

Summary of Personal Accounts

Description: [Concise overview of what happened illustrated with many personal accounts](#)

Author: James, Alison

[Info Categories:](#) A, B, E, I, P, R

Description: [Student at Intermountain Union College, attending school dance when earthquake occurred](#)

Author: Meloy, Harriet

[Info Categories:](#) B, E, I, P

Description: [Family's experiences in all of the 1935 earthquakes](#)

Author: Buck, Fred

Information Categories

A -- Aid:

provide medical services, shelter, donations, loans, advice, encouragement, implement safety measures

B -- Building Damage:

structure itself plus windows and chimneys (typically damage visible from outside the building)

E -- Earthquake Description:

where, when, duration, direction, sound, motion, number and timing of aftershocks

G -- Geologic Effects:

changes at the Earth's surface, fault scarps, rockfalls, landslides, ground cracks, ground subsidence, sand boils, water spouts; effects on springs, lakes, wells

H -- Humor:

I -- Impact:

changes in daily routine; rumors; influx of reporters, politicians, cost in dollars

L -- Lifelines:

effects on transportation: roads, bridges, railroads, airports

effects on communications: telephone, telegraph

effects on power, gas, water, and sewer lines

effects on dams

N -- Nonstructural Effects:

effects on plaster, furnishings (typically damage or rearrangement of furnishings visible inside a building)

P -- People:

effects on and responses to, during and after; deaths, injuries, near misses

R -- Recovery:

clean up, rebuild

S -- Scientific:

explanation of the day

[Back to Summary](#)

The 1935 Helena, Montana Earthquakes
--what happened and personal accounts retold

written 60 years later (1995), by Alison James, Helena High School sophomore, as part of a research project for the Canyon Ferry Limnological Institute of Helena, Montana.

PREFACE

By Gil Alexander

The Helena earthquake of 1935 destroyed property and disrupted lives. It was not as devastating as subsequent quakes in California or many other places on Earth, but it demonstrated how susceptible we all are when we are at the mercy of natural forces.

Sixty years have passed (4 months from now) since the quake shook bricks and mortar from the walls of Helena High. People who were students at Helena High and who still live in Helena get together on a regular basis to have dinners and recount stories of the past. Their stories are a legacy of Helena's history. Stories from the "High School on Wheels," rebuilding houses, and the long winter of '35 all have their place in the memories of these Helena residents.

Somehow, these stories seemed far removed from my students in 1993 when this project began. Students seem to always believe that history begins with their birth. Events of the past seldom seem real to them. Our Geoscience class was beginning to study earthquakes and it seemed like a perfect opportunity to drag the past into the present. I invited folks who still remembered the earthquake to Helena High to be interviewed by my students. Approximately thirty people told their stories and shared their knowledge of the '35 quake with my students. I asked students to record those stories on audio tape and on paper. What resulted was a glimpse into people's lives.

The academic year came to an end and I hadn't had the time to collate the materials into a usable format, so there the information sat in its folder. A whole year passed and still no time existed for me to get the job done. Enter Alison. Alison James had been a student in the 9th grade Geoscience class that had conducted the interviews and she was looking for an opportunity to combine her journalism aspirations with a science project.

The first shudder in the ground below Helena occurred on October 3rd, 1935. This was a mild and almost unnoticeable quake which promoted nothing more than some curiosity and "barbershop talk". Another quake occurred on October 12th, at 12:51 a.m. This one was somewhat more intense, but caused no more damage than some cracked plaster and broken dishes.

During the next week, fifty-seven more tremors occurred. These tremors were thought to be aftershocks of the quake on the twelfth, and they too were ignored. "Another Bad Earth Shock Extremely Unlikely, Say Leading State Geologists," read the headlines of the Helena Independent on October 16th, 1935.

Fred Buck, who lived in Helena with his family, was working at the State Water Conservation Board during this time. In his personal account, written in December of 1935, Fred Buck said of the tremors:

The six days that intervened between the 12th and the 18th were trying on the nerves to say the least. Shocks kept following shocks, some severe and others mild, but none of very long duration.

However, on October 18th, 1935, the history of Helena was changed forever. It was an ordinary Friday evening. The double feature that night at the Marlow Theater, on Main, was "It's In the Air," starring Jack Benny and "Fighting Youth," starring Charles Farrell. A few blocks away, the Rio Theater featured "The Case of the Lucky Legs," starring Warren William and Patricia Ellis. High school students were preparing for Saturday's football against Butte with a "snake dance" up and down main street. Other residents visited with friends, read, or played cards. And some were just touching sleep in the warm peace of the evening dark.

The first taste of a tremor occurred at 8:04 p.m., when another quake, a little stronger than usual, was felt. An hour later, at 9:47 p.m. the earth that Helena and her citizens rested on suddenly began to shake. Violently, uncontrollably, Helena rocked with the shuddering earth. This shock was no longer a minor tremor that could be easily overlooked. The ground rolled like waves, bricks and mortar fell, buildings swayed, roofs fell in, walls collapsed.

Fred Buck was at his office on the second floor of the Montana Block, on the corner of Fuller and Placer Avenues when the quake hit. He described the quake in his personal account:

The noise alone of grinding brick and groaning timbers, the rattling windows, and roar of the quake itself, were enough to terrify one to say to nothing of being jostled about like a lone marble in a tomato can. About that time the plaster came showering from the walls and ceiling, and in the midst of it all the lights went out. There we were trying to stay on our feet while being swatted with falling plaster in the ghastly darkness. It was an experience I never want to go through again. Every second I expected to be shot out of the window to the pavement below, or have the walls crash around me. This terrible shaking went kept up severely and constantly for a period of 32 seconds--it seemed like 32 minutes.....Old Mother Earth reminded me of a dog full of fleas shaking himself to get rid of the dirt.

The land buckled and shook tremendously. Half a minute later, buildings in Helena were reduced to rubble, dust and debris settling into a hazy suspension. The lights were out, the earth was quiet, and a few moments of silent shock permeated the city.

Soon, the streets were crowded with panicked residents. People screamed, yelled and stared, through the dust, at their trembling city. "Sis" Warren Southwick, a freshman in high school at the time, described being in the Marlow theater:

So my cousin and I went to the Marlow Theater to see a Jack Benny movie. We liked to sit way up high in the theater so we could look down on the movie. At 9:30 the seat seemed to be moving, a low rumble was quite obvious even as the movie was so interesting. It got worse and worse and the air seemed to be filled with smoke or dust. Looking down we could see the large chandelier swinging in a big arc, and the chains that held it were rattling. Then the lights went out. Panic hit and people were screaming, trying to get down to the ramp. We got to the ramp and it seemed to be swaying from side to side. People were pushing, falling down and panic was at its utmost. One lady fell and was screaming for someone to help her. It seemed the shaking would never stop and dust was so thick we could taste it. Everyone was pushing to the bottom floor where the doors were. It was so dark outside all lights were out in downtown Helena. As my Cousin and I finally got out we realized a man was holding us each by the hand. We did not know him, but we were mighty thankful that we were finally out of the building.

Terrified people flooded into the dark streets. Electricity was out. An operator at the Montana Power Company had realized what was happening, and cut off the city's electricity. This was a major factor in preventing fires which could have ravaged the town. The people of Helena watched and waited, unsure of what to do next. Superintendent of Schools, C.R. Anderson, wrote in *Montana Earthquakes*(p.11):

Everywhere was great excitement. Up and down the streets could be seen little groups of excited people. Children, in most cases, hovered close to these groups or clung tightly to parents. Cars were run out of garages and their flashing beams of light added to the almost unreal aspect of the night. Neighbor shouted to neighbor, experiences were exchanged, prognostications made. It was that period which comes after a great strain. Over all was an atmosphere of expectancy--of waiting--waiting for something more to happen, and trying to realize what had already happened. In their keyed up conditions these victims of a moving knew that anything could happen.

The lights were still out, but hundreds of headlights and flashlights punctured that darkness. Tremors were coming almost constantly, a movement barely felt, but breaking out every few minutes into stronger, sharper quaking.

Some victims, too frightened to stay the night, packed their belongings and their families into cars and left. In his memoirs, Perry Brackett, who was a boy at the time of the quake, wrote:

I remember my Dad saying it was as though someone had kicked into an ant hill. Cars were going anywhere and everywhere. Some of them just wanted to get out of town.

Those who stayed held vigil throughout the night. Mattresses were placed in truck beds and on lawns for children to sleep in. People lit campfires in vacant lots to keep warm, and

garages provided a place to lay blankets and cots. Others, whose houses were still stable, simply went back to bed.

The shuddering city slept, though likely it was a difficult and uneasy rest. Many were too disturbed to sleep, and for them it was a long, anxious wait for dawn.

Morning rose over a trembling, yet calm Helena. Daylight showed the city to be humbled, wounded, but alive still. C.R. Anderson wrote in Montana Earthquakes (p. 14):

At long last the dawn came.....The sun was just poking over the mountains and throwing its fingers across the city to towering Mount Helena, on whose slopes we were situated. In the distance, over the city and the valley towered the rugged peaks of the Rockies, some standing out boldly, while others seemed more shadows as they receded in the background. And then our gaze fell on the city, a city which we had full reason to believe would be a mass of wreckage. Could it be true that there it stood as we had seen it many times before? Except for a building partially wrecked here and there, for chimneys down and some coping stone fallen, the city showed all its spires, steeples, and skyline. We could hardly believe it, and yet there it was before our eyes. Helena was still holding its own."

THE SECOND QUAKE

Over the weekend of the 19th and 20th, amid torrents of aftershocks, people packed their belongings and moved to improvised homes. Residents set up tents, moved in with friends or relatives, or slept in their garages. People continued to leave Helena for more stable ground. Fred Buck described the days after the quake:

During the interim I packed up the belongings at the house between quakes and hauled the small items such as pictures, clothes, dishes, groceries, etc., over to Benson's garage while the heavy furniture was put into storage at Curtin's. It was cold and most any second one could expect a good shake. I worked with the front and back doors wide open and the runways kept clear so that a hurried exit could be made in case the plaster got to flying too thickly. Several times I made a flying exit and often I got so weak, tired, and nervous I would have to go out in the car to rest awhile. The first three or four days I could not eat and subsisted almost entirely on black coffee.

The people of Helena tried hard to ignore the constant trembles and return to daily life. During the week after the quake people began repairing buildings, erecting fallen walls, mending roofs, and rebuilding homes. An article in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer on October 27, 1935, said:

Hardly had the rumblings of the most severe temblor given way to the tremors of more moderate intensity when Helena residents began searching for ways

in which to aid those who were stricken and homeless and to rebuild fallen structures.

Soon, businesses opened and offices resumed work. Other institutions such as schools and churches prepared to resume as soon as possible. On October 21, 1935, The Helena Independent said:

"SO THE PEOPLE MAY KNOW"
Force of Earthquakes Spent

All day Monday the Associated Press and all of its correspondents in whatever city where authorities could be interviewed with regard to earthquakes, were working for the people of Helena and the readers of The Independent. The general verdict was that Helena, having suffered its major earthquake, is now the safest city and the center of the safest area in Montana.

The quakes, however, were not over yet. At 11:37 in the morning, another large tremor hit. C.R. Anderson wrote:

People, caught unawares, grabbed for support, ran away from walls, jumped to places of safety or clung where they happened to be. And thus they awaited the end of this shock. But the end did not come, not with the first second, nor with the next. Instead the trembling increased, the violence became terrific, walls crashed which had been weakened by so many previous shakes. Eight--ten-- fifteen--eighteen--nineteen--twenty seconds passed, and then the shaking ceased and the rumbling died away.

Once again, people flooded out of buildings, into the streets. Many people were frightened and surprised; the big quakes were supposed to be over! Perhaps they would never be safe. More optimistic citizens insisted that the earth had finally settled itself. Rebuilding could continue and life could go on.

DEATHS

Helena was extremely fortunate in that, through several large quakes and perpetual tremors, and despite millions of dollars worth of building damage, only four deaths occurred.

Two men died during the quake of the 18th. The first man, Dave Harris, was killed when the front wall fell out of the Headquarters Building on South Main Street. The man ran out into the street during the quake and was crushed by the mass of bricks.

The second man killed was Charles Siggelink, a transient who was sleeping in a shelter at the fairgrounds. During the quake, he dashed through the entrance of the building, and was caught in the falling debris. Siggelink was transported to St. Peter's hospital for treatment. He died at 7:00 a.m. the next morning.

On October 31st, two men were on top of a stack at the Kessler Brewing Company. Ed S.

O'Brien, 27, and Vincent Kennedy, about 24, were removing bricks from the cracked chimney when the shock came. The men were thrown off the tower, into the air. Caught in the flow of bricks and mortar, they were dashed to the ground. Rescuers soon recovered them, but one was dead when found, and the other died shortly afterwards.

The recent earthquake in Kobe, Japan killed 5,500 people. A quake in China in 1976 killed 800,000 people. Though these quakes were more intense than Helena's quakes, and occurred in heavily populated areas, they are grim examples of how earthquakes can massacre a city. Despite falling bricks, walls, and roofs, Helena somehow escaped mass human casualty.

DAMAGE

None of the quakes that occurred in Helena were extremely strong. The most severe quake, on October 18th, registered 6.2 on the Richter scale. The quake of the 31st registered 6.0 on the Richter scale. For comparison, the 1995 quake in Kobe, Japan, registered as a 7.2 on the Richter scale.

However, the Helena quakes, plus the perpetual tremors and aftershocks, caused severe building damage. Many of the buildings in Helena in 1935 were built from brick and brick veneer (brick against wooden walls). Unlike "flexible" wooden buildings, these masonry structures could not withstand the rolling and pitching of the land. Bricks and mortar crumbled in wake of the tremors.

Building location also affected the amount of damage to a structure. Buildings constructed over loose rock or gravel retained more damage than buildings built on bedrock. For example, the Montana State Capitol building, built over solid granite, sustained minimal damage.

The quake on October 18th caused moderate damage to structures, whereas the quake of the 31st caused severe damage. Buildings that had been weakened by the first quake were brought down by the second quake. Dean S. Carder, of the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, who was in charge of the seismic observation and recording said in his report:

The earthquake of October 31 caused considerable new damage to buildings apparently untouched by the former hard tremors, although it is greatly possible that many of these had already been weakened. Earlier damage was greatly accentuated. Several buildings which had been badly hit by the former tremor were completely demolished on the thirty-first and many others were rendered uninhabitable.

Damage centered mainly on the east side of Helena, especially in an area called the "Sixth Ward", on the northeast. Damage was also severe in the area around city hall, on Main Street. Some buildings on the west side received moderate damage, however the most severe damage was toward the east.

The following pages describe the damage to buildings caused by the earthquake, and what was done to reconstruct and restore them. Many of these buildings still survive in Helena today.

After the quake, Helena's two hospitals, St. Peter's hospital and St. Johns hospital, were required to treat some minor injuries. Hospital staff had to work in the dark for nearly an hour after the quake, until electricity came back on. This report on the hospitals' activity after the quake appeared in The Helena Independent on October 19:

The shock had scarcely quieted down after the first severe shaking when 30 nurses and student nurses in training at St. Peter's arrived at the hospital for duty from the nearby dormitory.

Almost simultaneously, a number of persons living in the vicinity appeared and offered their services wherever they might be needed. Though devoid of lights, persons living nearby sensing the seriousness of the situation, rushed in with lanterns, candles, flashlights, and kerosene lanterns.

Emergency apparatus was hastily set up in St. John's operating room to care for the first emergency cases. Relatives of the injured crowded the hospital halls and nurses and interns rushed about.

Due to the confusion as many hospital patients able to leave their beds fled from the buildings, to be replaced by the injured.

St. Peter's hospital sustained little damage, and continued to function. St. Johns hospital, however, was cracked severely, and patients were eventually evacuated from the building. Patients who were able went home. Those who remained in need of medical attention were transferred to St. Peter's hospital, or to hospitals in Butte and Deer Lodge.

When St. John's ceased to function, the city was in need of another hospital facility. St. John's then moved to the Montana Children's Home so that they could continue service. The St. John's building was later rebuilt in the same location.

Fort Harrison Veteran's Hospital was moderately damaged. Further damaged occurred during the quake of the 31st. The buildings had to be evacuated, and the veterans were transferred to Walla Walla, Washington and Roseberg, Oregon.

St. Joseph's Orphanage suffered \$50,000 of damage during the quake of the 18th. The school building and the dormitory building at the orphanage were both damaged severely. The dormitory walls were cracked, and its main chimney had to be torn down. Three tons of bricks fell from its rear wall.

The orphans that were living at St. Joseph's spent the night of the 18th in a barn. They later took shelter in bunk coaches provided by the Northern Pacific Railroad Company. On Sunday, the orphans were escorted by the Montana Highway Patrol to the Boulder Hot Springs Hotel, owned by Senator James Murray, who allowed them to live there until the orphanage could be repaired.

The Florence Crittendon Home, where 64 girls and children resided, suffered some minor damage during the quake of the 18th. During the quake of the 31st, it was damaged severely. The Home was evacuated after this quake. The institution took up temporary residence in the Episcopal church, until the original building could be repaired.

Most of Helena's churches suffered minor damage and continued usual services. The churches that received moderate to severe damage were First Lutheran, St. Paul's Methodist, and St. Helena Cathedral.

The First Lutheran Church was damaged considerably. The Board of Home Missions assisted the church in making repairs. During that time, services were held at the Opp and Conrad Chapel, and in the church parlors.

St. Paul's Methodist Church was the most severely damaged of all the churches. After the quake of the 18th, the building was considered unsafe. It was further damaged by the quake of the 31st. Initially, services were held at the Presbyterian church, at 35 North Ewing Street. Later, Sunday morning services were held at the Rio Theater.

Helena's beautiful Gothic cathedral, on Warren Street, was moderately damaged. The most extensive damage was on the south tower, however, both towers remained standing. Inside, a cross made of fine Italian marble fell from the crucifix scene above the main altar. The stone steps below the cross were also broken. Other damage consisted of a fallen spire and two loosened pillars.

The damage at the cathedral was minimal enough that City engineer, Oscar Baarson, declared it safe for the funeral of Governor Frank Cooney, who had died of a sudden heart attack.

The courthouse building, at 228 Broadway, was damaged somewhat during the quake of the 18th. The building suffered two large cracks on the outside, and a chimney on the east side of the building toppled over. Later, commissioners decided to take down the chimneys because, "they would be more harmless on the ground than on the roof." Business continued there as usual, however, throughout the hordes of tremors. Employees at the courthouse worked tenderly, hovering close to the doorways in case another big tremor hit.

On the 31st, the county courthouse suffered several thousand dollars worth of damage. The third floor and attic were damaged extensively, as well as the building's clock tower. City engineer Baarson said that the clock tower would have to be removed, along with some ornamental stone work. He also said that the third story may have to be removed, but fortunately, it stayed intact.

The quake of the 18th caused a mass of bricks to fall through the inner ceiling of the jail house. Twenty-two men and four women prisoners were inside the building during the quake. The prisoners were kept inside the entrance way, and no one was injured. Jailer Ben Rinda told The Helena Independent, "All remained orderly, although they wanted to be released. We gave them as much safety and protection as possible, at the same time keeping them confined to the jail."

On the 31st, the jail was severely damaged. The building was considered unsafe, and the prisoners were released. All the prisoners were serving sentences for minor crimes.

The Algeria Shrine Temple, presently Helena's Civic Center, was damaged very little in the quakes. The quake of the 18th caused a 40-foot section of coping to fall from the east wall. During the quake of the 31st, the upper portion of the west wall fell, leaving a four foot gap between the roof and the damaged wall. Inside, damage consisted mainly of cracked plaster and chimneys.

The minaret that adorns the west side of the building rises 174 □ feet and is built with a steel skeleton that makes it extremely sturdy. The beautiful, tall tower survived the earthquake undamaged.

A local myth says that the building once had two minarets, and that one of the twin spires fell during the quake. However, the delicate minaret that graces the building today is the only one that has ever existed.

Helena's city hall was so severely damaged that it eventually had to be torn down. Nearly all the plaster was shaken off, walls were cracked, and partitions fell. The quakes caused the building's rear wall to lean out more than three inches.

The Helena Police Department was forced to move out of the damaged city hall on October 23rd. For three days, they operated out of a police patrol car, parked in a vacant lot. C.R. Anderson called this "probably the smallest police station in the United States for the time." They then moved into a building on East Edwards Street, but the quake of the 31st forced them to evacuate that building also. After that, Helena's police department resided in the Placer Hotel bus.

The fire department also had to evacuate from city hall. After the quakes, they worked out of the AA garage.

Only two small fires were reported during the quake. One was in the Helena High School chemistry lab, and was caused by chemicals that spilled and mixed during the tremors, then caught fire.

Bricks fell from the back wall of the armory on the 18th, causing the roof to sag over a gaping hole. Major Sol Pederson, United States property and dispersing officer, was fleeing the building, and was hit by the falling debris. Major Pederson suffered "severe head lacerations, badly injured nose and face."

Major E.H. Williams called the national guard out immediately after the quake to patrol streets and protect the public. A portion of the guards were stationed at the armory to protect the damaged building's supply of weaponry.

Fortunately, Montana's State Capitol suffered very little damage in the quakes. The building is constructed of heavy Indiana sandstone, and is built over bedrock. The area around the capitol suffered severely, but despite damage to its surroundings, the State Capitol survived the quakes with nothing more than a few plaster cracks.

Businesses that were severely damaged included the Capitol Hotel, Brackman Grocery, Gordon Mercantile, the Depot drug store, Larson apartments, Curt's grocery, and Montana Meat Store. Also damaged were the Depot Corner Store, the Northern Pacific land office, the Nash Finch wholesale grocery company, Christie Transfer, and the H. Earl Clark garage. Plate glass windows blew out of all the businesses along Helena Avenue. On Boulder Avenue, the National Biscuit Company was demolished. The Kessler Brewery, was also damaged by the quake of the 18th , and like so many other buildings, damage was accentuated during the quake of the 31st. Countless other businesses suffered damage during the tremors.

Many homes did not sustain massive damage, only broken dishes, fallen jars, displaced furniture. Fortunately homeowners survived the quakes with nothing more than some cracked plaster or broken windows.

However, some homes were severely damaged, especially those located in and around the "sixth ward". This destruction of homes left over 500 people homeless, facing the chilly fall weather without shelter or belongings. Fred Buck described the damaged houses in his neighborhood:

There was not a house in the block that was not either demolished entirely, or so badly wrecked that they were not liveable. A two-story brick adjoining ours on the West was shaken to the ground and there were scores of homes within a short radius of us that were demolished. The most severe damaged was centralized in various localities and we seemed to be about in the center of one of these areas.

During the quakes, tombstones in Helena's cemeteries twisted and toppled. Many of the tombstones fell or twisted in similar directions. To seismologists, the twisted and turned tombstones depicted the way the land twisted and turned beneath them. Damage was moderate at Resurrection Cemetery, four miles north of Helena. Pedestal type tombstones moved in a counter-clockwise direction. At the Benton Avenue Cemetery, slab stones also twisted in a counter-clockwise motion. However, pedestal type monuments generally turned clockwise. Of all the cemeteries, Forestvale suffered the most. Tombstones here twisted and fell, but there was no pattern or general direction in which the stones moved.

C.R. Anderson described the experience of a man caught in the cemetery during the quake of the 31st:

A man was encountered in the cemetery who said he had been there when the tremor of the 31st came. His experiences were not enviable, with gravestones falling all around him, and the many trees shaking as if 'someone had grabbed the trunks and moved them violently back and forth.' It might have easily convinced any observer that the 'Day of Judgment was at hand.....

Carroll College suffered little damage in the quake. The tremors loosened coping stones and cracked plaster. Part of two gable walls were also damaged. However, inspectors declared the campus buildings safe, and classes resumed on November 11th.

Intermountain Union College was not so fortunate. The quake of the 18th knocked out part of the gymnasium wall, while students were gathered in the gym for a dance, in celebration of their football victory over the School of Mines.

The quake also knocked plaster and fixtures from the dormitory walls, and damaged furniture. The college classrooms were damaged so severely, they were unsafe for use. The tremor caused about \$20,000 worth of damage.

The college utilized all available help, including the students, to restore the buildings. Most of the damage was repaired, and school resumed October 29th. This lasted only two days, then the destruction came again.

On the 31st, the school suffered so severely, the buildings were uninhabitable. President Jessie W. Bunch and the other officials on the board, decided to move the college to Great Falls. The school never returned to Helena.

Helena's public schools suffered more damage from the quakes than many other buildings. Bryant School and the new Helena High School were demolished, and other schools suffered minor to moderate damage.

Central School suffered moderate damage during the quake of the 18th. The only damage consisted of cracks running along classroom walls. The quake on October 31st furthered damage to the building. More plaster cracked and fell, and the parapet over the east entrance collapsed, damaging part of the roof.

Kessler School was not damaged severely. Stone coping fell from the east gable during the quake of the 18th, and some walls were cracked. The quake of the 31st damaged the steps leading up to the front entrance and fractured the chimney.

Broadwater, Emerson, Jefferson, and Hawthorne schools escaped the tremors with minor damage. At Hawthorne, plaster cracked and a ceiling light shattered. Plaster also cracked at Emerson and Broadwater, and the chimney at Broadwater was slightly fractured. The quake of the 31st did not considerably further damage at any of these schools.

Bryant School was not as fortunate. The quake of the 18th ruined the building. Tons of bricks fell off its walls, and people standing on the street could see the classrooms inside the building. Everything above the basement level was ruined. The quake of the 31st shattered more walls, and simply furthered the wreckage.

Students from Bryant attended school in the basement of Central school, until the Bryant building could be reconstructed.

On September 3, 1935, Helena High students entered their brand-new school for the first time. The building (now Helena Middle School) cost half a million dollars to construct and was considered to be one of the most beautiful buildings in the state.

During the quake of October 18th, the school was damaged severely. The walls were cracked, bricks and mortar fell, and a gaping hole shattered the north wing. C.R. Anderson, Superintendent of Schools, described the damage:

Examination inside and outside attested to the fact that the building had been subjected to terrific wrenches and strains in every direction. Going around the building we found less devastation and estimated the total damage at around 30 per cent. But even with this great monetary loss, and the sorrow of seeing something so beautiful marred, a prayer of Thanksgiving entered the hearts of all that school had not been in session when the quake occurred.

Only a few hours before the quake, the school had been occupied by over a thousand students. A report from the Seattle Post-Intelligencer on October 27, 1935, says "had the quake struck during school hours, the slaughter would have been terrific and inevitable." A drama class had been in the auditorium of the school practicing for a play. According to a school custodian, the teacher "seemed to have a premonition of the coming disaster. She had dismissed the class a few minutes before debris came crashing down on the auditorium stage."

The October 18th quake weakened the building and its foundation. It could not withstand the quake of the 31st. The north wing that contained the auditorium was leveled into a pile of rubble. The rest of the building was a mess of cracked and crumbling walls. By the end of October, at least 40% of Helena High was demolished. The cost of the damage was \$360,000-- 75% of total building cost.

Because the building was obviously unfit for use, school was dismissed for almost two months. Near the beginning of December, T.A. Marlow, a director of Great Northern Railroad, and M.S. Gunn, attorney for the Northern Pacific Railroad, offered railroad coaches to the Board of Education to be used as classrooms. Each company offered to furnish eight to ten cars apiece, free of charge. The Board of Education readily accepted. On December 16, 1935, school resumed.

Due to lack of space, the academic schedule had to be adapted. A college-type schedule was instituted. Classes were not held every day, but each class was lengthened to a period of one hundred minutes.

Students often had long periods of time between classes. The weather was cold, so they went home or sat in their cars while they waited for their next class to start. "This resulted in a lot of steamed up windows." remembered Betty Sass, who attended the school on wheels. "We used to go downtown between classes and try on the fancy hats at the department store. The clerk would cringe when she saw us."

Each coach was heated with a gas stove, but they were still cold. "I remember when a bucket of water froze in typing class," said Jo Cope, who was a sophomore at Helena High

in 1935. Students were allowed to wear their coats in class and girls were not required to wear dresses. Still, the winter made the coaches difficult to work in.

The coaches were old-fashioned passenger cars. They had high-backed red plush seats and windows along the sides. Betty Sass said, "The seat backs were high, so if you crouched down, the teacher couldn't see you. I imagine there was a lot of laughing and giggling and not very much studying!"

"The coaches were lined up next to each other, and sometimes kids would hold the answers to the test against the windows so that the people in the next car could write them down." laughed Jo Cope.

Regina Thomas, another student, told about when "the girls in home economics would bake cookies and pass them through the windows to the next car to make points with the guys."

"We had a lot of fun!" Betty Sass admitted.

The students went to school in the coaches for two years. They returned to the repaired building in the fall of 1938. In a letter to the students, published in the Helena High "Vigilante" yearbook, Principal W.W. Wahl, whose office resided in a flimsy shed for two years, says "Are we glad to back in a real high school building? I would say yes, a thousand times, yes."

THE STORIES

The earthquake of '35 was a significant event in the life of Helena and its residents. Even after the rubble was cleared, the buildings were repaired, and life returned to normal, the stories still live on. Every person who survived the quake has a tale to tell. When a disaster such as an earthquake shatters daily life, it is a blatant reminder of how dependent we are on the earth and her stability. It is this shocking realization of the vulnerability of the human race that causes the event to be branded into the memories of all who experienced it.

These are the stories of the people who experienced the quake of '35. Beyond the impossibly intricate tools, tables, and graphs that assess earthquake damage, these stories are the simple, bare truth of how the quake affected peoples' lives.

Several accounts written by Helenans were published in a magazine called "Letters" on November 25, 1935. The article, "Footnotes: How an Earthquake Feels", appears here.

Smashers, Rumlbers, Snakers

Sirs:

Bang! A steam locomotive struck the house and awakened me out of a sound sleep. Almost instantly the locomotive was replaced by a mighty sun-fisher bronco, Paul Bunyan size. I was riding it. It changed ends in midair, it weaved savagely, and was a mighty mean "hoss". Three shelves of books hurtled over the bed and on the floor.

The smash of crockery mingled with the clatter of falling canned goods , the grinding, creaking house joists, the thud of chimney bricks hitting the ground, and a staccato from the kitchen as (learned later) the heavy range danced eight inches off its base, the boiler stand broke, the stovepipe came down and things were a mess generally.....

I heard my wife call and got up. She says she called loudly before but that I was too scared to hear her.

.....No use to clean up the mess until we felt it wouldn't be worse so we piled into the car to survey Helena. Every main highway leading from the city was filled with fleeing cars. Passing the Shrine Temple, I observed a car with passengers, parked directly beneath the tall tower (which still stands). Glad they felt safer there than at home.

The tremors kept coming. We were parked on a rear street.....Following one shock, the door of a small brick house opened and out came a strapping young Negro, followed by an old mammy. "I'se goin' away from here, sudden,' he told the woman. 'You can't escape from the Lawd, sonny, you can't escape from Him; He's sho to follow you wherever you go.' Across the street an irate husband and a frightened wife were in a violent argument. He was cleaning up the debris in the house but felt it was woman's work, but his wife wouldn't enter, and his efforts to make her do it forcibly failed.

A naked man, dazed, ambled down the street carrying an alarm clock. In contrast, there was a miner who returned to his boarding house after the quake, not aware that there had been one. The building was pretty badly wrecked and everyone else had fled. The miner, too tired to be observant, parked his car in front, went upstairs and climbed into bed. Two hours later, his landlady, who had been riding the night out, passed by and saw his car. She and her friends decided to see if the miner was in the house. They found him in bed, a grayish pallor on his countenance. First he was thought dead, but he was breathing too hard for that, so they yelled and pulled at him until he opened his eyes. They told him what happened, that the house might tumble down any moment, and he should get out at once. "To hell with the quakes," he answered. "If the Republicans were in , we wouldn't have them." And over he turned in bed to sleep until morning.....

There was a guest at the Placer hotel who heard the other guests frenziedly getting out. He rushed to leave his own room, but couldn't open the door. He yelled, but the scurry of feet down the hall did not stop. He grew frantic because couldn't open the door. Finally, when the hotel was cleared, this guest suddenly recollected something.....Then he turned the key that unlocked the door, opened it and walked out.....

Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Brass were in St. John's hospital visiting a woman who had given birth to a baby a few days before. After the quake the woman wanted to get out. Mr. Brass carried her down to his car. When he opened the door he found the

back seat stacked with brick. Not a window was broken, but the car top had been neatly cut away by a falling chimney.

Some people fled from Helena following the first major shock of October 12. The city was nervous but not markedly so. Confidence was being restored when the 20-second major shock struck at 10:50 a.m. on October 31. Then Helena got jittery. It had lost all confidence in experts. Rumors became facts. The quake was not tectonic but volcanic. A blue sulphurous haze was around the mountain tops. The rumbles were not created by a vacuum of air, but were the stirrings of a mighty volcano in the Prickly Pear Valley at the foot of Helena that would destroy the city.

Fortune tellers and almanacs had predicted these quakes and more to come. Strangely, one never talked to a person who had seen the almanac or visited the fortune teller. It was always a friend who had done this.....

Every temblor has a movement all its own. Sometimes it is a grand smash with no warning. Sometimes it is a deep rumble. One waits to feel the tremor. It does not always come. Sometimes it is a rumble and a smash, or maybe a smash, a rumble and then a quivering agitation. One young matron has fittingly described them as "snakers". In the last day or two the rumbles have almost entirely disappeared.

While there have been some of five and six seconds' duration, to layman they appear to be diminishing in force. Some last night were of the slow, creeping, crawling kind, insinuating themselves into your consciousness. Then the bed quivered, as if it were resting on a mountain of flesh.

The earthquake epidemic was particularly hard on the nervous systems of children from two to eight. I don't believe this was always a reflex of their parents' attitude. Children of many became hysterical and could not be calmed until they were taken elsewhere.

Some dogs were affected just as much as the children. Cows lowed and moved uneasily. Horses charged madlong across the fields. Chickens (at least ours) were unaffected, but the turkeys began gobbling and flopping around on the roosts..... Helena has lost all faith in the newsreels. Most of the pictures taken at Helena have been staged, from the rescue of a woman by the State fire marshal, to taking out the injured on stretchers from the state armory. Buildings wrecked years ago (not by the earthquakes), but not demolished, have furnished splendid atmosphere for the movie cameras.

--Chas. D. Greenfield, Montana Life Insurance Co.; Helena, Mont.

Thrilling

Sirs:

.....Helena is rapidly becoming earthquake unconsciousOn October 18 the big 40-second shake came about 9:47 p.m. I was in the Rio Theatre. A low rumbling sound could be heard such as of an express train on a high trestle, which blended into a noise much stronger but of the same character as that of the noise used by

carnivals in the snake tent. The floor vibrated as the stern of the Berengaria at full speed ahead. The lights went out, people arose but had no difficulty in walking. It was over. No one screamed. People walked out quietly groping their way in the dark.....

One slightly tipsy fellow in a "soft drink parlor" had just announced that he could whip any man in the house. The shock came and everyone rushed to the street. Oblivious to the quake he turned to where the bartender had been standing and said: "See! They're all scared of me!....."

A friend of mine immediately after the shock said to his wife that he could not breathe for dust, asked that she open a window. She entered the bathroom to open a window, found the rear wall of the house gone, went to an adjoining room and to her surprise the entire front wall had disappeared. I asked one man if he heard the noise when the side of his two-story brick house fell. He said not--that while the quake was on he rushed to the street, noticed the crumbled wall of a nearby store building, casually looked around and to his consternation saw the side of his own house was gone.....

A Red Cross worker, visiting a lady in a house which had been seriously damaged, felt impelled to walk to the street, the lady following her. As they left the house the second jolt came and the building collapsed.....

The county Court House being rendered unsafe by the continual tremors, the Clerk of Court now carries the Court seal in his pocket, does business where we find him.....

While these earthquakes are a thrilling experience, news gatherers not satisfied to report real facts, delight in exaggerating reports. One newsreel photographer asked refugees in a relief camp to remove some of their clothing and shiver so that the suffering would be more realistic. They refused. But a day or two after the second quake city firemen did rescue a lady from the second story window of an abandoned building, smashing the glass, carrying her down the ladder, etc., for the Hearst-Metrotone Newsreel cameraman. Photographers were seen snapping an abandoned school which has looked like the ruins of Kenilworth for at least five years that I know of.....

--Arthur P. Acher, Attorney at Law, Helena, Mont.

Brag

Sirs:

We were so contented in this little city up near the Continental Divide! No cyclones, floods, or dust storms. Some of us bragged a bit.

First came a little rumble and a shake, just enough to make barber shop conversation and to remind us that all was not well. A more severe jolt, this on Oct. 12, made the town quake conscious. Some said they were "jittery."

.....On October 18 a big shock made history. It changed the face of the city, killed two, paralyzed business, closed schools, made tenting popular, placed us in the national headlines, sprouted a new bunch of heroes.

Chief of these heroes was the apartment house tenant who, in the darkness and excitement of those terrible moments, collided with his wife, carried her to safety and then found it was the lady from across the hall he had rescued. His own soul mate later crawled from the wreckage and explanations were in order.

Another, a bartender drawing a stein, fled down the street in his white apron, to return long after and shut off the tap.

A lucky boy was the one who could not get open the screen door. While he struggled the porch collapsed.

Then more tremors and after eleven days another major shock with more death, destruction, and destitution. Mercury dropped to below zero.

One might say that Helena people, as a whole, are cheerful but nervous. Even as I write this a sudden tremor went through the building. What is yet to come? We jump and wonder. If we boast now it will be about this wonderful, invigorating Montana climate.....

--Thomas P. Regan, D.D.S. Helena, Mont.

"Cutitout! Gotohell!"

Sirs:

.....Slight rumblings and moderate tremors continued daily setting more and more on the verge of exhaustion from fright and helplessness in the face of nature's manifestation of power and might. Many Helenans retired at night partially clothed under their nightwear, with flashlights and car keys within easy reach, their coats and footwear across the foot of their beds. Subsequently many residents left town each and every night, repaired to nearby resorts which had not felt the temblors and returned to business in the morning. Others awakened by the minor shocks dressed, packed families in cars, drove to the airport seeking solace in the "All's Well" flash of its green beacon every ten seconds plus the safety of wide open spaces.....

On October 31, the third violent shock of unusual duration was experienced in the face of a rapidly falling barometer and thermometer. Weakened buildings tumbled completely, others, having withstood previous quakes were cracked to the extent of making further occupancy extremely hazardous. Additional residents left town. A matronly bridge club of eight, reduced to a foursome by the previous quakes became no quorum at all after this shock.....

Helena matrons soon became experienced seismologists, able to report the direction of movement of the latest earthquake by the number and location of open drawers throughout their homes.....A very talkative parrot became unusually quiet

except at the start of a new tremor when a rapidly shrill "Cutitout! Cutitout!" continued for several seconds unless the quake ceased within that time, or tiring, he uttered a guttural "Gotohell!" as they failed to cease at his prior command.

Our friendly little dog, loving and well loved by the children, would rise from her bed, make the rounds of each bed in the house, listen for signs of life and slowly return to her own troubled sleep only when assured of her masters and friends safety.....

Hotels located in the business district became practically vacant. A report of the hasty exit of at least one guest after a slight shock may give the an idea of the uppermost desire of everyone to get going. This gentleman, without bag ore baggage, clothed only in pajamas rushed from the lobby to a nearby bus, clambered aboard, with only a gasping entreaty to the driver, "I don't know where you are going but let's get there quick."

Many people, after the reported experience of the sheriff who arrived home after the third severe quake to find his bathtub filled with brick and stone, were reluctant to even venture near a bathtub, much less draw a tub, their worry: the fitness of their garb should a quake occur while engaged in their ablutions.....

Today,.....the city is hesitantly and cautiously turning to the repair and rebuilding of its future being. But relatively large numbers of home and property owners in Helena are elderly retired agriculturists, cattlemen or their relics. Many of these, ordinarily comfortably situated financially.....having suffered depression since 1928.....after this catastrophe made decisions which will have far reaching effects upon the future rebuilding of Helena. Losing homes, apprehensive of further increased taxation in a town reputedly at the peak of allowable indebtedness, well along in years, they moved out of the city back to ranches and many out of the State to spend remaining years with more virile offspring. Since the last ounce of gold has been taken out of Last Chance Gulch (Main Street, Helena) many years ago, there remains nothing to attract the zestful active initiative of youth in rebuilding the town. Helena remains just and only the capital of Montana.

--G.R. FitzGerald, Airways Extension Supt.; Miles City, Mont.

That's That

Sirs:

.....We were sitting in the living room of our home listening to a radio program.....when the entire house started to rock, shake, and quiver as though it were being pulled in all directions at the same time. The large pictures on the walls seemed literally to fly out into the room and turn over.....We started to run for the front door and just as we reached the porch all of the lights in town went out-- nothing but darkness and the tense feeling of some terrible catastrophe. Then out of the dark came the shrill sounds of hundreds of cars hurrying, hurrying through the night.

The first thought that entered our minds was that the young son of the family was attending a movie some six blocks from home. Hurrying to the theater through the

dark streets we found men, women and children running out of all the entrances guided only by the lights of the cars that had rushed to that point, everyone frantic with fear, yet making no outcry. We learned afterward that the most nerve-racking part of the experience of those in the theater was seeing the plaster from the ceiling falling in front of the screen....

Where buildings were of brick veneer, the bricks shelled off like corn off the cob. In the case of solid bricks or stone buildings, the sides or front or back would be entirely removed and the furniture in the rooms would be exposed to view. One strange thing was a car of liquor that had been spotted at a warehouse. The warehouse collapsed, the roof falling on the car and almost cutting it in two. Only six cases of whiskey were damaged.

.....Some of the finest institutions of the community were badly wrecked, this being particularly true of the Catholic Orphanage on the edge of town, housing 125 little children, who with the nuns were compelled to seek shelter in the dairy barn until the railroad officials placed cars on the tracks at their disposal.....While the children were in the cars one of the railroad officials said, "Well, where would you like to go--will it be New York or California?" A tiny girl replied, "I don't want to travel. I want to stay here and have earthquakes."

.....The residents of the town feel the same way....When a quake comes along, we just smile and say "Well, that's that." -

--Edith G. Briscoe, Acting Secretary, Montana Liquor Control Board, Helena, Mont.

The following are stories and anecdotes from the chapter "Pathos and Humor", from C.R. Anderson's Montana Earthquakes:

"Better Stay In"

After the quake of the 12th, one family tried to rush out of their house through the back door, but found it to be stuck tight, and no amount of pulling could open it. Investigation later showed them that bricks from the chimney had fallen right in front of that door. They were in the same house when the quake of the 18th came along. This time they tried the front door, and imagine their surprise when they found this one stuck. They were duly thankful when they found the second floor balcony had shaken loose and fallen directly into the path they would have taken.

"Crack the Whip"

At one home the husband and wife were in the living room and dining room respectively, when the crash came. Knowing the added safety of being under door lintels when possible, they both made a rush for the wide opening between the two rooms. They reached that position, but went beyond as each was catapulted into the room vacated by the other. This happened twice before they could manage to stay upright.

"Just in Time"

Caught on upper Main street at the time of the temblor of the 18th, a party of three were in their car in front of a soft drink parlor. One man was perched with a foot on the running board and was handing glasses of malted milk to his two friends in the car. When the shake came and continued, it seemed to the man on the side of the car that the buildings were certainly coming down on them. He stood for a second entranced, and then shaking himself into action, shouted to the driver to get going. The driver, confused and unable to coordinate his muscles and will, fumbled with the starter, but finally the car roared and the suddenly meshed gears shot the car down the street. Just a second later, a wall of brick came down in the exact spot where they had been parked. A more shaken but thankful trio could not be imagined when they finally reached open spaces.

"Cats"

Many reports came concerning the strange antics of the feline species before and during the tremors. Some reported that these animals would throw a kind of fit just prior to the shaking, while others said they observed them jumping wildly about just after it happened. One cat was seen to throw a fit and then fall over dead. In one home a man had just cut off a chunk of meat and placed it in a pan by the kitchen range. Just as the hungry creature was getting ready to sink his teeth into the choice morsel, the quake came, and in a flash the cat jumped out of the nearest window and has not been seen since. So much for nine lives.

"Fair Exchange"

Two automobiles were approaching each other on a narrow road some 17 miles from Helena. On one side was the steep bank to the Missouri river, and on the other side was a cliff. When they were just a short distance apart the temblor came and a huge pile of rock and dirt came tumbling down onto the road between them. As there was no possible way of getting past, the men did the sensible thing and exchanged keys and cars.

"Just a Coincidence?"

Two small girls were sleeping together in an upstairs room. The temblor came, shook loose part of the roof and a timber came hurtling down through the bed just between the two girls, who were left unhurt. This is somewhat similar to the case of the mother who went up to get her baby from its crib and found the latter half-filled with brick. She finally uncovered the baby--unhurt.

"London Calling"

The London Press called Chief Roger Smith of the Helena police force a few days after the quake. Chief Smith went to the telephone and gave a very conservative report of the earthquake and the damage done. Clippings from the London newspaper were later sent to the police chief, and among other reports were the following:

'TOWN RUINED--WOMEN AND CHILDREN FLEE.

How earthquake shock after shock hit a town and shook it to pieces, how its 6,000 women and children fled in the dark along roads which suddenly gaped in chasms and were showered with debris.

'Helena, Montana, a mining town 3,955 feet high in the mountains, has suffered 600 shocks since Saturday. Yesterday all able-bodied men among the 20,000 inhabitants were still fighting to save life and property.....The terrified people believed that the whole mighty range of the Rockies might be breaking up.

'TOWN UNRECOGNIZABLE. Helena was still in the grip of the terror. From a town which claims to be the richest of its size in America has been reduced to a heap of ruins.'

Chief Smith opined that his words certainly fained embroidery as they went of their 5,000 mile trip and was thankful that he had had witnesses to his end of the conversation.

"Where Were You?"

When earthquakes come they give no warning, and wherever one is at the time is not one of its considerations. Many Helena residents found this out to their extreme embarrassment when they were caught in the bath.

"Lena"

From Bozeman comes the interesting information that the city of Helena is now called Lena. This was due, they say, not so much to the leaning tendency, but because the quakes have shaken the Hell out of it.

This is an account by Joanne Maynard. She experienced the earthquake as a little girl, and this is her story:

The Earthquakes

I was born in Helena in 1931, so I was four years old at the time of the earthquakes. I think that my memories of them are interesting because children remember things in a different way from grownups.

The first big earthquake was at night. I was asleep upstairs in a crib and my parents and some of their friends were playing bridge downstairs. I woke up and thought that a dragon was coming up through the heat register that was in the corner of my room, to let the heat from downstairs come up. I thought that the dragon pushed my crib around the room. I still have a mental picture of that dragon. I didn't know what an earthquake was - had never even heard of one. But I knew what a dragon was.

As I've heard the story told, the men of the party ran outside. The women went upstairs to get me. My crib had rolled - not clear around the room - but across the doorway, so that my rescuers had a hard time getting into the room.

The next thing I remember is being wrapped in a blanket and handed to a lady who was sitting in the back seat of a car. The dome light was on, and I was surprised at a light inside of a car. I realize now that, because we had a little roadster with a canvas top, I wouldn't have seen a dome light before. This car must have belonged to the bridge players.

The next thing I remember was being at my grandparents' home, which was about three blocks from our house. The electricity was off. I had to go to the bathroom. I suppose my mother went with me, carrying a candle, but, of course, it would still be dark in the bathroom. My grandmother had cleaned the toilet earlier, and the toilet-scrubbing brush had been stuck under the seat to drain. I sat on it, and I think that scared me more than the dragon or anything else that happened. I still remember that sensation.

I remember that we had cocoa (Grammy must have had a gas stove) with a marshmallow on top. Then I was put to bed. The bedroom had a slanting ceiling, and I thought it was falling down. But I remember this as merely a curious fact, not something to be afraid of.

By the end of the month, we were back home. Maybe we went back home the next day - I don't know. On the day of the earthquake, I was sitting on the kitchen floor, "cooking" something on a toy stove and my mother was standing at the real stove, where some split pea soup and some graham muffins (ever after designated as the "earthquake lunch") were cooking. I felt something and said to my mom, "There's going to be an earthquake." She tried to calm my fears and be reassuring, but the earthquake did come shortly after that. I suppose that children can tell, the way they say that animals can.

My mother got panicky and wanted to run outside. I was the calm one by that time, and reminded her that we had been told not to go outside, but to stand under a doorway, which I suppose we did. But it wasn't long before we hurried down the hill to my grandparents' house again. My uncle and aunt were there, and when my mother remembered that she'd left the soup and muffins cooking, my uncle went up and got them, and we all shared them for lunch.

We lived in an elderly duplex made of brick. The wall at the back leaned out, so that you could look out between the back and side walls - or so I remember it. Iron rods were put through the house and tightened with braces on either end to draw the walls back together. As I remember it, a rod went right through the room, and we could sit on it. My grandfather (not the one we stayed with, but the other one) was a blacksmith, and his shop made many - or maybe all - of the iron rods that were put through Helena's buildings after the earthquakes. You can see the braces on the

walls of many of the older buildings. The duplex where we lived is still there, and looks very nice even now.

There were a lot of small shakings. We had a side board with plates on it and they kept falling off. So my mother got paper plates and painted them with water colors in various designs, coated them with shellac, and used them instead of the real plates. I still have a couple of them. At the time, I thought she was the most wonderful artist in the world, to be able to do that.

My mother was expecting a baby in June, or maybe July of 1936. She visited the doctor during this earthquake time, and before he realized that she was pregnant, he began telling her about all of his women patients who were losing their babies because of the earthquakes. That didn't do much to set her mind at ease. But she did fine. The interesting thing is that, because she was startled by a small earthquake on June 13, 1936 - which was my fifth birthday - my sister was born on that day too.

At some point, after the big earthquakes, my mother and I went out to Townsend to stay with the parents of a friend of hers. My mother was born in Townsend and lived there until she was in high school. We went there so I could get some rest, because the doctor said I was having a "nervous breakdown."

I can remember being driven around town and seeing some of the damage. I remember a house with the front wall gone, so that it looked to me like a doll house. And I remember being with my grandparents outside of town somewhere - maybe by the Scratchgravel Hills - and seeing big cracks in the ground.

I've always felt that the earthquakes weren't as bad as they've been made out to be. But recently I realized that my parents probably down-played what was happening, so that I wouldn't be afraid. So I never knew what was really going on.

From Mrs. Jack Schultz' Genealogy Book "Events to Remember"

The 'earthquake', at 9:45, October 18, 1935, I was in old hotel we lived in at Winston, I was undressed and ready for bed, as it happened, I was alone in the house. I was sitting on a low stool near our old potbellied coal and wood stove. I turned to a book case to find something to read, the light flickered (this was the first year we had electric lights, it was drop cord type from ceiling with light bulb). I turned to look at light, it was swinging slightly--9:47--light went out, building began to shake, noise all around me, plaster and items falling in rooms upstairs, glass falling in room I was in as three windows smashed. I didn't know what it was, decided the world must be coming to an end, put my head in my hands and 'didn't even try to stop it,' I told people later (when I could talk!). After what seemed like a lifetime, shaking stopped, dead silence, total dark. Off in the distance I could hear my name being called, couldn't answer, shock.....I guess. Finally realized Mom was out on porch calling me, so squeaked out "yes". Stumbled in bare feet to door and outside.

My mother, Dad, and several others were anxious that I was okay. They were next door at the Winston bar. They knew what it was, realized I was alone, tried to get out the door but were not able to do so, because it jammed and moved during the quake. You wouldn't believe a few seconds could turn you into a quivering mass like jelly. I thought I was tough, tomboy type, not afraid of much, but I learned from that experience. Combine dark, being alone, no knowledge of what was happening.....you will be able to compete with any earthquake with the shakes that follow. The earth shook all night, so did I. To make matters worse, all telephone lines were down, no communication, it was not too great in those days at best.

Neans was in Helena, another lady in Winston had a daughter here. Nothing would do except get to Helena to see if we could find out if they were all right. Fellow there named Harry Smith had a car to bring Mom, Dad, Mrs. Sass, and me to Helena. All the way in , Harry Smith kept saying 'everybody in Helena will be dead'.....we should have taken him out of the car, have Dad drive him over several times and proceed on our way (last place I wanted to be was Helena), he really made everybody feel great. As we got close to Helena, we first thought the lights were on. It was car lights, so many were moving it seemed town lights were on. We found our Neans and other lady's daughter were okay. I don't remember seeing them, but we found out something. I remember sitting in the car up on Broadway, you could feel a constant tremor under the car, me too. Never did I stop shaking that night. Returned to Winston. Tried to go to bed, nobody slept. Banging at the door for Dad to go out to check railroad bridges and track before the trains came through. He left. Bed is shaking (me), Mother is in bed with me. Too much, Mother was a natural coward, scared of the dark, scared of being alone. Mild quake felt, I shake more, we got up, went down to depot to be where there were others. By this time, it was getting daylight. This is the basic of what happened, all the things and thoughts could go on and on.

October 31st there was another of about the same intensity. I don't even remember it (now), it was a Thursday around noon. Suppose I was with other people, also, it wasn't dark! Two people were killed in first quake, two people in second quake. Most places don't have quakes as Helena did. They had mild ones before the first big one 6.5, they had almost continuous mild ones until October 31st, then another big one 6.5 Usually there is a big one, then quakes of decreasing violence. Leave it to Helena to be original. No wonder the Indians considered this area to be "taboo". Amen."

Schoolgirl

Yes, I remember quakes of '35. My younger sister and I were taken to the Deaconess School in '33. We were in bed asleep, when the quake hit. Our housemother came and told everyone to get in line and we would go outside. The school was five miles from Helena. The whole 5th floor was shook off. But, everyone in the school was outside and one housemother was the last one and a brick came

down, hitting her on the head. We were all put into the garage, and people were coming to help. Men were upstairs throwing mattresses and bedding out of the window. The next day, our housemother took us for a week and I remember playing in the leaves. The next day my Dad came to get us and I wasn't very happy to leave--we were having such a good time. When we returned to school it was a building on the end of Helena--I graduated out of the 8th grade there."

--Mrs. Edith Gray

Football Game

Well, to tell the truth, I never personally experienced it, felt it that is. I don't remember the exact date, but it had to be late September or early October. I do know, it happened on a Friday evening--(around 9/9:30 p.m.) I was a member of the Fort Benton (Long Horns) football team. The only school in our conference, at that time, that had a 'lighted football field' as Conrad. I don't remember exactly what time the game started, probably 8 p.m. I forgot the exact score, but I know we won--(21/6 or 20/7) something like that. I remember running to their gym (whoopin' and hollerin') we had WON! As we entered, we noticed they were setting up a band on a stage at one end of the hall. There was going to be a school dance, after the game. Well, there was a lot of noise; guys yelling, all the 'showers' going full blast; we were in the basement. At first our Coach Zile said, 'No,' we couldn't stay for the dance. Finally, after we all protested, he said we could stay for 30 minutes, since we won the game! Well, we went up the steps to main floor-- strange, nobody was in the gym--noticed the bass drum lying on its side--one or two horns on the stage floor. Went outside, a few people standing around, talking about an 'earthquake'--the dance had been canceled (I think Coach Zile was smiling). Well, he treated the whole team to a milkshake at "The Barrel" as we passed through Great Falls on the way home to Benton. That night/morning in bed (2-3 a.m.), I felt my bed shake for a few seconds--definitely an 'aftershock'....."

--V.R. Elliott

Movie

A friend and I were at the movie at Marlow theater. We were up in the balcony. When it started to shake, the lights went out and bits of plaster started falling. We all made it out okay. There was no panic or screaming. We made it up where our car was parked, through the mess at home. There was a lot of mess, etc. One man was killed near where our car was parked. At that time I was working downtown at a store called Strain Brothers. But no one wanted to come to work except two managers and I and another girl. The four of us kept it open for days. Also, my parents had a dairy farm not far from town. We didn't miss a day. They brought in

the milk to our customers on time every day. What we called the 'sixth ward' was hit the hardest. It was a poor section of town.

--Dani Englund

St. Vincent's Academy

In 1935 I was a student at St. Vincent's Academy--that was the Catholic School that was condemned after the quake. I can still remember the scary feeling we all had at the time. We were in a dormitory on the 2nd floor. I remember looking out the window and everything was a bright blue color. You can imagine the panic of 50 or so girls. Sister said, "Now we will stay in our beds and say the rosary. Everyone settle down and lay quietly." When we were finally allowed to get out of bed, we put on our robes, and were led downstairs. A lot of the stairs were damaged so we had to slide down the banister. What fun! We spent the night on the lawn with many blankets. As the building was condemned (I'm not sure how many days passed), I was sent back to my family in Anaconda. I still get that panicky feeling when a train goes by or I feel another quake.

--Betty Sager

Ghost

At the age of 14, my brother, 12, and I went along with our mother. We had just left an old fashioned Catholic wake and went across the street to the neighbors. At the wake there must have been 40 people. As the coffin started rocking, the house cleared out. I think a lot of them thought some spirit had them. My brother was so scared he said it was still shaking where he was standing.

--Emma R. Smith

Butte High

I remember being in Rialto Theater in Butte the evening of that quake. It must have been Friday because Butte High was to play Helena High the next day. I remember the chandelier in the theater swinging in at least a six foot arc in the theater ceiling. I'll bet the shocks were much more intense in Helena, but they were quite severe in Butte too. I was on the Butte High football team. We got on the bus the next morning to go to Helena to play football, but received word in Boulder that the game was canceled, so we did not proceed and came back home.

--T.L. Cragwick

The Noise

I was with two friends (Carl Hill and Tom Regan) in front of my dad's drug store in the Union Bank Building, on the corner of Main and Edwards. We heard the quake and saw it coming as low waves up the street. I told my friends to get into the doorway right under the building wall.

Most memorable was the noise; aside from the quake's rumble, there was the sharp "whack" reports as cornice stones hit the sidewalks. Also, the squeaking and squealing as though a hundred piglets were being tortured as the plate glass windows were pinched in their shifting metal mullions and frames. I could write for hours about the quakes, but I will just say that the whacks (very loud) and the screeching and squealing are the things I couldn't possibly forget."

--Bill Reynolds

This is a selection from the memoirs of Perry Brackett. He was a young boy when the quakes hit.

Helena Earthquakes

My first experience with earthquakes came on October 18, 1935, in the evening. I'm not sure of the exact time but I would guess somewhere around 8:00 p.m. and I can remember it as well as if it had been last night. My Mother and Dad had taken my sister and I with them to visit some family friends who lived about six blocks northwest of where we lived. We were all sitting in the living room and the first thing I remember is the chandelier began to move back and forth and then as the quake picked up intensity it assumed more of a circular motion. I was sitting in a chair next to my Dad who was sitting near the door. The next thing I remember is my Dad pulling me over into his lap head first and then he bent over me. I was 12 years old and my sister who was six years older, about this time announced that she was getting out of there and headed for the door, as she approached the door my Dad grabbed a hold of her and held her keeping her from running outside. I later learned that running outside is not the best thing to do in an earthquake. Then the electricity went off. When the shaking died down and everybody gained their composure, we all ventured outside. There did not seem to be much visible damage to the house we were in. Then the folks and the couple we were visiting, along with another couple who were there from an area near the Northern Pacific depot which we called the sixth ward, decided to visit the other homes. We all went up to our house and fortunately found no damage. The only things we noticed were a violin setting on edge on top of the piano had tilted backwards and was leaning against the wall. Also, a baseball bat that was standing on end in the corner had fallen over. We considered ourselves very fortunate. We then all traveled down to the home in the

sixth ward and we soon realized that we were coming into the area that received the most damage. When we reached the home of the other couple their home was intact on the outside, but it was a different story inside. This lady had a pantry full of canned goods in glass jars and they were all over the floor and of course the jars were broken.

The electricity was off all over town and all you could see was car headlights. I remember my Dad saying it was as though someone had kicked into an ant hill. Cars were everywhere and anywhere. Some of them just wanted to get out of town.

Some of the buildings looked as though someone had taken a knife and sliced away an outside wall. You could see the different floor levels of the house and the bedroom furniture in the rooms. I remember seeing a home where the bathtub was exposed, and I remember thinking "what if someone had been in taking a bath at that time".

There had just been a new high school completed in Helena and the first freshman class had started there in the fall. My sister had just graduated from the old high school in June of that year. I was in the sixth grade at Central School and the boys in our class had spent the afternoon at the new high school for an introduction to manual training, as they called it in those days, now of course it is better known as shop or industrial arts, anyway, to get back to the story--the auditorium of the high school, which was directly over the shop, had completely collapsed. This made me realize how fortunate that the earthquake had come in the evening and not during the day.

That night none of us went to bed, the folks got out the blankets and my sister and I slept on the floor in the kitchen. There were aftershocks all night long, some more severe than others, and our dog Dandy would check on us every time one would come.

People in Helena were really frightened and many left to never return. I remember one family who recently built a small log cabin and they wanted to leave Helena and wanted my Dad to buy their house. My Dad tried to talk them out of going but they were insistent so he did buy the house and my folks used it as rental property. The little cabin is still there today, and is still in our family.....

The quake brought an early end to the school and schools did not start again until after Jan. 1, 1936. This meant that I had a lot of time and not much to do, so I began helping my Dad. He had a transfer and fire wood business and the earthquakes increased his transfer business. People whose homes were damaged had to find a new place to live. Then there were those who no longer wanted to live in Helena and take a chance of another earthquake. Even though it was hard work moving furniture and cutting wood, I enjoyed it. It gave an opportunity to spend a lot of time with my Dad and of course Mother liked it because she knew where I was. My Dad had a 1 1/2 ton Chevy truck and during this time he taught me how to drive. He also hauled coal as well as wood because these were the main sources of fuel in those days.

I remember once during this time when we went to the coal yard for a load of coal; we always had to pull on the scale to weigh the empty truck and again on the way out to determine the weight of coal we had loaded. When we arrived at the yard, I was driving and my Dad left me in the truck and went into the scale house and left me behind the steering wheel, which I could hardly see over. After the truck was weighed, my Dad told me to pull into the yard and back up to the proper coal bin. Mr. Guffey, who owned the coal yard said, "Your not going to let him drive it in there are you?" My Dad's response was "He can do it as well as I can." That made me feel good and as I reflect back I realize that those words gave me a lot of confidence. Mr. Guffey in later years when I would see him, would often mention about the truck without the driver because when we pulled up he couldn't see me.

Later while hand loading some large pieces of coal, I was trying to throw one in the truck and I accidently hit my Dad in the head and almost knocked him out.

After the first of the year we all went back to school and the kids who were in high school had the unique experience of going to school in railroad cars. Since the high school had been so severely damaged, the School District and the City made arrangements with the Northern Pacific Railroad to park several passenger cars on a siding to be used for classrooms. This seemed to work out okay, except winter months in Helena can be pretty cold and students and teachers alike kept their heavy clothes on all day.

Bryant school in the sixth ward was also damaged and the kids from Bryant were moved into the basement of Central School.

--Perry Brackett

LaVere "Sis" Southwick experienced the quake as a freshman in high school. The following is her account of the earthquake:

Year 1935. My first year of high school. I lived with my Aunt and Uncle at 709 9th Ave. My room was on the third floor of the apartment house.

I started school at the old high school on Warren and Lawrence Street. The new high school on Rodney Street was just being built. We moved into the new school September 3rd, 1935 and enjoyed the spacious rooms and long hallways. It was a real treat from the old building.

Beginning on October 3rd we felt small earth tremors, but did not think much about them as it was not unusual to feel small tremors that year.

Two weeks later we began to take notice. It was a more scary thing to feel so many little tremors, and on the 12th at midnight a more severe tremor turned into a shake, dishes rattled, pictures hung crooked, and the earth seemed to rumble. During the

following week, small vibrations were making us more aware that this was not quite normal.

On October 18th, in mid-evening, a sudden sharp quake hit with a rumble like unto an explosion. It lasted a few minutes and the rumble faded away. We thought now it is done with whatever and will be over.

So my cousin and I went to the Marlow Theater to see a Jack Benny movie. We liked to sit way high in the theater so we could look down on the movie. At 9:30 the seat seemed to be moving, a low rumble was quite obvious even as the movie was so interesting. It got worse and worse and the air seemed to fill up with smoke or dust. Looking down we could see the large chandelier swinging in a big arc, and the chains that held it were rattling. Then the lights went out. Panic hit and people were screaming and trying to get down to the ramp. We got on the ramp and it seemed to be swaying from side to side. People were pushing, falling down, and panic was at its utmost. One lady fell and was screaming for someone to help her. It seemed the shaking would never stop and dust was so thick we could taste it.

Everyone was pushing to the bottom floor where the doors were. It was so dark outside all the lights were out in downtown Helena.

As my cousin and I finally got out we realized a man was holding us each by the hand. We did not know him but we were mighty thankful that we were out of that building.

We started to walk down Main street (in the middle) as we were afraid the buildings would fall down on us. As we made our way up Sixth Avenue, many people were going home, or just getting away from the high buildings.

People were all out of the houses on the yards, loading in cars that were available. And few cars were around at that time.

The streets were rolling and it was hard to stand up. Chimneys were falling and bricks were falling off houses. Cement walks were cracked and made it hard to walk without falling.

People were afraid to get back in the homes to get supplies needed to stay out of home for fear of collapsing. People with trucks made beds for elderly and children in the back of the trucks. Cardboard was a much needed item to make shelter for the people. The National Guard put up tents out in the valley and at Fort Harrison for those who could not get back in the homes, or were afraid to.

My parents, Edith and Owen Warren, lived at Beaver Creek (Nelson). My Dad had the Montana Power Station at that time, and they heard the news of the quake in Helena, so they came to town to take us home.

Out there the power lines were swaying and big rocks rolled down the gulch behind our house. My Dad said before the quake hit the horses were nervous and wanted

out of the corral. The chickens were flying around in the chicken house, and it was so very quiet when the rumbling stopped. No birds or animals around.

For three weeks we stayed out at the house before going back to Helena to school. Many relations came out to Beaver Creek to get away from the city.

Many people took what they could in their cars, never to return. Homes were left empty. It was so cold that the cold seemed to be coming from the cracks in the earth, which were many. Deep crevasses were seen in the Helena valley.

By December 16th the railroad had moved in railroad coaches on tracks to be used as classrooms for the high school. Some heat was made in them but they were cold. Typing class was a disaster. Typewriters slid off desks and were ruined, so class was closed. Teachers braved the inconvenience and cold to teach, but the bitter cold made it hard to sit for very long.

It was a bad year but we came out winners, maybe not in learning at school but being thankful we still had homes and loved ones unhurt from all the happenings of the Big 1935 Earthquake.

AFTER SHOCKS

The earth beneath Helena continued to shake for six months. During October, tremors were intense and frequent. They became milder as the winter progressed into spring. On April 26, 1936, a 24-hour period passed without a single tremor. This was the first day in nearly seven months that Helena did not have an earthquake. Over the entire six months, 1,310 noticeable tremors occurred.

The people of Helena became accustomed to the frequent shakes and shudders, and were able to continue their daily lives. A small, and somewhat exaggerated article appeared in the Boston Post:

Real Courage

Fire may level a city, droughts make a desert land of a countryside, and floods sweep away the building of a lifetime. But such disasters pass and the residents bravely build again. Yet more disastrous to property and contentment are the endless earth shocks suffered by the residents of Helena, Mont. Since Oct. 18 that city has felt 1,004 shocks. It must be a frightful experience to be shaken night and day, with death imminent at any moment. There is no chance to plan anew while the shocks continue. Living there must be a nightmare. One can get used to just about anything except the solid earth shaking constantly. Only the pioneering spirit of the early founders that is still retained by the present generation keeps the city from becoming a wilderness. If Congressional Medals of Honor were given to groups for outstanding courage this community would deserve one.

RELIEF AND RECONSTRUCTION

Buildings in Helena were uninhabitable, and over 500 people were left homeless after the quakes. After the quake of the 31st, a cold spell hit, and temperatures dropped to below zero. People needed shelter, food, and clothing.

The Red Cross, FERA (Federal Emergency Relief Agency), The Salvation Army, The National Guard, local churches and clubs, and many other volunteers rushed to aid Helena.

Policemen and National Guardsmen were on duty immediately after the quake of the 18th. Along with 25 volunteers, Helena's police force roped off streets and patrolled the city. 40 National Guardsmen assisted the patrol on the night of the 19th. For many nights afterwards, guardsmen patrolled the city to prevent looting and to ease panic. Looting, however, did not appear to be a problem in Helena. Only one case of looting was reported--a purse was stolen from a police officer's house, when he was called out on emergency duty.

The Red Cross also went to work immediately. The organization helped supply food, shelter, household goods, medical supplies, and hospital attention for those people in need. Workers also helped clear debris and repair homes. The Red Cross spent a total of \$94,056.63 on supplies and reconstruction for the city of Helena.

The Salvation Army set up a refugee camp in a warehouse at the Green Meadow farm. Donations supplied cots, mattresses, blankets, clothing and heating stoves for the camp. A first-aid center and an emergency kitchen were set up. Nurses, doctors, ministers, and many other citizens donated time, money and supplies. The refugee camp operated until December 8th, when it was not needed anymore.

The Great Northern and Northern Pacific Railroads set up heated railroad cars for people to sleep in. An average of 90 people slept in the Great Northern cars for 17 nights, with 165 being the greatest amount at one time. Many people also slept in the Northern Pacific cars. On the afternoon of the 19th, a refugee camp was also set up at Camp Cooney, west of Helena by the National Guard. 100 heated tents from the armory were set up, and 400 people spent the night of the 19th there.

On the 19th, City Engineer Oscar Baarson toured the city to examine the damage. He found many buildings to be unsafe, and condemned those that were uninhabitable. State Fire Marshall Arthur C. Parsons, with City Engineer Baarson and other city officials declared a ban on all public gatherings until buildings could be inspected and repaired. Churches, theaters, saloons, and all other gathering places were temporarily closed. At noon on the 25th of October, this ban was lifted. Buildings that had been properly inspected were granted certificates of occupancy by city officials. It was thought that the big quakes were over, and reconstruction could continue.

But on the 31st, the next big earthquake came, and the ban was reinstated. Once again, all public gatherings were forbidden. The ban was not lifted until all buildings were inspected and granted occupancy.

Congressman Joseph P. Monaghan was the first public official to come to Helena to inspect damage and assist the city. Monaghan notified President F.D. Roosevelt of the damage to Helena. On Saturday afternoon, he also wired Relief Administrator Harry Hopkins. The telegraph read:

Visited Helena today: damage done by earthquake inconceivable. More serious damage threatens unless relief workers from other parts of the state can be ordered here immediately to assist in removing shaky construction and bolstering up infirm walls and chimneys, also direct relief necessary for helpless and homeless people. Please act quickly and advise.

Congressman Monaghan contacted Secretary of War, George P. Dern also. The telegraph to Dern follows:

Many hundreds homeless tonight as result of terrific earthquake, Helena, Mont. last night stop. Visited city today find people in streets in desperate condition stop. Please arrange for camp stoves bedding and tents and army emergency relief equipment as needed stop. Act promptly tonight and advise.

Monaghan sent telegrams to the federal housing administrator and the federal home loan administrator as well.

Other officials to bring aid to Helena included W.M. Ruffcorn, state relief administrator; Tom McCabe, county relief administrator; Riley Mapes, state director of transient relief; Miles Romney, director of the state emergency council; F.H. Marvin, director of emergency relief for the FERA; Barclay Craighead, state director of the Federal Housing Administration; U.S. Representative Roy Ayres, and U.S. Senator Burton K. Wheeler. Senator James E. Murray also assisted in obtaining aid for the city, as well as donating his Boulder Hot Springs Hotel for the use of 140 homeless orphans from St. Joseph's Orphanage.

Governor Frank Cooney located state funds for Helena, and also broadcast several pleas over the radio for relief and aid.

Soon, federal and state funds were pouring into Helena. President Roosevelt saw to it personally that Helena receive a large amount of federal funding. This funding helped immensely with reconstruction and aid for the homeless.

By 1936, Helena was almost back to normal. Tremors continued throughout the winter, but Helena survived through them all. Many buildings had to be torn down because of the quake, such as the National Biscuit Company, and Bryant School, but despite these,

Helena's reconstruction continued. Some residents of Helena became so frightened by the quakes, they left the area forever. Those who stayed rebuilt Helena into the "Queen City" we know today.

[Back to Summary](#)

Newspaper Article: "Talk about a big upset..." published in The Independent Record, Helena, Montana, Sunday, October 29, 1995. (Edition with focus on 60th Anniversary of 1935 earthquakes)

Author: Harriet Meloy, a student at Intermountain Union College in Helena, Montana, at the time of the earthquake 60 years ago

Location at time of earthquake: Gymnasium of Intermountain Union College, attending a dance following a big football game

TALK ABOUT A BIG UPSET... A first-hand account
by Harriet Meloy, Special to the IR

October 18, 1935:

Al Lundborg, Lew Chittim, Freddy Ranf and Roland ("Fuzzy") Ortmayer played football for Intermountain Union College that day; "Fuzzy" carried the ball for the fourth-period touchdown that won the game, 6-0, against Montana School of Mines. They played in Helena, on the field east of the IUC gymnasium on the site now occupied by the Capital Hill Mall.

Intermountain's win over the Butte Orediggers was the first recorded in a long series of contests between the two colleges. Tension ran high during the game. At one time fists flew, bringing the Helena police to the field. Intermountain's hard-won victory was the first of two historic events on that 1935 October day.

After the stunning victory, about 200 students, faculty, and friends, gathered for a dance in the gymnasium. Even the most reluctant dancers, energized by the day's excitement, soon encircled the floor.

Rumbles Felt

At 9:50 p.m., six injured players sitting near the west wall of the building heard a deep rumble. A few moments later, the dancers also felt a second rumble, which marked the onset of the area's most violent earthquake.

At 9:52, before the lights went out, the brick walls of the new gymnasium swayed in and out, like sides of a large empty packing box in a windstorm. Then all the lights went dark. The stunned crowd stood silent in the inky blackness. Then voices murmuring and feet shuffling, the crowd moved quickly and quietly out-of-doors. Apprehension gripped the crowd; just as the light died they glimpsed a hole in the wall on the west side of the gym. Above the low talking and moving feet, a voice assured worried friends that most of the west wall bricks had fallen outside, that everyone was safe.

Black Night

I vividly recall the warm air and the black night that enveloped us as we filed out the south door of the gym. I remember gazing down Butte Avenue to Montana Avenue where my two-story home was, and worrying about my family. My father was away; and my mother was home alone with two sisters and a brother. Had the old brick house withstood the

quake? Fortunately, my date, A.J. Kempenar, offered to walk home with me to see how my family fared.

Our home at 815 Montana appeared intact. Later, however, we discovered that the heavy, stone-encased windows in the dining room were so shaken out of their casings that daylight appeared through the cracks.

Telephone lines were still operating and the Lymans, Mabel and Ranney, invited us over to spend the night in tents on their lawn on Peosta Street. By the light of flickering candles my mother and my siblings packed suitcases to move to the Lymans where tents were being erected. It seemed safer for us to remain outdoors.

After driving my family across town, my date and I returned to campus where a group of IUC men had just returned from celebrating the day's victory by lighting the "I" on Mount Ascension, (a tradition observed after every winning game.) The celebrants described seeing a flash across the sky, at about 10 p.m., as the city lights disappeared, rocks rolled down the hill and trees swayed. The men told of scrambling down the steep path in the night's blackness, and running to the campus to find, with relief, that classmates were safe. Near midnight, several students carried mattresses from Mills Hall, to sit on while they watched the parade of automobiles exiting Helena (moving slowly -- bumper to bumper.) Paradoxically, others were heading into the city to view the destruction.

Eager to learn more about the results of the quake, several students suggested walking toward Main Street to observe the damage. My date and I joined them. We didn't feel the continuous quakes when walking. Lights glowed in houses along Broadway enroute to the city center.

At the end of Broadway, National Guardsmen informed pedestrians that the entire length of Main Street was barricaded. Militia patrolled the streets to warn unauthorized personnel away from tall buildings. They told us of the death of a man who was caught by a shower of brick as he ran from a building on South Main.

Leaving the battle-like scene of Last Chance Gulch, we strolled back to the college campus. We stopped for a few minutes to sit on the low stone wall surrounding the Court House. The earth still shook. How strange the sensation of sitting on solid granite yet feeling the earth shake under us. No one considered the danger of the tall Court House tower that might tumble at any moment.

While we classmates talked about the events of the evening, we speculated that the earthquake might change the course of our lives. What would be the fate of 200 college students if IUC were unable to finance the restoration of damaged buildings and continue? Intermountain College did leave Helena soon after the quakes. It moved to Great Falls, and eventually became a part of Rocky Mountain College in Billings. Students dispersed to various other higher education institutions. Most Helenans have forgotten the little college east of the city. But those attending Intermountain on that October night long ago, will

never forget the school, the football game, and the earthquakes of 1935.
Just ask Al, Lew, Freddy -- or me!

[Back to Summary](#)

**Memoirs: Fred Buck, State Water Conservation Board, Helena, Montana
written December 17, 1935**

Addendum: Mary Buck Jelinek, his daughter
written April 2, 1989

Obtained from: Montana Historical Society files, Helena, Montana
Location at time of earthquake: second floor of office building, Helena, Montana

**EXPERIENCES OF THE FRED BUCK FAMILY
IN THE HELENA EARTHQUAKES OF 1935**

Since June, 1925, a period of ten years, Helena, Montana, had not experienced an earthquake of note, and those that had been felt were mere tremors compared with the major ones of 1935.

The first jolt came early in the evening of Thursday, October 3rd, 1935. We, the Fred Buck family, were sitting in the front room when it was noticed that pictures moved slightly and there was a gentle tingling of dishes and bric-a-brac. All was quiet again until about one o'clock the morning of Saturday, October 12th, at which time the first severe shock occurred. This lasted twelve seconds and shook the house until the walls seemed to be weaving in all directions. Its severity aroused us out of a sound sleep soon enough to witness the last half of the shake up. There was no doubt what had happened; nobody stopped to ask, "Was that an earthquake?" In a few minutes, the populace of the whole town was in the streets. No one could sleep through it. Many people spent the rest of the night in their cars.

We hurried downstairs in night clothes, turned on the lights, and took positions on the davenport near the front door. The front door was left ajar, too, in case a hurried exit was necessary. Every few minutes from then on for the next two hours there were lesser tremors. Finally, the early morning chill drove us to venture back upstairs for some more clothes, and a while later, we retired to the bedrooms to lie down until daylight. We were nervous and excited. Every new tremor added new excitement, and the waiting for the next shock, which might be harder still, whetted our nerves to a keen edge. Juanita was so sure that that was only the forerunner of what was to come that she could hardly force herself to stay in the house at all, and she was right, for had it not been for her uncanny premonition, some of the family might have been killed or seriously hurt in the terrific shock that wrecked our home on the night of Friday, October 18th.

The six days that intervened between the 12th and 18th were trying on the nerves, to say the least. Shocks kept following shocks, some severe and others mild, but none of very long duration. It is the ones of long duration that do the damage to life and property. The city suffered some minor damage in the way of fallen chimneys, broken plaster, and cracked walls, but no one was hurt.

I asked the state engineer the next morning if he was scared, to which he answered, "No, I wasn't scared, I was terrified." This is the best description of one's feelings that I have heard and just fits the way everyone felt. A veteran of the World War remarked, "I'll take my chances in a shell hole anytime in preference to this." If such remarks were initiated by this

quake, which, by comparison with the violence of later ones, was hardly a cocktail to a dinner, we wonder what expressions, if any, could be expelled from the same lips later in the shakes that followed.

Juanita had become so nervous that when I returned home next evening she pointed to a bedroll, suitcases and clothes that she had collected and piled on the floor, and gave me orders that they were to be packed into the car that very night for emergency's sake. She was so sure that we would have to take refuge in the car before the thing was over. It struck me funny. I smiled and tried to kid her out of it, but no, she was in dead earnest, so in the car they went.

The next day, Tip Napton, one of the boys working for me who had been through the major quake in Los Angeles in 1932, came into the office to ask how we survived. He said that he had walked downtown that evening and thought to himself that if it were California he would be sure that we were in for an earthquake, as the temperature and feel of the air were just right. He then said to me confidentially, "You know what I would do if I were you? I would pack a bedroll and some clothes in the car. I'm not kidding you a bit. I know from experience what happened in California, and you better take my tip and be prepared." When I told Juanita this it bolstered up her convictions, and I came in for a good chiding to the tune of "I told you so." The luggage stayed in the car until noon of the 18th, when I unpacked and piled it up in the dining room, much against my wife's wishes. (She claims it was not so much against her wishes as it was the embarrassment of having the neighbors see what she had in the car.)

The fore part of the week preceding the 18th, the shocks began to boom up in frequency and intensity, which terminated with three heavy ones on Tuesday, then settled to a dead calm on Wednesday evening after a few scattering quivers. All day Thursday and Friday, scarcely a tremor of note was felt. It might seem that people were beginning to like the rocking from the anxiety caused by this stillness, but not so. Everyone interpreted it as a warning. The earth coming to rest in such a sudden, deathly calm after a series of crescendo shocks proved to be a bad omen, as people suspected.

When I came home for supper on Friday evening, Juanita was very nervous over the stillness and felt confident that something was in store. She spoke about it several times before I returned to do some night work at the office. Shortly after leaving home, there was one very severe shock (or "jolt" describes it better) with not a single after-tremor. This magnified the nervous anticipation of the coming event, no one knew what, nor how severe, nor what the toll of life might be, but, nevertheless, the event seemed inevitable.

At the fatal moment, nine-fifty p.m., to be exact, six engineers were in my office consulting over the design of a storage dam when the crash came. We jumped out of our chairs but could not stand up only by holding onto something solid. The noise alone of grinding brick and groaning timbers, the rattling windows, and roar of the quake itself, were enough to terrify one, to say nothing of being jostled about like a lone marble in a tomato can. About that time, the plaster began showering from the walls and ceiling, and in the midst of it all the lights went out. There we were, trying to stay on our feet while being swatted with falling plaster in the ghastly darkness. It was an experience I never want to go through again. Every second I expected to be shot out of the window to the pavement below, or

have the walls crash around me. This terrible shaking kept up severely and constantly for a period of 32 seconds -- it seemed like 32 minutes. As soon as the worst was over, we struck matches to pick our way through the dark halls, over the plaster, and down the stairs to the street. The earth and building were still trembling. The choking dust that filled the air was as thick as a heavy fog. Old Mother Earth reminded me of a dog full of fleas shaking himself to get rid of the dirt.

As I unlocked the car to hurry home, two women came running up so hysterical they didn't know what they were doing. One threw her arms around me, imploring, "For God's sake, take me home quick. My child is in the house alone." Not until we got out of the business district did I begin to realize the seriousness of it. The pavements were strewn with brick and lumber; people were running as though they were insane; women were screaming as though in death; the streets were alive with cars; and the weird yellow cast of headlights piercing the thick blanket of dust was uncanny.

When near the neighborhood of where these two women lived, I asked them several times to tell me when to stop, but they were so excited they didn't pay any attention to me. Finally, one of them threw her arms around my neck (they were both in the backseat of a two-door sedan so it was necessary to fold back the front seat in order to get out) and said, "Stop, Stop, Stop!" Before I could stop, both of them were out of the car and clear across the street. I never will know how they got out of that car. The house was almost demolished; the front porch was crumpled in a heap and the brick wall had fallen out of the bedroom where the child lay sleeping. As I got there, a man came out of the ruins carrying the baby in her night clothes. She was a six-year-old girl, so frightened that she couldn't cry. How she escaped death was a miracle.

I hurried on eight blocks more to my family and, upon arriving, found them seated on the bedding, suitcases, etc., in the parking space across the street from the house, where there were no buildings. I will never attempt to describe their fright, nervousness, fear, and anxiety for my safety. They knew I must have been killed or I would have been home before now. By this time, there was not a soul in Helena, it is safe to say, that was inside any building. They were out in the streets, in cars, and clustered in groups on vacant lots. Fortunately there was no snow, and the night was not very cold.

To complete the story, I'll take up the movements of the family from dinnertime until I met them again about ten-twenty. The baby had gone to sleep, and Juanita was so uneasy that instead of taking her upstairs to bed as usual, she had parked her on the davenport near the front door and had dragged out the bedroll, suitcases, and clothes and piled them up at the front door. Juanita played the piano for awhile and then went to the phone to call me to come home. She grabbed the baby, ran across the porch, down several steps to the sidewalk and was clear across the street before the lights went out. She said the porch pillars danced a shimmy and seemed to bounce up and down as if they were made of rubber. Several milk bottles came rolling off the porch after she had gotten across the street so we know she lost no time. It was her alertness and anxiety that saved herself and baby from what might have been a serious accident. Mother Evans was not far behind, and they both got out before wreckage began to show itself in the house.

The ground continued to shake and tremble all night, almost constantly. The records show that there were 174 shocks during the night.

After packing the car, we drove around to find some of our friends who did not have cars, but in all the confusion we couldn't find anyone we were looking for. About two o'clock in the morning, we came back to the house to see what damage was done, and turn off the gas. It was a spooky feeling to open the door and peek in, one that made cold shivers run down your back. About the time one would get up courage enough to venture in a few feet, another pop would bring down more plaster and you would bolt for the door.

The house was a mess; a huge chunk of plaster buried the piano where Juanita was sitting only a few seconds before. The ceiling was unusually high and the plaster was the old, thick type that had enough weight in falling so far that she would have been badly hurt if struck with it. The kitchen window was blown out completely and landed on the table right where the baby ate her lunch before going to sleep only a short while before. In the front room, a big bookcase full of books was thrown down in the middle of the floor just after Juanita had crossed in its path to grab the baby; the radio was hurled clear across the room; stand lamps were upset and the floor was strewn with bric-a-brac, pictures, vases, etc. The refrigerator, which weighs five or six hundred pounds, was moved out about eighteen inches from the wall. In the hallway upstairs, a heavy bookcase full of books was jiggled out into the center of the hall until it met a trunk that had moved out from the opposite wall. In the kitchen, broken dishes were piled up in a heap where they had slid out of the cupboard; bottles, fruit jars, syrup, beans, flour, etc., covered the floor; then over the top of this conglomeration, the fallen chimney had spread a thick layer of black soot.

A peculiar thing about the wreckage in the house was that everything was thrown from the east toward the west. Things hung on the west wall, or setting tight against it, were not disturbed, but everything against the east wall was dislodged. Against the west wall in the bathroom hung a frail medicine cabinet full of bottles, etc. Not a single article in it was upset, but on the opposite side, which would be the east wall of the kitchen, the dishes and groceries were thrown out of the cupboard onto the floor. The basement seemed to survive the best of all the house as the only thing disturbed there were two cans of fruit, which had upset and rolled off the shelf. In a flimsy board shed in the backyard, I had piled up a lot of empty tin cans that had been used for flower pots, and not a single one was moved. Such are the freaks of earthquakes.

The solid brick house in which we lived (531 Fifth Ave.) was split on all four sides and one wall bulged out of plumb about eight or ten inches and pulled loose from the inside partition. The bricks in the back of the house were almost all either shattered apart or split. Archways over all the doors and windows were broken until the entire loads of brick above were resting on the wooden casings. Although the building had been very substantially built, it suffered structural damage that did not show on the surface. We noticed this in particular when moving the furniture out, which would make the floors and walls shake and creak. Two boards on the front room floor bulged up the full length of the room.

There was not a house in the block that was not either demolished entirely, or so badly wrecked that they were not liveable. A two-story brick adjoining ours on the west was

shaken to the ground, and there were scores of homes with a short radius of us that were demolished. The most severe damage was centralized in various localities, and we seemed to be about in the center of one of these areas.

One of my engineers, Norman Benson, found us at the house about three in the morning after hunting for us all night. Nothing would do but to go over to his house until we could get located again. His home was a little four-room frame, which was far too small for his wife, three kiddies, my wife, Mary Clarabelle, Mother Evans, he and I, but his generosity was so thoroughly backed up with his insistence that we camped with them for the following two weeks, or until the next major quake came on the 31st.

During the interim I packed up the belongings at the house between quakes and hauled the small items such as pictures, clothes, dishes, groceries, etc., over to Benson's garage while the heavy furniture was put into storage at Curtin's. It was a spooky job. The days were short so that the daylight hours were brief; the house was cold and most any second one could expect a good shake. I worked with the front and back doors wide open and the runways kept clear so that a hurried exit could be made in case the plaster got to flying too thickly. Several times I made a flying exit, and often I got so weak, tired, and nervous I would have to go out in the car to rest awhile. The first three or four days I could not eat and subsisted almost entirely on black coffee.

You never saw such a pile of junk as there was in Benson's garage after it had been assembled on the cement floor. The weather turned cold during the next week while Juanita and I were trying to sort stuff out and arrange it in some kind of order to pack. Between this job, and trying to keep warm, and running out doors every little while to escape another quake, Juanita and I became much better acquainted with each other's dispositions than ever before. Then, too, living in such small quarters with four small, noisy children, and not being able to sleep nights or eat right, just aggravated the situation. People were living in tents pitched on vacant lots all over town. Many people slept in their cars from two to three weeks and many left Helena to take up abodes in neighboring towns. Garages were made liveable while other people moved into homes with friends who were more fortunate. As an example of the congestion, I know of one place where 19 persons were sleeping in a one-car garage. Houses were scarce in Helena before the disaster, and when some 460 homes were completely destroyed or badly damaged, as the census showed, you can imagine the congested conditions.

During all this time we were house hunting every spare minute, but you couldn't find a vacant house, tourist camp, garage or chicken coop -- one fellow did offer me a tent. At Fort Harrison, some hundred or more townspeople were housed in army tents pitched hurriedly for the occasion; the Great Northern Railway Company brought in several Pullmans to accommodate the homeless. Had it not turned cold right afterward with a light snowfall, conditions would not have been so tough, but, at that, nobody really suffered. None of us could find a single thing we owned or wanted. I had a razor and toothbrush in my overcoat pocket and an extra pair of socks in the car, which were about the only personal belongings I could locate for the two months that we were homeless.

The thirteen days intervening between the 18th and the 31st were days filled with earthquakes: some 24-hour periods would record as many as 25, many of which were light

jars, and again, many were good shake-ups. On the 30th, things began to quiet down again, and then people took on new alarm, for peace and quiet were bad signs. At 11:30 the next morning, the violent shock struck with all the force and duration of the major one of the 18th. It was not quite so terrifying, though, as it happened during daylight hours, but the damage was perhaps more severe. It shook continuously for 27 seconds. As I glanced out of the window, the west brick wall fell from St. Charles College building.

My office was a madhouse if you ever saw one: more plaster fell; women and girls were hysterical; and nobody could get out of the building until it was over. As the walls vibrated in and out, I expected every second to land in the street amid a pile of brick and lumber. They bulged and cracked until you could look out upon the sky around the ceiling, but fortunately the walls did not fall or some of us might have been hurt. As it was, the building was wrecked to the danger point and every office and business in it ordered to vacate immediately. The building is being reconstructed, and while repairing the upper story, it was discovered that the floor joists had pulled away from the walls until only 3/4 of an inch remained that was resting on the brick. Just a trifle more bulging of the walls and our floor would have crashed to the ground. In the meantime, the office was moved to a road house known as the Nite Owl, which is three miles outside the city.

After the major part of the shock was over, the ground kept quivering almost constantly for about an hour. The records show that there were over 100 shocks during the afternoon. By this time there were no human nerves left in the city. Streams of cars radiated out over the highways in all directions, for the majority of those who had cars left town.

As the day was cold, I had parked the car in a public garage about half a block from the office. I ran to get it but the attendants were all out in the street, and it took a lot of persuasion to get one of them to go back with me long enough to get it out. My only escape was through the alley, which was built up solid on both sides with dangerous brick buildings, and adjoining was a tall stack that had cracked some ten feet below its top and was expected to fall any moment. I was desperate, though, to get home to the family as soon as possible, so I took a chance and safely ran the gauntlet up the alley, past the chimney, and over fallen bricks from the wall of our office building.

The family was pretty excited, but no damage was done to the little frame house where they were. When I arrived, all of them were tramping in the snow out in the yard and wrapped in blankets to keep warm. As soon as we could get things together, we pulled out that afternoon for Great Falls and rented an apartment. I returned to salvage what was left of our wreckage and later brought the family back to Helena to camp with the Tarrants, who were old friends of Mother Evans in the Black Hills many years ago. Not until the 6th day of December were we able to get a house in Helena and move into a new home, after sixty days of homeless wandering.

The shock of the 31st just about finished the house where we were living the night of the 18th when it was cracked to pieces. The back door was torn off its hinges and slapped down on the floor; the big kitchen range was upset and the connections torn loose from the water tank. The water main was broken in the front yard. Had we been in the house at the time and could not have dodged the remaining plaster that fell, there is no telling what the results might have been with a shock severe enough to play such havoc.

Even yet, old Mother Earth keeps up her shimmies. On Thanksgiving morning there was another that lasted twelve seconds and shook things up good, bringing down more brick and plaster. Had the other catastrophes not been so fresh in mind, we would have been inclined to class this one as a major shock. Up to midnight, December 17th, the time this is being written, we have had a total of 1203 quakes since October 18th and are still having them. There have been eleven shocks within the last twenty-four hours, some of which are classed by the Weather Bureau as "moderate intensity."

It is almost safe to say that there is hardly a building in Helena that is not damaged to some extent. A recapitulation of the damage now being compiled by the city engineer shows that out of a total of 3500 buildings inspected in the city, 1789 were damaged from 2 % to 100 %, and the survey is not yet completed. Besides the 460 homes ruined, some of the larger buildings condemned are: the county courthouse, St. Johns Hospital, a new half-million dollar high school, Bryant School, the cracker factory, Montana Deaconess Home, St. Joseph Orphanage, county poor farm, city hall, county jail, Intermountain Union College, numerous stores and office buildings. Some of those badly damaged but which can be repaired, are: Montana Children's Home, Florence Crittendon Home, Shrine Temple, the cathedral, Denver Block, Fort Harrison, Northern Pacific Depot, Great Northern Depot, the Methodist church, Hawthorne School, Central School, the old high school, many stores, office buildings, and apartments.

Intermountain Union College was moved by truck to Great Falls, and the Veteran's Hospital, which was housed at Fort Harrison, was moved by special train to Walla Walla, Washington. Whether these institutions will eventually rebuild their buildings and return to Helena is still problematical. High school is being conducted in a train of railway cars and the grade schools will not be reopened until the first of the year. Temporary quarters will have to be provided until the school buildings can be repaired, and it is planned to send half of the children in the forenoon and the other half in the afternoon in order to be able to accommodate them all.

During the first shock of the 18th, two men were killed and three more were taken on the 31st. Several have died since as a result of shocks. The hospitals were filled with injured, and when St. Johns Hospital went down on the 31st, its patients were hurried to Butte. When one drives around the city to observe the wreckage, they can't help but wonder why more people were not killed. The fact that people were so nervous, alert, and held themselves ready to run is probably the reason.

In several places, small cracks opened up in the earth after the severe shocks. In one locality down in the valley, a large crevice belched up water, which brought up volcanic ash sufficient to build up small cones six to twelve inches high. The ash was undoubtedly brought up from an artesian flow, which was intercepted by the crack.

After the shocks of both the 18th and 31st, the main part of the business district was roped off to prevent auto travel. It was not necessary to prevent pedestrians from entering the restricted district, for people were afraid to venture among the tall buildings, and even yet, a good many were reluctant about going downtown to shop. Business houses were all closed for two or three days and the city was practically under martial law, although such

had not been officially declared. City police, the county sheriff's office, the state highway patrol, and the state militia all joined hands to protect the populace and prevent looting.

We learned after experiencing a series of quakes that if the earth kept quivering after a severe shock that there was not much danger of anything more serious happening, but if the earth settled down to composure, it was a warning to look out for something more. In other words, continual shakes quieted our minds, but silence generated uneasiness. With every quake, there is a distinct rumbling, which sounds like a heavy truck. During recent days, as the disturbance is subsiding, we can often hear the rumble very distinctly but do not feel the jar. It makes you wonder if old Mother Earth does not need a laxative.

The quakes, from their behavior, classify themselves into three distinct types: first, the severe ones, which shook continuously for several seconds and did the damage, the ones that jostled you in all directions at the same time; second, the quivering kind, which were short in duration, and from their behavior, were locally called, "The Stutters"; and third, "The Jolts," which would hit one vicious crack, like some heavy object striking the building with great force. Sometimes this latter kind would seem to be a side crack, and again, they would strike vertically as though the force came from the basement. Some of them would fairly make your neck pop.

With every catastrophe there are always amusing sidelights. The evening of the 18th, a salesman driving into the city, who had not felt the shock, couldn't imagine why so many cars were on the highway leaving Helena. He saw a woman standing on the walk and asked, "What on earth is the trouble; have all the people in Helena gone crazy?", to which she indignantly replied, "What's the matter with you, young man, are you trying to be funny?" A fellow, who works for me, and his wife, were entertaining a neighboring lady when the pop came. In the darkness, he carried his wife out of the house, but when he reached the street, he found he had carried out the wrong woman. Visitors from outside who flocked into the city to view the ruins never had to stay over an hour or so to experience a good jolt. In their fright, they would get out of town as soon as possible. Two contractors, from out of state, who were in the office when a slight jar was felt, jumped to their feet in excitement and would have run into the street if some of us quake-veterans had not kidded them out of it. All the restaurants were emptied in a second, and nobody came back to finish their meals or pay for them,

After the earth had begun its dancing, an interesting experience was told by a rancher, who lives in Helena valley, within the vicinity of where scientists eventually located the epicenter of the quakes. He said that during haying time, early in the summer, they had heard rumbling noises, which were thought to be distant blastings. These periodical rumblings finally aroused their curiosity enough to inquire where the blasting was being done, and, finding that there was none, they eventually decided that the noise was coming from the earth. He said that several times they had talked about it within the family circle but never mistrusted its meaning until the surface of the earth began its shaking spells, and then they were convinced, for the same rumbling sounds, only magnified in intensity, accompanied each quake.

During the thirteen days between the two major shocks, the first that shook the office to pieces and the second that finished it, the employees were so nervous that very little work

was accomplished. Many times during this period, quakes would send them on a mad rush for the halls and stairways. The girls would get nauseated, scream, and faint. Many times I found myself reading through correspondence, and after completing a letter, couldn't remember a thing I had read: my mind, like every other, functioned only in terms of earthquakes.

Even the animals were frightened. Many cases were reported where dogs set up ghastly spells of howling. Our eight-month-old collie pup shook with fear, ran for one of us, and crouched down whining every time a quake of major intensity occurred.

One who has never passed through an experience of this kind has no conception of its meaning. The nervous shock far exceeds the physical shake, and the anxious waiting in anticipation of something more to come is indescribable. It brings one to a sense of realization of how helpless and frail humanity is to battle with natural forces. You experience a nervous sickness, a physical weakness, loss of appetite and sleep, and move about on tiptoe ready to spring at a second's warning.

THIS ENDS THE NARRATIVE OF HOW THE BUX [sic] BECAME QUAKERS

Fred E. Buck
December 17, 1935

ADDENDUM

When my father wrote up our experiences in the October 1935 earthquake in Helena, I was the "baby" in the story -- almost four years old. The afternoon before the earthquake, my mother had taken me to Mrs. Walker's Dancing School, which met in the old Consistory Shrine Building (15 North Jackson), behind the Placer Hotel, for my first ballet lesson. Needless to say, my career was short lived!

Afterward, my mother took me to Fligelman's Department Store to buy a new snowsuit. When my father came home for dinner that night, I wanted to show him my new snowsuit. After dinner, my mother let me put it on and wear it all evening, as she was sure something was going to happen. I fell asleep on the living room couch. When the earthquake hit, I was ready to go.

My father's office, the State Water Conservation Board, mentioned in the story, was on the second floor of the Montana Block, located at the corner of Fuller and Placer streets. Anderson Motors was located on the ground floor. The building has since been torn down. The office force was working late every night in order to get plans and specifications drawn up so the State Water Conservation Board could qualify for Project Works Administration (PWA) loans and grants to build small irrigation projects. The office was also responsible for handling the Works Project Administration (WPA) program.

After the earthquake, the office was forced to move to temporary quarters in the Nite Owl, a nightclub located on the Missoula Highway next to the old Broadwater Plunge. The weather was very cold and severe, and this was complicated by excessively heavy snowfall. The State Highway Department had to plow out a parking space for the cars.

Nobody would leave in the evening until everyone had started his car, and then, they left in a caravan for Helena. My mother was always apprehensive about my father getting home safely. I remember my father having to crank the Terraplane car many times in the winter to get it started. The next spring, the office moved back to the Montana Block, after extensive repairs were made.

My father failed to mention in the story that we had a collie dog. It was a problem to find places to keep him. When we went to Great Falls and rented an apartment -- actually a hotel room with cooking facilities -- the hotel management would not allow the dog on the premises. My parents kept the dog locked in the car and my father would get up at 4:00 a.m. and go down to the car to check on the dog. My father was afraid the dog might freeze to death. Many people from Helena stayed in Great Falls, and accommodations were hard to find. Since the arrangement wasn't very satisfactory, we returned to Helena. I hope this additional information will help round out the story my father wrote.

Mary Buck Jelinek
April 2, 1989

[Back to Summary](#)