the role of principal and served the school in that capacity until 1928. Helen C. Piper, also a trained Chicago deaconess, would next take on the job of top administrator. A native of Illinois, Piper saw little promise in the treeless, sun-baked Prickly Pear Valley when she arrived in 1913 to take on the role of assistant principal; she planned to stay no longer than one year. But soon captivated by the work and the children, she was destined to be the pillar of the school for more than forty years. Her infectious enthusiasm and jovial personality endeared her not just to the children but to all who knew her.[19]

When the Montana Deaconess School opened, it accepted both boarding and day students ages five to fourteen, and the curriculum extended through the eighth grade. Monthly tuition for boarding students was twenty dollars. The school catered especially to rural boys and girls whose parents for a variety of reasons—illness, separation, death of a spouse—were unable to care for them. The women at the school did everything possible for the welfare and comfort of their young charges, but sometimes the staff had to make difficult decisions. The case of the five McCaffery children from the Big Hole Valley reveals the pressing need for social services for children in the early decades of the twentieth century.

The McCaffery children's mother, Cora McCaffery, bedridden for several years before her death,

Courtesy Kathy Holzer

The Montana Deaconess School accepted boarding and day students ages five to fourteen. The children often came to the school when parents were unable to care for them due to illness, separation, or death of a spouse. In 1914, Charles McCaffery brought his daughter Maxine (above, December 1913) and her four siblings there after their mother died.

had prepared for the day she would no longer be with them by setting aside money for each child. She carefully chose the only place in Montana where she knew they would receive a Protestant education. With her death in 1913, however, her husband, Charles, a Catholic, was hesitant to send his children to a Protestant school. For a year after Cora's death, he attempted to care for the children himself at the ranch. Finally, in 1914, he took them to Helena and enrolled them in the Montana Deaconess School. There the children, including the youngest, seven-year-old Maxine, settled into a comfortable routine, which included

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special treats—five-cent candy on Wednesdays, fruit on the weekends, and sometimes a trip to the Parrot Confectionery in downtown Helena. Occasionally, there were even weekends spent in a teacher's home. When Christmas approached, Charles McCaffery arrived to spend the holidays with his children. The family spent two weeks together in a Helena hotel before the children returned to the school. After that first Christmas, however, communication grew less and less frequent. The second Christmas came and went with no word from Charles McCaffery. By the second summer, all contact had ceased.[20]

In the meantime, overcrowding at the school was taking a toll. The capacity of the building, which at sixty-five students had seemed ample at first, proved inadequate. In 1911, two years after the school's opening, enrollment stood at forty-six; in 1912, it was fifty-six; and by 1914 the school was bursting with seventy-two students. Difficult decisions had to be made. With Charles McCaffery's disappearance and no tuition coming in, Roxana Beck was eventually forced to send the five McCafferys to St. Joseph's Home for Orphans. At St. Joseph's, there was trouble almost from the beginning. The oldest brother ran away, and sometime later the youngest sibling, Maxine, became ill. When the sisters took her to the hospital, she was diagnosed with typhoid. Her recovery was slow, and the children's unhappiness was so evident that the sisters had to call their aunt and uncle in Butte, Marie and Joe McCaffery, who agreed to take them in.[21]

Although the Deaconess School could not effect happy outcomes in all cases, it was ever the aim of the staff to see to the comfort and well-being of their charges. Helen Piper's focus during her long tenure was to make the school "a real home. . . . It is our desire to have the children live a free, joyous life. We want at all times to radiate joy. That we have succeeded is shown by the testimony of many who, when they enter the building say, 'How happy you feel when you enter this place.'"[22]

Brother Van radiated that happiness. He had a special bond with the children, and perhaps the greatest legacy he left them was his love of music. His frequent visits to the school usually came at mealtime. He would arrive at the front door and immediately start down the stairs, singing his favorite hymn, "Harvest Time." The children knew then, even before

Helen Piper aimed to make the school "a real home" and to have the children "live a free and joyous life." She wanted her graduates, like the class at left matriculating in 1920, to remember "how happy you feel when you enter this place."

he appeared in the dining room doorway, that their beloved Brother Van was coming. At his insistence, music was an essential element in the school's curriculum. Through the decades, the children staged plays, operettas, and Christmas programs and often performed at community events. Private piano study was available to all students who showed talent, even if they could not pay for lessons. Choral classes were mandatory for all grade levels, and students received training in two- and three-part songs, with solo work for those who showed special talent. Fittingly, the children from the school were taken to Great Falls to sing at Brother Van's bedside after he suffered a debilitating stroke on October 8, 1919. Weeks later, they sang at his funeral.[23]

Children came to the Deaconess School from all over the Northwest and Canada. By the 1920s, average enrollment reached eighty students. In 1929, when Miss Piper became principal, the school accepted ninety-five students and turned away seventy-six applicants. Some of these were charity cases, but most were not. Although many people thought of the Deaconess School as an orphanage and a home for destitute children—and it did sometimes take in these students—its purpose was not charity but rather to provide a Protestant education to children from near and far. Patty Williams, who arrived by herself on the train with her doll, was the daughter of a well-employed bank teller in Great Falls, and she is just one example of the many children whose parents paid tuition. Still, the misconception of the school as a home for orphaned children benefited the school in at least one way: the public was always generous, and fund-raising was usually successful. One board member noted that it was always easier to raise one hundred dollars for the school than it was to raise ten dollars for Wesleyan University.[24]

During the Great Depression, however, the need for financial assistance grew as economic conditions worsened. At times during the 1930s, 70 percent of the children at the Deaconess School were charity cases. Helen Piper's annual reports are full of stories. One father, for example, brought his three little children to the home on Christmas. He wept as he told them good-bye, but he wanted Miss Piper to know that he was "not crying because they are here, but because I have to leave them. I am so glad I found this place." More evidence of need could be seen in the number of students who remained during the three-month summer break because they had nowhere to go. Miss Piper traditionally kept a few students at school, but in 1935 thirty of the school's children stayed over. "Yet," Miss Piper wrote, "we were able to pay our bills. Friends . . . slipped us tiny envelopes." Longtime benefactor J. Henry Longmaid, the first president of the board of trustees, left Montana Deaconess School ten thousand dollars when he died in 1930. This bequest and other donations, large and small, including those of food and clothing, kept the school solvent during the hard economic times.[25]

Throughout the 1930s, the Deaconess School served children from all walks of life. Among the eighty children enrolled in 1931, thirty-three had suffered the death of a parent, and nineteen had parents who were separated. Seven students had chronic illnesses in their homes. There were children from single-parent homes where there was no adult supervision while the parent was at work. There were orphaned children whose guardians placed them at the school. Eight students came because they had no school close enough to attend. Ten students came because they were behind in public school, and some came who simply could not get along in public schools. Deaconess students were often behind not only in their studies but also in social development; they desperately needed the individual attention they could not get in public school. Miss Piper eloquently defended the school's duty to serve such students, writing, "The social orphan stands just as much in need as the child whom death has robbed." These children drew Miss Piper's special attention: "We seek to help the child find his place," she wrote.[26]

In providing love and guidance to students, Miss Piper saw many happy endings to seemingly hopeless situations over the years. One of the seven graduates in 1931 was a boy who had gone through all the grades at Deaconess. Upon the death of his mother, his father had brought him to Miss Piper. When the father failed to send tuition beyond the first few months, Miss Piper kept the boy on, seeing his promise. At his graduation, Miss Piper noted, "We believe we have instilled within him the desire to seek for only the best in life." In another instance, a family of six siblings was dropped on the school's doorstep. They came with nothing—no clothing, no bedding—forcing the school to furnish everything. Although the father

Brother Van shared his love of music with the children. Choral classes were mandatory, and through the decades the children, like the girls in this choir, staged plays, operettas, Christmas programs, and community performances.

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In October 1935, a series of earthquakes struck Helena. Though no injuries were sustained at the Deaconess School, the quakes damaged the building beyond repair, and it was demolished.

promised to pay seventy dollars a month, the money was not forthcoming. Another problem was that the oldest daughter was over fourteen years of age. However, seeing the pleasure the girl took in being able to study without having to care for her younger siblings, Miss Piper decided to keep her at the Deaconess so she could attend high school in Helena.[27]

Another of Miss Piper's favorites was John, who had been a very little boy when he first came to the school from Wenatchee, Washington. His mother had

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abandoned the family, and his father brought him to the school. The first night there, John cried uncontrollably until the housemother understood him to say that if he could see the lady who had greeted him at the door, he would feel better. When the housemother escorted him to Miss Piper's room, Miss Piper took the child in her arms and rocked him until his crying stopped. Comforted, he went off to his own bed. Thereafter, on his first night back at school after summer break, John routinely had to visit Miss Piper before he could go to sleep. But upon returning to school as a seventh grader, however, he did not come to her door that first night. When she found him at breakfast the next morning, Miss Piper questioned him. "Oh, gee," John told her, "I'm too big now." In her annual report that year, Piper wrote, "My feelings were similar to a mother whose baby grows up."[28]

Miss Piper was not alone in ministering to students. Indeed, the whole staff was good at mothering. "[W]e believe we have succeeded . . . [in bringing] into the lives of those who have come to us that which for the greater part in most of their lives was omitted—Love—just the tender, loving, thoughtful care that we are all seeking," Miss Piper noted. "Truly, we have found that whoso loves a child loves not himself but God."[29]

While they concentrated on the care of the children, the deaconesses also pushed ahead with plans to expand the campus. During the 1910s, the school raised some seventy-five thousand dollars for the building of Van Orsdel Hall. Begun in 1922, it was nearing completion in the fall of 1935. Guests attending a tea in observation of the school's twenty-sixth anniversary were invited to inspect the four completed classrooms in the new building. Just days later, on October 18, the first temblor in a series of earthquakes struck the Helena area. It was about ten o'clock at night, and the students were in bed. Housemothers led some sixty sleepy children out of the old Wesleyan building without incident. Brother Van would have heartily approved as the adults gathered the children on the lawn and directed them in singing "God Will Take Care of You."[30]

Meanwhile, in town, a dance was in progress at the Shanty, a popular nightclub. Owners Lloyd and Frances Synness woke up their two girls—one of whom was a day student at the Deaconess School—and hurried out to the campus. There they found the children unharmed and singing in the darkness. More vehicles soon arrived, and volunteers retrieved mattresses from the ruined building. They ferried the children to the Shanty, laid the mattresses on the dance floor, and put the children to bed. The next morning, as Miss Piper assessed the damage—the buildings were a total loss—she was horrified to discover that a large stone over the doorway through which the children had passed had shaken loose. She considered it a miracle that there were no injuries. The old Wesleyan building had to be demolished, and Van Orsdel Hall was never used. It still stands today, a lonely shell out in the Prickly Pear Valley.[31]

Miss Piper and her staff quickly relocated many of the children to an abandoned mansion that had once served as the hospital of Dr. Napoleon Salvail; others she placed in private homes. The school operated in makeshift classrooms. The future looked grim for the Deaconess School, but in 1937 the school providentially acquired

The 1935 earthquake also rendered unusable the Deaconess School's new building, the nearly completed Van Orsdel Hall, on the right in this photograph of the campus. The building still stands today, a lonely shell in the Prickly Pear Valley.

Following the earthquake, the Montana Deaconess School moved to temporary quarters and then acquired Mills Hall (right), the former girls' dormitory of the Wesleyan campus in Helena, where it stayed until 1971.

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Mills Hall, the girls' dormitory that had once been a part of the Wesleyan University campus in Helena. With her characteristic enthusiasm, Miss Piper wrote, "They say it can't be done. We say, 'Here it is!'"[32]

Although the future looked better, Miss Piper noted in her 1937 report that many children were being turned away from the school for lack of space. At the same time, the requirements of children who did attend the school were changing. Many needed the type of mothering the deaconesses provided, and at times, this emotional support was more important to the child than the school's educational services. The school gained a reputation for its ability to provide nurturing. Recognizing this expertise, in the late 1930s and 1940s the Montana Department of Child Welfare began to pressure the school to take not only homeless children but also those with emotional problems. This change of focus from academics to parenting became more and more evident in the school's day-to-day operations.[33]

By 1944, the Montana Deaconess School, still the only Protestant school for boys and girls west of the Mississippi, had educated more than three thousand children, and Miss Piper's work was known across the state and beyond. However, with Miss Piper's retirement in 1950, there were no more deaconesses on staff, and the school underwent a transition. The difficulty of this transition is clearly evident in the story of the four Richter children, Ed, Lonnie, Luanne, and Kathy. The Richters came to the Deaconess School in

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By 1944, Deaconess, still the only Protestant boarding school for boys and girls west of the Mississippi, had educated more than three thousand children, including those in this third- and fourth-grade class who posed in 1946. However, in the late 1930s the school's focus had begun to change. At the behest of the state's Department of Child Welfare, the school began to accept students who were more emotionally needy, and basic parenting increasingly became a part of the school's day-to-day operations.

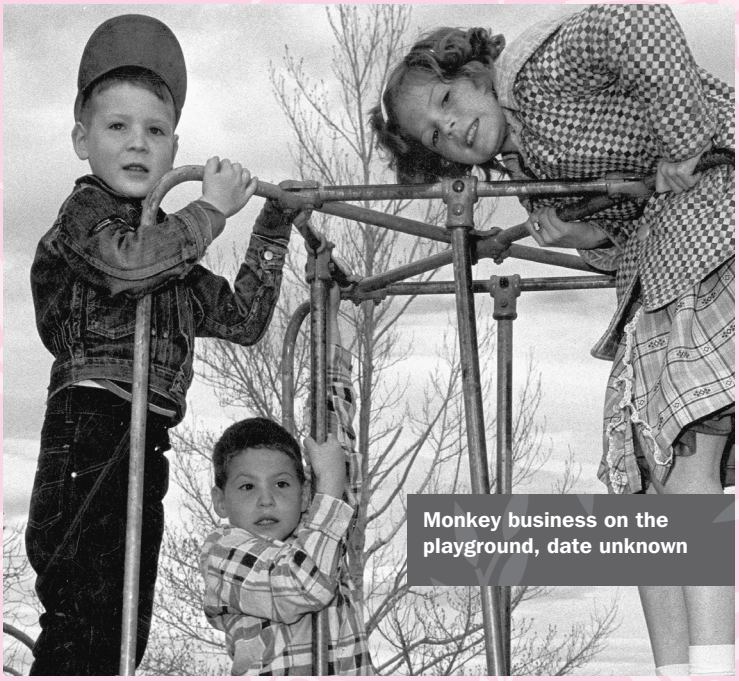
1951. Their parents had separated, and their mother attempted to support the family by waiting tables at the Star Café while Ed watched his younger siblings. Finally deciding she could not adequately care for them, their mother placed her children at St. Joseph's Home, Helena's Catholic orphanage. But seeing their unhappiness there, she next brought them to the Deaconess School.

For seven-year-old Luanne, it was, as she recalled in later years, the first time in her entire childhood that she felt secure. "At the Deaconess School we never felt we did not belong because we were all equal in the eyes of our housemothers," she said. The home's mandatory church attendance provided Luanne and her siblings a solid and unwavering religious faith that lasted into adulthood, and the daily routine offered stability. She enjoyed the pleasant mealtimes where the children sat at round tables of six to eight. At the head table, the principal rang a little brass bell to indicate when it was time to eat and, again, when it was time to leave the dining room. Since many children went home on weekends, those remaining at school got milk and bread with sugar and cinnamon as a special treat. However, the comfort the Richter children found at the Deaconess School ended in 1954 when the school discontinued its academic curriculum. The school instead decided to focus on the care of children severely damaged by neglect, abuse, rejection, and lack of supervision and training. With this new direction, the school's name changed to Inter-Mountain Deaconess Home for Children, houseparents replaced the female-only staff, and courts and public welfare agencies began referring adolescents. Caught in this transition, some students remained at the home and attended public school, but the Richters went into foster care.[34]

The experiences of Kathy, Luanne, Lonnie, and Ed Richter (right, circa 1952), who attended the Montana Deaconess School from 1951 to 1954, illustrate the quality of both the school's academics and its living environment. Luanne Richter recalled that she received a solid education and that the school provided her and her siblings a sense of belonging, a stable daily routine, and an unwavering religious faith that lasted into adulthood. The photographs on these pages illustrate many of the Deaconess students' playtime activities.

Intermountain, Helena

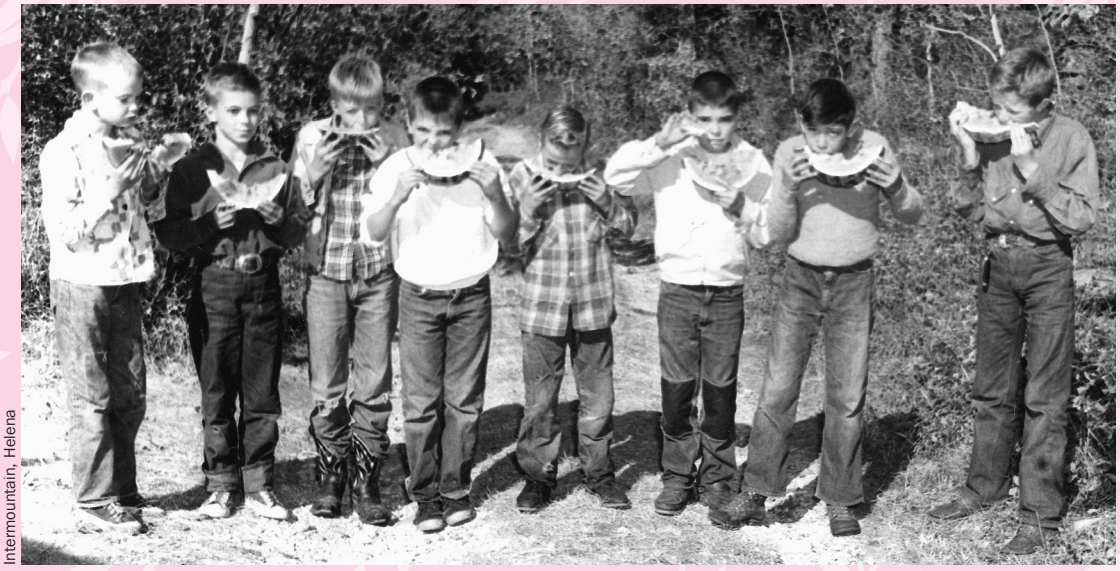
Girls on a teeter-totter (above) and boys eating watermelon (below), probably in the 1950s



Intermountain, Helena

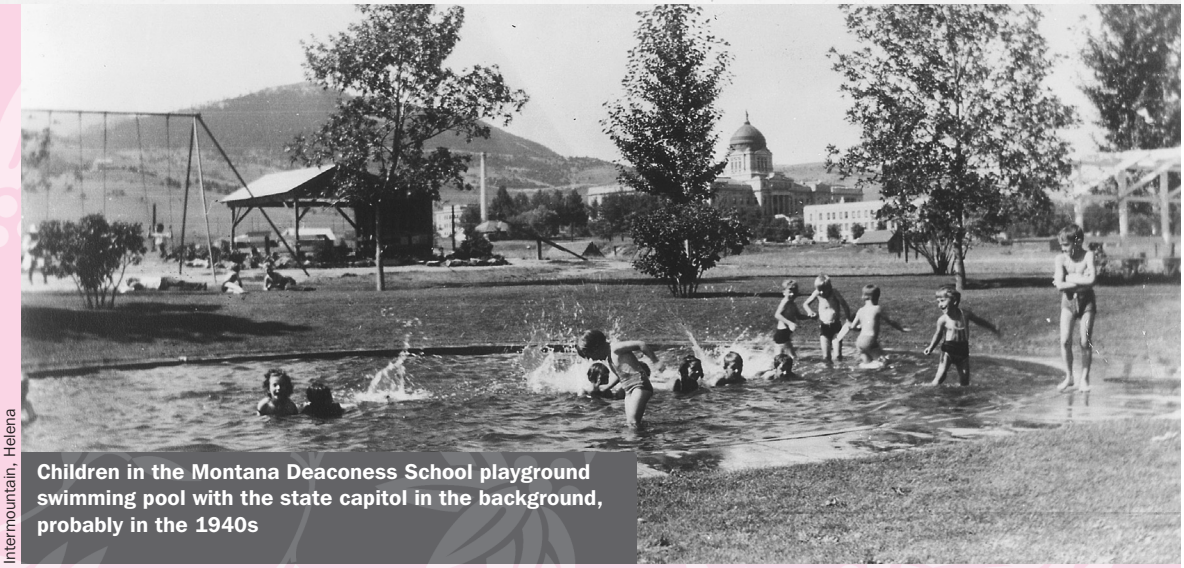
Monkey business on the playground, date unknown

Intermountain, Helena



Intermountain, Helena

Winter fun at Mills Hall, early 1950s



Intermountain, Helena

Children in the Montana Deaconess School playground swimming pool with the state capitol in the background, probably in the 1940s

Intermountain, Helena

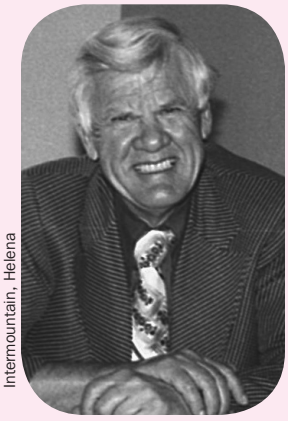
Teacher and boys on the Prickly Pear Valley campus, 1930

When the Deaconess's academic program ended, houseparents replaced the female-only staff, and the school became a haven for children who suffered severe damage from neglect, abuse, or a lack of supervision and training. The name changed to Inter-Mountain Deaconess Home for Children in the mid-1950s.

Intermountain, Helena

The Inter-Mountain Deaconess Home continued its work with at-risk children throughout the 1960s. Michael Kalous was in fifth grade when his father brought him and his three brothers to the home in 1965. The four Kalous brothers had lived in cars, in tents, and in a string of inadequate houses with their abusive father. They suffered further mistreatment in numerous foster homes. At this time, there were no on-site counselors, no treatment programs, and no educational facilities at the Deaconess Home. However, there were caring houseparents who offered a stable environment for children such as the Kalouses. During his tenure at the Inter-Mountain Deaconess Home, Michael went to public school, attended church every Sunday, had fun at camp, sang around the piano, and, most importantly, felt safe and learned that there was good in the world.[35]

Inter-Mountain and its services continued to evolve over the following decades. In 1971, under administrator Robert O. Wix, the campus moved to its present cottage-style arrangement on the south side of Helena. In-house educational services resumed because many of the children had such severe problems that they could not attend public school. In 1982, professional counselors replaced houseparents. The name changed to Intermountain Children's Home in 1990, dropping "Deaconess" to separate the home's identity from the deaconess hospitals around Montana. With the broadening of services to Missoula and Kalispell, the name again changed, to Intermountain. Based on a new understanding of what troubled children really need to heal and grow, Intermountain began to focus on the depth and quality of children's relationships with safe adults. Today, its vision is to transform young lives through residential programs, community-based



Intermountain, Helena

Inter-Mountain continued to evolve, and in 1971 administrator Robert O. Wix (left) moved the school to its present cottage-style campus. In-house educational services resumed at the new location because many of the children's emotional needs precluded attending public school.

Intermountain, Helena

services, and public eduation seminars. The children living at the home struggle with fear, hurt, anger, and pain. Hard work is involved before a child grasps the hope offered to him. Some 75 to 80 percent of children will take that spark, and from it they eventually learn to trust, to laugh, and to love.

Generations of children have experienced the safety and love of the Helena home in all its different phases. Many of them embraced the healing they found there and passed it on. Patty Williams became a teacher; Maxine McCaffery and her two sisters went to nursing school while a third sister became an accountant. Luanne Richter raised four successful sons. And Michael Kalous returned to Intermountain with a degree in ministry. Now pursuing a master's degree in counseling, Michael knows that the work can be exhausting and emotionally draining. Yet Intermountain counselors must make a two-year commitment because the children they work with need continuity and stability as much as anything.[36]

The Intermountain of today has passed through many changes, but it remains steadfastly devoted to the spirit of its founders and a conscientious steward of Brother Van's legacy, "to enter into the heart-life of children." Celebrating a century of challenges and triumphs, Intermountain continues its work as a nonprofit organization providing early prevention, intervention, and treatment for youth and families. It preserves its ecumenical spirit as a mission of the United Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ, and the Presbyterian Church, USA. The men and women of today's Intermountain look forward to providing another century of healing for children.

Ellen Baumler is the Montana Historical Society's interpretive historian and National Register sign program coordinator. *Dark Spaces: Montana's Historic Penitentiary at Deer Lodge* with photographer J. M. Cooper (University of New Mexico Press, 2008) is her most recent project.

In 1990, the school dropped "Deaconess" from its name and in 2007 shortened it simply to Intermountain. Today the school delivers treatment to teach children to form attachments and to learn to trust, love, and function in society. Above, Intermountain's children play ball on the school's campus in 1990.