

ALERT TOP STORY

## Nuggets from Helena: The Smoke House Marathon of 1916

David Curd For the Independent Record

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**T**he year 1916 was a big year for running in Helena.

In late April the Mount Helena Handicap took place: this race was a Nugget from Helena in the Sept. 16 IR. The State Fair Marathon was held on Sept. 30. And on Oct. 28 was the Smoke House Marathon: this month's featured Nugget from Helena.

The reader must expect a different marathon race in this writing than what is a marathon today. Up to and into the middle 1970s, a run covering more than two miles was often referred to as a marathon.

The Smoke House at 11 S. Main St. in 1916 was few yards to the left of today's Windbag Saloon. The Smoke House had billiards, pocket billiards and cigars. Today a large office building occupies the land.

**Oct. 28:** Vic Norman, the challenger protagonist of the April race, had his fingers involved in making the Smoke House race. "Vic Norman said he would give novices and soldiers a three-minute handicap, and for Harvey Yates on scratch with Wesley Binko of interest



the Interscholastic Meet). Medals were to be given to first, second and third place finishers” (Gold, silver, bronze). The Yates brothers had signed up, one of which ran in April on the Mount Helena run.

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Photo is circa 1912 showing the Helena High School competitors at the Interscholastic Meet. Location unknown. Wesley Binko, fourth from left, and Ben Burgess, second from right, are mentioned in this writing.

Courtesy photo

*(Explanation: the use of the word 'handicap' is assumed to mean those runners would start two, or three minutes, before the fastest runners. Starting on scratch would be when the fastest runners start, at the firing of the starters gun).*

Harvey Yates, James Yates, Ruben Bompart, Wesley Binko and Vic Norman have entered the race. Ben's name is added to the newspaper report probably for excitement value. He was the winner of the Mount Helena Handicap.

Four people were listed as being in charge of the race: one was Worth Almon, president of the Moore Book and Stationery Co.; Dick Crum employed by Western Drug, Jack Flannery the chief of police; and Ted Meredith. Ted and Worth are race judges, Dick is the timekeeper, and Jack

fired the starting gun.

*(Dick Crum was the father of Richard Crum the record holder of the 880-yard run and the mile run of the Interscholastic Meet in 1911).*

The course as happened with the Mount Helena Handicap is unknown. But the Helena Independent gives us one clue: "... the route will follow the auto road to the garrison and return." And to keep it interesting: "the race is a free-for-all," Does this mean you run any course you want?

A 1917 map of Helena from a great book, "Montana's Trolleys," Book 1, Rex Myers, fall of 1969, Ira L. Swett, shows two trolley routes to the Broadwater Hotel/Natatorium; one of the two trolley routes continues to the garrison, Fort William Henry Harrison.

This writer chooses the following route, giving weight to the "auto route" comment: start at the Smoke House (Broadway and Main), turn west on Edwards, then right on Park, then left on Lawrence (today the Grand Street Theatre and the City-County building), uphill to Harrison, turn right, and run past Hawthorne School until reaching Knight Street, and take a hard left. From there simply follow the trolley tracks until reaching the Broadwater Hotel where the runners dash around the parked autos, trolley cars, and get over to Green Street. The runners ignored calls to stop for a dip in the warm waters of the Natatorium.

They ran on the Green Street bridge over Ten Mile Creek, then followed the trolley tracks to the garrison.

A roundabout at the garrison gates, and it's hell-bent-for-leather back to the Smoke House.

**Oct. 29:** The Independent reports that "Harry 'Speed' Yates crossed the finish line in 53 minutes with Vic Norman right behind at 53 minutes and 15 seconds followed by James Yates some distance behind." With the first two runners 15 seconds apart, it must have been an exciting finish. The estimated distance of this marathon is eight miles.

Vic Norman's name was not found in local public records 1915, 1917. Maybe the 'coast athlete' moved back home. This writer tributes Vic for creating the Mount Helena Handicap and the Smoke House Marathon, all in 1916.

Helena's running history began long before the races of 1916. At the fourth annual Montana State Fair, September 1873, there was a half-mile race for all Helena Firemen with a \$50 purse. This race on the fairground's dirt track, started at 4 p.m., commencing after the horses had run.

Over the recent 31 years there has been an annual race during the last half of October, on or near Halloween weekend: the Montana Cup. This is a team competition between the seven towns of Montana, females vs. females, males vs. males. The state is split into seven sections and a section belongs to a town: Billings, Bozeman, Butte, Great Falls, Helena, Kalispell and Missoula.

This year the Cup is held in the Helena area on Oct. 28 at the Zinn Ranch. For more Cup information, visit [www.montanacup.org](http://www.montanacup.org) or [www.vigilanterunning.org](http://www.vigilanterunning.org).

Among statewide events in 1916, Jeannette Rankin was running, and winning, to become the first U.S. congresswoman.