

Elaborate practical jokes spawned local legends

Chances are that three out of five who notice the big round table in the northwestern corner of the Petroleum Club bar aren't aware that they're looking at a piece of history.

It came to the 22nd floor of the Sheraton from the club's former quarters in the Northern a few years back.

Earlier it was a smaller table — but just as round — in the Golden Belle dining room, back in the days when it was known as the Northern Hotel Coffee Shop.

But it was a special table. It all started back when Frank Mackey, Harry Snyder, Bobby Jones, Pete Thompson, Rockwood Brown, Art Langman and Les Carter, owner-manager of the Northern, began meeting regularly for coffee. Later they were joined by Stanley Arkwright, Art Hartwig and

Saturday Sundry



Addison Bragg

Phil Fortin.

Others later included W.C. Hardy and Bob Cobb and Dr. Roy Morledge, who were the first honorary Shepherders.

Mackey and Snyder were in the sheep business. Jones was a wool buyer. Art Langman

bought and sold livestock.

Perhaps that's where the name came from. And their table was and still is the Shepherders Table.

But there was a time when the word "Shepherd" in and around downtown Billings was synonymous with practical joking on a magnificent scale.

Like when a Shepherd used his Gazette connections to have an entire front page made up and delivered to the hotel complete with headlines, Associated Press copy and financial analysis of a major disaster on Wall Street.

Papers reporting the crash story were placed conspicuously near the Shepherders table, awaiting only the eye and attention of one member — Stanley Arkwright.

For, strangely enough, the only stocks suf-

fering declines (or in some cases, wipeouts) were those in which Arkwright held considerable interest.

The Shepherders heard later about how Arkwright's family narrowly averted a heart attack by getting word to him that it was a Shepherd, not a Gazette, extra.

Another time they collected enough detour signs to steer early traffic away from the stockyards where Shepherd Langman was planning his big sale of the year, and placed them where Langman was sure to see them on his way to morning coffee.

Langman had all of City Hall on the carpet before learning it was his turn that time.

The table is quiet today — but Shepherd legends still live.

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