



## ***Emma Slack Dickinson (1838-1926)***

*The first teacher in Missoula who not only pioneered education in town, but also was required to live under very strict rules.*

**1838-Birth.** December 4, 1838 in Baltimore, Maryland. Parents: Andrew and Mary Ruff Slack of German and Scottish descent.

**1863.** She and several other Baltimore girls nursed the wounded soldiers.

**1868.** Her brother, John (Jasper) Slack who had settled in Montana after eleven years of wandering, sent letters that aroused Emma's desire to see the western wilderness. John sent money for Emma and her half-brother, Lamar Kelly, to come to Montana.

**1869.** They left Baltimore by rail to Sioux City Iowa then by boat to Fort Benton. The trip was to take three weeks but the Missouri was so low (the boat kept hanging up on sandbars) that it took six weeks. At Bismarck ND, a war party of Crow Indians, who had just finished an encounter with a Sioux tribe, were

having a war dance. They demanded to be allowed to board the boat to travel to their next destination. They brought two captive Sioux squaws and numerous Sioux scalps on board with them. Their war dance was continued on the boat. They ate all the food they wanted. This was very frightening but the Indians left everyone alone and disembarked at their destination without incident.

John waited at Fort Benton for three weeks for them to arrive, then took them by wagon to the Bitterroot Valley. Emma was not fond of camping or buffalo meat. Accustomed to Southern comfort, this was quite an adjustment.

**1869.** John took her to Missoula where the school board had just been formed. Since there were no teachers in the area, she was given a teaching certificate with no questions asked and offered \$100 a month salary. Upon her acceptance, she was given the school board's list of rules for a teacher:

### ***RULES FOR SCHOOL TEACHERS***

- 1. You will not marry during the term of your contract.*
- 2. You are not to keep company with men.*
- 3. You must be home between the hours of 8pm and 6am unless attending a school function.*
- 4. You may not loiter downtown in any of the ice cream stores.*
- 5. You may not travel beyond the city limits unless you have the permission of the chairman of the board.*
- 6. You may not ride in a carriage or automobile with any man unless he is your father or brother.*
- 7. You may not smoke cigarettes.*
- 8. You may not dress in bright colors.*
- 9. You may under no circumstances dye your hair.*
- 10. You must wear at least two petticoats.*
- 11. Your dresses must not be any shorter than two inches above the ankle.*
- 12. To keep the classroom neat and clean, you must:*
  - a. Sweep the floor at least once daily.*
  - b. Scrub the floor at least once a week with hot, soapy water*
  - c. Clean the blackboards at least once a day*
  - d. Start the fire at 7am so the room will be warm by 8am*

- **1869 to 1871.** The first school was a frame building on east Front Street in Missoula. She had 16 pupils including two of the Higgins children. School terms were three months in length. There were only about 25 families in the Missoula area at that time. Her friends consisted of the Higgins, Woody, Worden, Hammond families were among them.
- **1871-Marriage.** William Henry Harrison Dickinson on November 5, 1871. They had five children. Their wedding is believed to be the first performed by a Protestant minister in the area. According to the rules, Emma was forced to resign her teaching position once she became a married woman.

- **1872.** Her husband, William, was commissioned postmaster and they lived behind the post office for many years. (This building was across from the old Mercantile, downtown Missoula) William was the first photographer and established himself in real estate and mining. They made their fortune by subdividing 160 acres of land near the city and selling it for residential property. Gold dust was used for payment at this time and Bitterroot residents had to travel to Missoula to get their mail.
- Emma walked with a cane and distinct limp after falling early in their marriage and breaking her hip. Even doctors in Baltimore who re-broke the hip could not help her limp.
- She began the first protestant church, the Methodist / Presbyterian.
- She was a woman of character and strength, kind, courageous, adventurous, self-reliant, and yet shy. She learned to sew out of necessity but once she discovered Erick's mail order catalog (Chicago based company) her sewing ended. She dressed differently than local women of her time as she preferred clothes with more stylish flair.
- She was always interested in education and world events such as the Suffrage movement and Women's suffrage.
- **1926-Death.** December 31, 1926 from pneumonia at her son's home in Missoula at age 88.

