

## **Historic Significance of the Johnson Schoolhouse**

This document is part of a larger document evaluating the historic significance of buildings on the northeast part of the Missouri Valley.

This portion of the document describes the buildings on the property owned by Diane and Michael Brown in March of 2003.

Unfortunately, the part of the document we have does not say who did the evaluation nor does it have any of the other buildings that were in the original evaluation.

*Joe Brown*

*Bob [unclear]*  
~~[unclear]~~

the house and outbuildings to Charles and Mae Matthews (Broadwater County Historical Society 1977:46). The consulted sources provided no information about the Moran and Matthews families.

**Description.** Of the eight buildings recorded at 24BW1068, two are modern. The remaining six include the 1904 house, the Johnson post office building, a chicken house, a garage, a storage building, and an outhouse.

The original form and size of the 1904 house (Feature 1) cannot be determined by inspection of the current building's exterior. The 1½-story house has been so thoroughly remodeled that it now appears as a large rectangular block with an irregular roof. All windows and doors are modern, as is the 11-inch-exposure imitation wood siding (Figure 9).

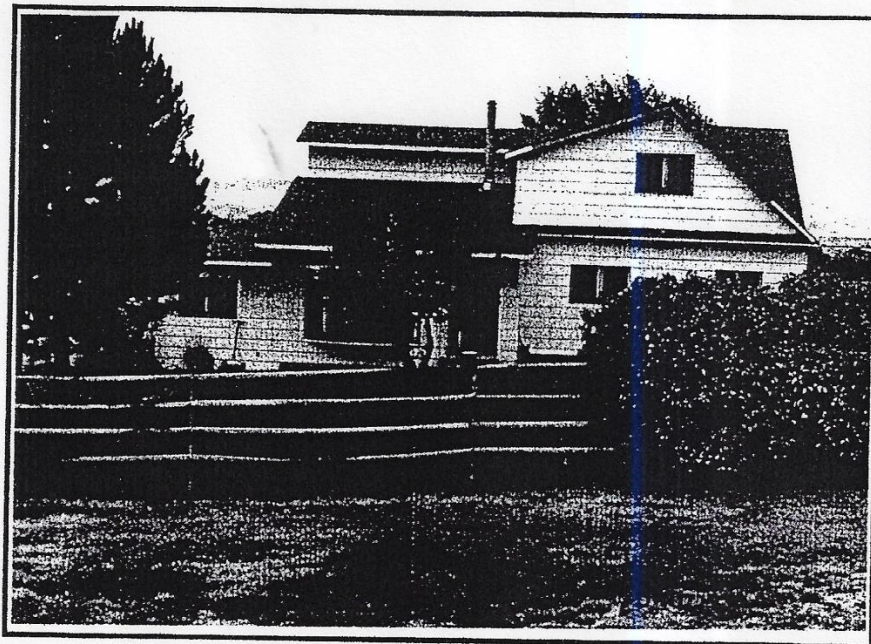


Figure 9. Feature 1 house at 24BW1068, showing its remodeled form, facing west.

The old Johnson post office building (Feature 2) is a wood-frame building standing immediately behind the Feature 1 house. The 12½ x 24½-foot post office rests on a concrete foundation. It is sided with board and batten and the gable ends are made of boards set horizontally (Figure 10). The side gable roof is covered with new, brown delta-rib roofing. The only door is a ½ light over three panel wood door at about the center of the north wall. There are windows on all but the west wall, and they are a variety of types. These include one- and two-pane fixed units and a pair of six-pane sliding windows. The building stands over a root cellar which is accessed by a set of wooden stairs on the west side. The post office presumably was erected between 1900 and 1910, but the concrete foundation and root cellar almost certainly post-date original construction.

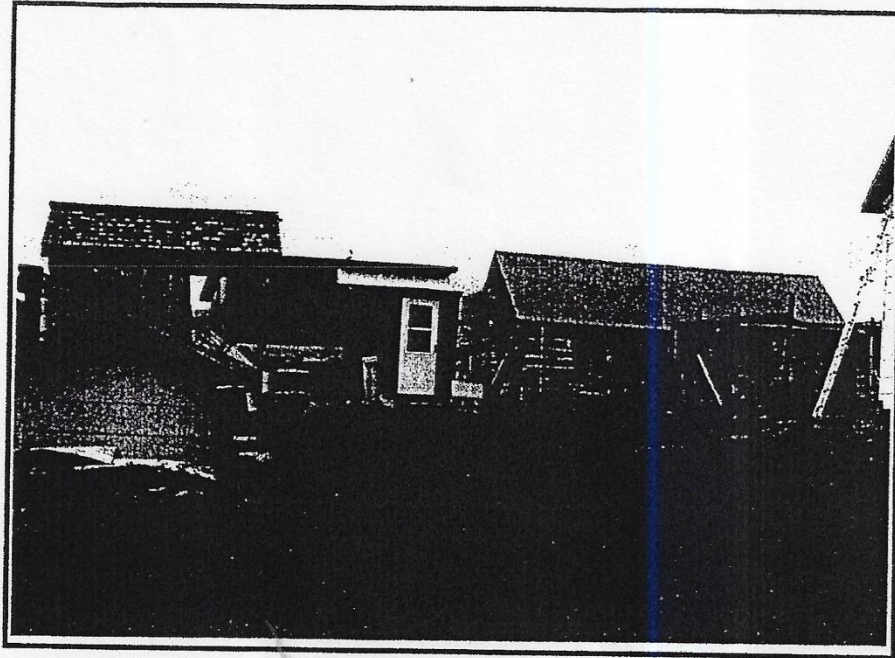


Figure 11. Feature 4 chicken house at 24BW1068 on right, with Feature 5 storage shed at left, and Feature 8 outhouse at far left, facing north.

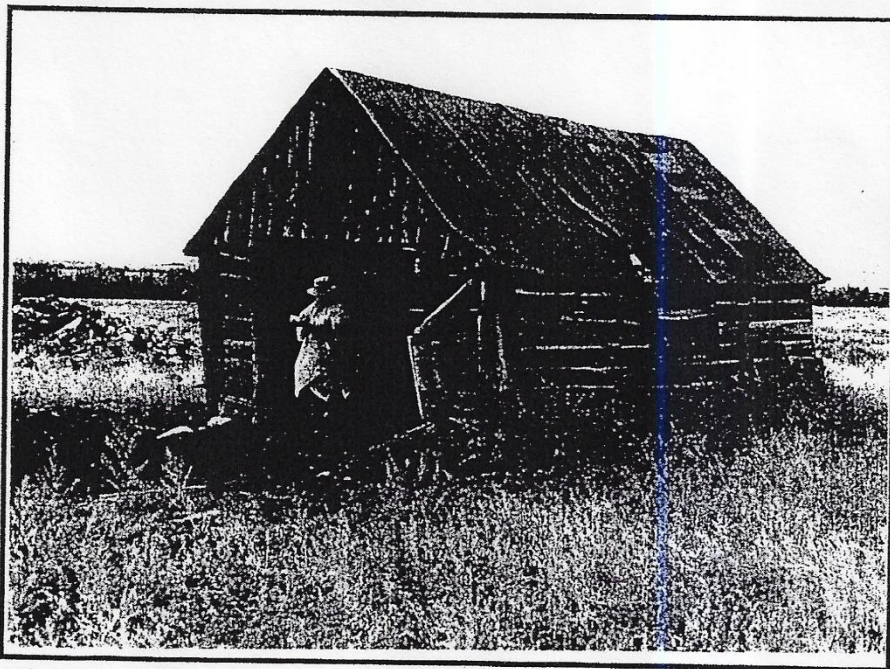


Figure 12. Feature 6 garage(?) at 24BW1068, showing box corners and garage opening, facing northwest.

The Feature 7 storage shed at the south edge of 24BW1068 probably is an historic building, but it no longer stands in its original position. This single-story, wood-frame building is set up on a moving frame. It measures just over 10 x 24 feet and is covered with drop siding. The front gable roof has a shallow pitch; it is covered with aluminum corrugated metal. The building has two doors, one cross panel door on the south wall, and the other a board door at the center of the west wall. The windows, all of which are positioned high on the walls, consist of a double-hung window laid sideways and several 3-pane fixed windows in the north, south, and east walls.

The Feature 8 outhouse is another possibly historic building at 24BW1068 which likely is not standing at its original location (Figure 11). The building measures 4 feet 7 inches square. The walls are sheathed with vertical boards and the door is made of vertical boards too. The front-gable, wood-shingled, Rocky Mountain-style roof overhangs the front wall by 2 feet 9 inches and covers a plank stoop.

The Feature 3 shop is one of two modern buildings on-site. It is a very large L-shaped building which measures 63 feet long (Figure 13). It is of wood-frame construction and has the same wide-exposure imitation wood siding as the house. Standing near the front edge of the property, the large shop is the first building one sees when entering the yard.

Immediately west of the Feature 2 chicken house is a pair of modern buildings joined together (Feature 5; Figure 11). They comprise a cobbled-together storage shed, sided with T-111 and plywood.

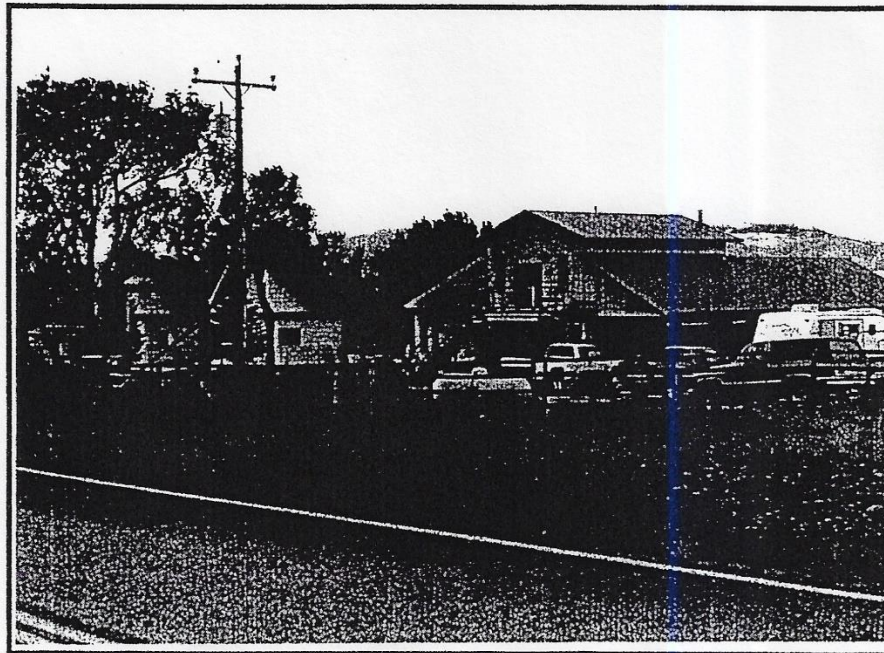


Figure 13. Overview of 24BW1068 from Highway 284, showing Feature 1 house at left and Feature 3 modern shop at right, facing southwest.

**National Register Evaluation.** Despite some interesting and perhaps significant historic associations, 24BW1068 is not National Register eligible because it lacks integrity. The historic site composition has been altered with the removal of several buildings and the addition of modern features. Among the most damaging changes made to site integrity are the mid-1980s remodeling of the 1904 farmhouse and construction of the large shop. Both buildings stand near the front edge of the property and effectively block the view of most intact historic buildings at 24BW1068.

### **Johnson School (24BW1069)**

The Johnson School is a well-preserved rural Montana school, including schoolhouse, wood shed, and outhouse. Standing at the south edge of Clear Creek, it served nearby ranching families for almost one-half century.

**History.** The Johnson School was the second to serve area residents. The first school in this part of the Townsend Valley was the Confederate School built in 1872. The older building was made of logs and stood farther up Confederate Gulch. The use of local materials is reflective of the school's temporary nature, first serving mining and early ranching families when Confederate Gulch placer mining was thriving but involved a transitory population.

By the turn of the century, Confederate's placer boom had long since busted, but ranching families were developing increasingly successful sheep and cattle operations. No doubt the Confederate School had outlasted its usefulness and area residents wanted a more permanent building. The new schoolhouse at 24BW1069 was built in 1905 on an acre of land donated by adjacent property owner Thomas Glenn. The school was renamed the Johnson School, in recognition of Reuben A. Johnson, the founder of the tiny community of Johnson, and Anna M. Johnson, the founder of the new Johnson School District which essentially replaced the old Confederate district.

Construction of the new building began in August 1905, after the trustees voted to levy a 5 mill tax to pay for the new schoolhouse. The total cost of the 20 x 30-foot building was \$575.10. Other specifics about the school, such as the origin of the building design, are presently unknown. The architecture clearly denotes use of a more-or-less standard plan used by many rural school districts in Montana and elsewhere, though.

As with most rural schools, the schoolhouse served as a community hall on occasion. During the 1910s, benefit dances and basket socials were held at the schoolhouse to raise money for the school, but other non-school-related activities also took place there.

The last class was taught at the Johnson School in 1946. The school closed during school district consolidation which followed closely on the heels of World War II in Broadwater County (Broadwater County Historical Society 1977:46; Broadwater County Museum n.d.a).

**Description.** The Feature 1 schoolhouse is a very good example of the rural Montana schoolhouse, having suffered few alterations since construction (Figure 14). Resting on a poured concrete foundation, the rectangular, single-story building exhibits plain lines with virtually no embellishments. Walls are clad with lap siding and windows are 2/2 double-hung units having plain trim. On the south side of the schoolhouse, those units are in three paired groupings, while on the north there were originally just three single windows. The north-side windows were removed many years ago, the spaces infilled with lap siding (Figure 15). A steep front-gable roof tops the building and has been re-roofed with galvanized corrugated metal roofing. A red brick chimney pierces the ridge line at the west end of the building.

The main part of the schoolhouse is fronted by a gable-roofed foyer centered on the east wall. Fully enclosed, the foyer once sported a single 2/2 double-hung window in each side. The lower sash in the south window has been replaced by a single pane and the window on the north was removed and infilled with lap siding. Access to the foyer and schoolhouse is gained through a wood cross-panel door. A transom above has been infilled with wood. A red brick chimney exits the foyer roof at the east end of the ridge line.

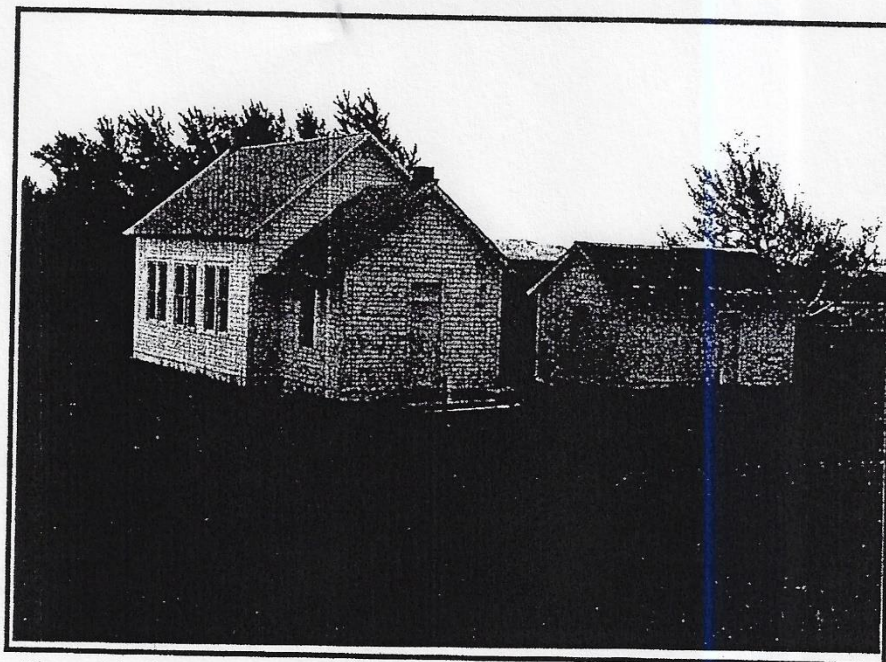


Figure 14. Feature 1 schoolhouse and Feature 2 wood shed at 24BW1069, the Johnson School, facing northwest.

Feature 2 is a single-story, wood-frame wood shed which stands about 10 feet north of the schoolhouse (Figures 14 and 15). Another plain building, this one is sided with shiplap siding and is covered by a moderately-pitched gable roof. The roof has wood shingles and rafter tails are exposed at the eaves. There are three openings in the shed, two board person doors (one on the south and the other on the east) and a small boarded opening high in the north wall. Because

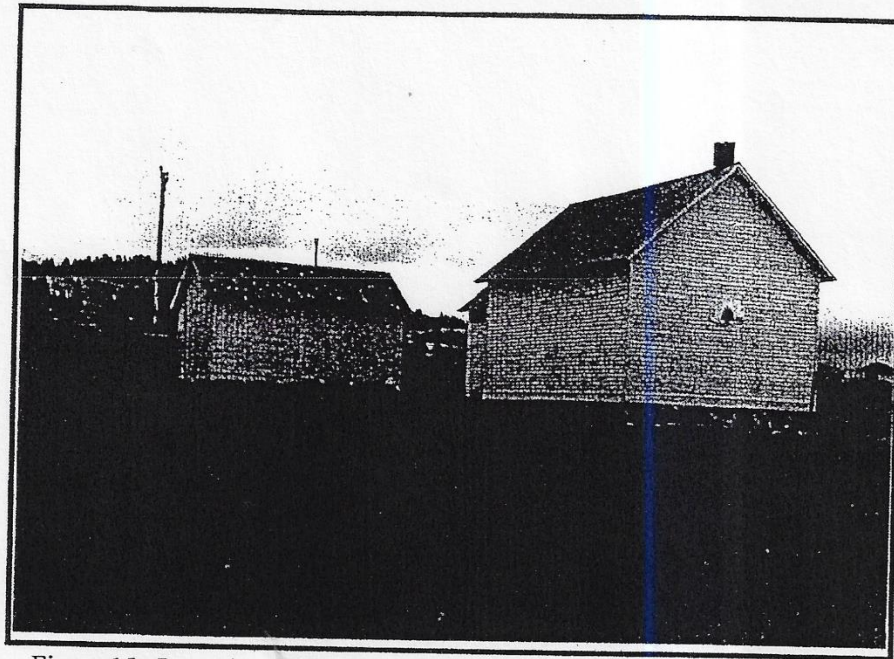


Figure 15. Rear view of Feature 1 (right) and Feature 2 (left) at 24BW1069, facing east-southeast.

builders used shiplap rather than lap siding, it seems likely that the wood shed post-dates the schoolhouse's construction. One area resident vaguely recalls that the shed was built at a later date (Rose Flynn, personal communication).

Feature 3 is one of two outhouses which once stood on-site (Figure 16). This building stands on a partial concrete slab, is sided with drop siding, and has a wood-shingle shed roof. The use of concrete to form the seat and floor may be indicative of construction sometime after 1905, perhaps during the 1930s.

An ink sketch of the Johnson School drawn by the school's last teacher (Ruth Christie) shows another wood-frame building at the rear of the schoolyard. Positioned between the two outhouses, it might have been a small barn. Nothing of that building remains today, and even its position on the landscape cannot be identified by visual inspection of the grounds (Broadwater County Historical Society 1977:65).

**National Register Evaluation.** The Johnson School is National Register eligible under Criterion C as a very good example of rural school architecture. While one or two outbuildings once part of the school complex have been removed, the remaining three buildings retain integrity in all respects. There have been no additions to individual buildings, and minor alterations such as the infilling of some window openings and the loss of the outhouse door are insignificant when viewed in the context of the site as a whole.

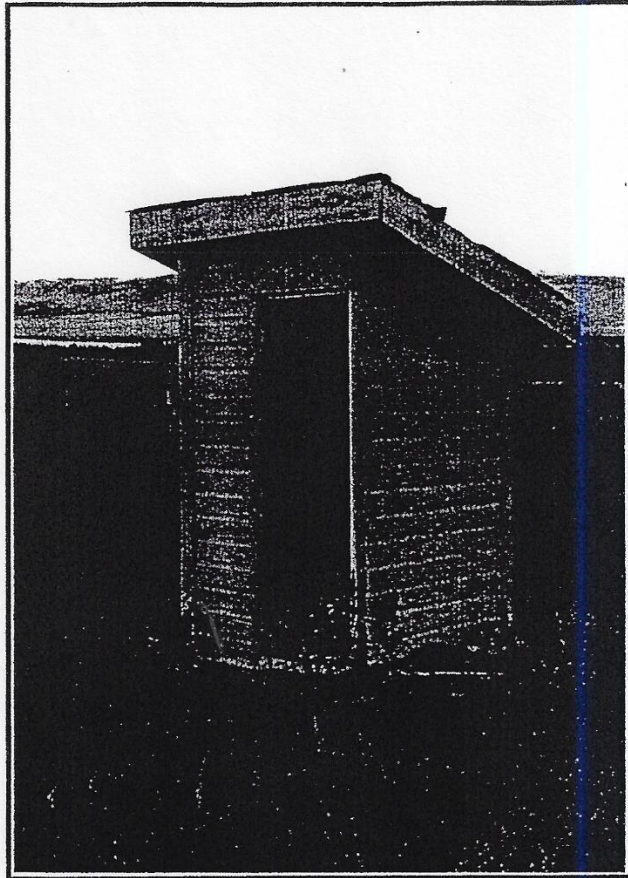


Figure 16. Feature 3 outhouse at 24BW1069, facing southwest.

### **Bert Plymale Sheep Sheds (24BW1070)**

This site stands at the south edge of Duck Creek on either side of Highway 284 (Figure 17). It includes a log cabin, three large sheep sheds, and a pump house. The log house, the oldest building on-site, reportedly dates to the early 1870s, while the sheep sheds were erected about 50 years later.

**History.** The site's early history has been all but forgotten. Unknown parties built a log cabin (Feature 1) there sometime between 1868 and 1875 (U.S. Surveyor General's Office 1869). The only piece of information about the cabin at this early date is the fact that James P. Marks was born there in 1875 (Nancy Marks and Don Marks, personal communication). The circumstances of his birth at that particular place are unknown, but the Marks family connection suggests one possible early site function. James R. Marks (James P.'s father) was a well-known area resident who moved to Montana in 1866, immediately settling in Diamond City. Soon thereafter, Marks went into the freighting business, first driving teams between Corinne, Utah,