

## Montana Teacher Receives History Award

April Wills, a fifth-grade teacher at Bainville Public School in north-eastern Montana, was given the Montana Statehood Centennial Bell Award honoring the Montana History Teacher of the Year at the fourth- through sixth-grade level for 2020–21.

Chosen by a panel of Montana history experts, Wills is the 32nd annual winner of the award. Montana history teachers at the fourth- through sixth-grade levels are chosen in odd-numbered years, and Montana history teachers at the seventh- through twelfth-grade levels are chosen in even-numbered years.

Wills received a plaque and a \$500 prize on Statehood Day, November 8, at a ceremony at the State Capitol in Helena. The money can be used for the purchase of Montana history materials, field trips, guest speakers, and anything else that will enhance her teaching of Montana History.

The award is sponsored by the Montana Television Network, the Montana History Foundation, the Sons and Daughters of Montana Pioneers, and the 1889 Coffee House in Helena—in cooperation with the Montana Historical Society.

Wills is a native of Columbus, who graduated from Broadwater High School in Townsend, and received her elementary education degree from the University of Montana in Missoula. She received her master's degree in



April Wills, Montana History Teacher of the Year, and MHS Trustee Norma Ashby Smith during the Nov. 8 ceremony that honored Wills' efforts to promote teaching history in classrooms.

Learning and Technology from Western Governors University. She is a Montana Teacher Leader for the Montana Historical Society, presenting Montana history to Montana history teachers across the Treasure State.

Wills has taught Montana history at Bainville School since 2014.

"I mesh traditional teaching practices with technology, and whenever possible I bring in trunks from the Montana Historical Society and state parks," she said. "We visit museums, cultural centers, and have guest speakers that can expand our learning."

Wills recalled that one year when they studied astronomy, students entered a quiet, dark room flickering with stars, listened to the sounds of drumming, and gazed on planetary views. They

learned about the ways that the Crow tribe used astronomy, and listened to oral star stories.

"Students were fascinated," Wills noted.

In her nominating letter, Samantha Keefner, a fellow teacher at Bainville School, said Wills has worked hard to bring the history of our state into the classrooms of many other educators.

"Without April's expert lead, I would have never known to utilize the many wonderful traveling trunks that the Montana Historical Society has available to schools with different focuses in Montana history," Keefner wrote. "Her passion and excitement for Montana history is present in everything she does."

*History Award (cont. on p. 2)*

## Gratitude

As I reflect on the events of 2021—my first full year as director of the Montana Historical Society—I'm struck by how grateful I am to so many. My colleagues at MHS, our Board of Trustees, our members and donors, and our volunteers are just a few of those to whom I owe gratitude.

MHS is peopled by a wonderful group of archivists, curators, educators, historians, and editors who ensure that the artifacts and archival materials that document our past are preserved and shared. My appreciation for the dedication, passion, and expertise of every person at MHS can't be overstated. Equally, our trustees offer their varied experiences in guiding the future of our organization, and their input is invaluable.

At MHS we save Montana's past, share its stories, and inspire exploration to provide meaning for today and vision for tomorrow. We couldn't accomplish that work without our many wonderful members and donors. More than 3,200 individuals and families—all of you!—are our champions. Your support for our work to protect the items that tell Montana's stories helps make what we do possible. By speaking up for Montana history, you send a powerful message about the importance of knowing and understanding our past.

We have an enormous task in front of us in the Montana Heritage Center. The nuts and bolts of construction are one part of that task. For that, we rely on our many donors to ensure success. Recently MHS increased our commitment of private funds for the Heritage Center—from \$10 million to \$15 million. We feel confident in achieving that goal because of your financial support. In just the past two

months, we've received three significant gifts that moved us closer to that goal.

We often hear that the Montana Historical Society has a powerful impact on people's lives. Students make connections with their communities. Communities benefit from historic preservation dollars to restore important buildings. Former trustees and docents give back in recognition of the importance of their association. This is the case with Bruce Ennis and Maggie Davis. Bruce, a former member of our Board of Trustees, and Maggie, a former docent and volunteer, gifted a substantial amount for the construction of the Montana Heritage Center. I'm thankful for those who came before me at MHS, who have touched the lives of so many.

Many of you likely know that Bob and Genevieve Morgan were an essential part of the MHS family for decades. They advanced the Society in so many ways—as artist, curator, advocate, and benefactor. Recently, Bob and Genevieve's family made an extraordinary gift of \$115,000 in support of the Heritage Center. We are grateful for their contribution but also for their thoughtfulness in honoring Bob and Genevieve's legacy at MHS.

Sometimes gifts come from a connection to our great state and to its past. Stockman Bank recently gifted \$100,000 to MHS in support of the Montana Heritage Center. As Montana's largest family-owned community bank, they are dedicated to enriching the lives of Montana. With a 70-year history, Stockman Bank recognizes the importance of preserving Montana's past and is committed to supporting the work needed to make that happen.

The gifts from the Morgan family, Stockman's Bank and Bruce and



Maggie represent the culmination of more than a century and a half of work by those who led the Montana Historical Society to greatness. With your support we will ensure that the next century is just as impactful.

With partners like you, I'm ever thankful to be a part of the Montana Historical Society family. But, most simply, I'm grateful to live in this great state and to serve you—our members and friends—as we work together to create an engaging and inclusive new home for MHS in the Montana Heritage Center. ★

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### *History Award (cont. from p. 1)*

Student Tally Berwick added that his favorite part about the Montana history unit was getting to pick a famous person from Montana and making a movie about that person.

"I chose Charlie Russell," Berwick wrote. "It was really interesting learning about his life and the impact he had on Montana."

For more information about the award and the November 8 ceremony, contact Norma Ashby Smith, award coordinator, at [ashby7@charter.net](mailto:ashby7@charter.net). ★

# Fundraising moves forward for MHC

Five recent substantial gifts totaling \$525,000 are helping the Montana Historical Society reach its private fundraising goal for construction of the Montana Heritage Center and updates to the existing MHS building.

Bruce Ennis and Maggie Davis of Kalispell made a substantial donation recently, after meetings with MHS Director Molly Kruckenberg and Development Officer Ginny Sullivan. Both Ennis and Davis are well-versed in historical society activities and challenges; Ennis formerly sat on the MHS Board of Trustees for nine years, and Davis previously volunteered as a docent at MHS.

The family of Bob and Genevieve Morgan contributed \$115,000 in



honor of their parents. Bob Morgan, a noted artist from Helena, was an MHS museum curator and acting director, and served on the Board of Trustees. His wife, Gen, also was a longtime supporter of MHS.

Another substantial donation

of \$100,000 came from Stockman Bank, which is Montana's largest family-owned community bank, with 36 full-service locations across the Treasure State. Chief Executive Officer Bill Coffee said it's important

*Fundraising (cont. on p. 7)*

## Hundreds of Oral Histories Now Available Online

More than six hundred interviews on 1,106 analog tapes are now in a digital format as part of a program that supports the preservation of rare and unique audio, audiovisual, and other media of high scholarly value.

The completion of *Voices of Labor: Preserving Montanans at Work; Metals Manufacturing in Four Montana Communities; and New Deal in Montana Oral History Interviews Project* was made possible by a \$32,000 grant from the national Council on Library and Information Resources Recordings at Risk program.

The audio files, along with transcripts and summaries, are available online through the Montana Memory Project. The three oral history projects focus on different industries and those involved in them.

Specifically, the *Montanans at Work Oral History Project* focuses on change and continuity in three main industries in Montana: agriculture, mining, and forest products. The

interviews capture the stories of laborers, labor leadership, and support industry workers, from the expansion in extractive economy jobs during World War II to the decline of those industries in the 1980s.

The *Metals Manufacturing in Four Montana Communities Oral History Project* concentrates on residents of Anaconda, Black Eagle, Columbia Falls, and East Helena, who share their experiences as merchants, bartenders, union organizers, and families of smelter workers living in towns dominated by metals manufacturing plants.

The *New Deal in Montana/Fort Peck Dam Oral History Project* documents the economic recovery programs initiated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in Montana in the 1930s and 1940s, such as the construction of Fort Peck Dam under the Public Works Administration, as well as efforts by the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Resettlement Administration.

Originally slated as a two-year project and scheduled for finalization in the fall of 2020, the COVID-19 global pandemic delayed its completion, and work began again in earnest in the spring of 2021 for another fall deadline. The staff of the Montana Historical Society Research Center archives and library dedicated hundreds of hours to digitize and upload the voices of labor past.

The Montana Historical Society hopes all Montanans will enjoy listening to these interviews. The state agency takes pride in knowing they are now available to a much wider audience.

"As much as we'd love to be able to digitize our entire oral history collection, projects like this could not be completed without the assistance of archival audio and moving image preservation companies. These companies do excellent work but can be very costly," noted Anneliese Warhank, MHS archivist/oral historian, who oversaw the project. 🌟

# Three Historic Properties Added to the National Register of Historic Places

Three properties were recently listed in the National Register of Historic Places, which is the nation's official list of historic properties worthy of preservation. Using specific program criteria and procedures, the Montana Historical Society's Preservation Office (SHPO) and the State Historic Preservation Review Board evaluate and recommend nominations of eligible Montana places to the National Park Service (NPS) for inclusion in the National Register.

**The McMaster Ranch**, at the south end of the Spokane Bench between Helena and Winston, was owned by the same family since 1893 prior to its transfer to the Bureau of Land Management. The high level of integrity of historic buildings and structures at the



ranch headquarters, the irrigation system that made the ranch operable, transportation elements influencing the property's history, and lands acquired using several Homestead Act permutations were key elements in this property's National Register listing.

**The Billy Kruse Cabin**, near Polebridge, displays rustic vernacular log architecture in its hand-peeled larch log walls set on gable ends. The 16-by-18-foot cabin, built in 1925 by Danish emigrant Wilhelm "Billy" Kruse, stands as a testament to those who envisioned a place of their own in the rugged mountains of northwestern Montana. In the case of Billy Kruse and many single men who lived in the North Fork, their cabins became a base to return to



after their seasonal employment ended. Kruse became a noted person in local North Fork history due to the circumstances surrounding his death in 1932 at the hands of a neighboring homesteader.

**The St. Regis Airway Beacon** stands in the Bitterroot Mountains in Mineral County. The International Derrick & Equipment Company of Columbus, Ohio, fabricated the tower in 1935 as part of a larger nighttime navigational system for commercial and private aircraft crossing western Montana. The beacon illustrates the federal development of the country's airway transportation corridors. ✪



## Donations Aid New Fourth-Grade Textbook

The Montana Historical Society's new fourth-grade textbook, *Montana: A History of Our Home*, has gone to press, thanks to generous donations from both individuals and foundations.

The Bill & Rosemary Gallagher Foundation, Inc. donated \$7,000 to the project, and the Montana Professional Teaching Foundation, a nonprofit organization created by the Montana Federation of Public Employees, donated \$5,000. Donations from Rick and

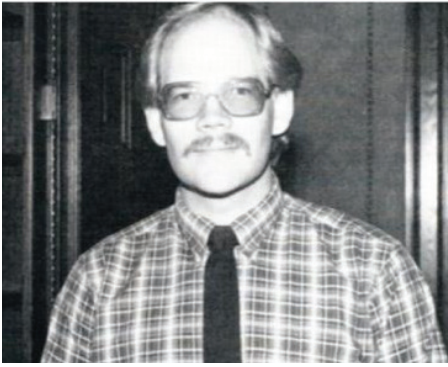
Jane Hays and ninety other education-minded people provided the additional \$10,000 needed to print the textbook and the accompanying teacher's guide.

The new textbook and curriculum meet a real need. The interactive curriculum and grade-appropriate narrative will be a boon to elementary teachers and students across the state. And thanks to the generosity of Montana Historical Society donors, the material will be in classrooms and ready to use next fall. ✪



Chief Financial Officer of the Montana Federation of Public Employees Cathy Novak, MFPE President Amanda Curtis, and MHS Outreach and Interpretive Historian Martha Kohl.

# Lambert Retires



Kirby Lambert came from his home state of Texas to Montana in 1985 to assume the position of registrar for the Montana Historical Society Museum. One career and thirty-six years later, Kirby retired in December 2021.

Lambert fell in love with Montana, often quoting John Steinbeck, who said, “Montana seems to me what a small boy would think Texas is like from hearing Texans.” Lambert embraced the history and culture of his new home and has put his wit and wisdom to work for the people of his adopted state ever since.

Among Lambert’s many talents is an ability to make scholarly material easily understood by the general public, through the countless exhibits he curated, in his numerous publications, and in the public programs he pulled together. The skill served him well through his final position as program manager of Montana Historical Society’s Outreach and Interpretation Program.

MHS employees still sing Lambert’s praises, noting that he never asked anyone to do something he wouldn’t do himself, and he was always ready to lend a hand, from setting up chairs to stuffing envelopes. At the same time, he was willing to take on complex, difficult issues.

“We appreciated his Texas-isms, like “There’s no educational value in the second kick of a mule,” said Martha Kohl, an MHS Outreach and Interpretation historian who worked with Lambert for about thirty years. “He has a dry sense of humor and a keen sense of the ridiculous, which made him fun to be around.”

Jennifer Bottomly-O’looney, senior curator and museum manager, first met Lambert when she was a part-time tour guide and on the exhibit’s maintenance staff starting in 1989.

“Smart, talented, and very

funny, Kirby is also incredibly generous, personally and professionally,” Bottomly-O’looney said. “He took me under his wing and helped shepherd my career. A mentor and a colleague, he is someone I can always go to for advice. And he can even take credit for introducing me to my husband, Doug!”

Lambert is known for saying that the best part about working at MHS was that he met his wife, Becca Kohl, in the photo archives, where she worked for thirty-seven years.

Just as Lambert fell in love with Montana, the Treasure State fell for him too. In 2015 he was awarded the 2015 Governor’s Humanities Award, which honors individuals and organizations that have made significant contributions in Montana’s communities.

“Not bad for a former Texas boy,” Bottomly-O’looney said. “We all wish you the best for your new adventures!” 🌟

# A Blast from the Past! Mining Montana History

It seems like only yesterday that we gathered with our friends in the Mining City on September 23–25 for *A Blast from the Past! Mining Montana History*.

Coming up on its forty-ninth year, the Montana History Conference is an annual gathering of history enthusiasts from across the state and the nation.

“This was so marvelous,” said Ron Hamm of Elliston, who attended with his wife Connie Hamm. “The people and the speakers—just the big hearts of everyone here to love and encourage one another’s endeavors, and history is the honey that attracts us to this.”

The conference began with workshops on topics ranging from re-registering livestock brands to tips for getting historical books and articles published. The first day also offered an educators’ workshop and the ever-popular, daylong Made in Montana Tour, which included stops as varied as Montana Precision Products and Montana Craft Malt to the Anselmo Mine and Bluebird Mill.

That evening found us in historic Uptown sampling “A Taste of Butte” in a progressive reception featuring the Elks Club, Headframe Distillery, and 51 Below Speakeasy. Afterward, the adventurous joined Ellen Baumler for tales of historic otherworldly encounters, followed by a visit to some of Butte’s most haunted places.

On Friday and Saturday, conference sessions featured a wide array of speakers and topics including scandals at the State Highway Commission and the State Normal College in Dillon, the Great Explosion of 1895, and tales of Butte’s infamous “Galloping Gallows.”

Saturday afternoon, the conference concluded with a variety




Montana Historical Society Director Molly Kruckenberg addresses attendees at the 48<sup>th</sup> Annual “Blast from the Past” history conference.

of field trips highlighting more of Butte’s historic and cultural treasures—including churches, headframes, brothels, and museums.

“What makes a non-Helena conference successful is local support and enthusiasm. And Butte offered that in spades!” said organizer Kirby Lambert, MHS Outreach and Interpretation Program manager. “We would not be able to pull this conference off without help from our Mining City colleagues, especially the staff at the Butte-Silver Bow Archives and a variety of other incredibly dedicated individuals and organizations too numerous to mention.”

Likewise, funding from the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation, Montana History

Foundation, and Montana Resources is greatly appreciated.

If you missed the conference, or just want to relive some of the sessions, we’ve posted selected programs online at <https://mhs.mt.gov/education/HistoryConferenceRecordings>. 

## About Us

The *Society Star* is published quarterly by the Montana Historical Society as a benefit of membership.

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- ✔ Editor: Eve Byron [montanahistoricalsociety.org](http://montanahistoricalsociety.org)

# A Cure for the After Christmas Blues

If you didn't get what you wanted for Christmas, the MHS Museum Store still has a great selection of Montana books, gifts, and souvenirs to purchase.

Treat yourself to a new Montana T-shirt or cap, a special piece of jewelry, Montana-made lotions and soaps, or Montana huckleberry candies and snacks.

We also have the best new books in stock, including *Back-Tracking in Memory*, the new biography of Charlie Russell, written by Nancy Russell; *Make Mine a Ditch*, about the historic backbars of Montana; and *Golden Kilowatts*, the history of Montana Power Company dams.

For winter reading, we also recommend the new book *Home Waters: A Chronicle of Family and a River*, by John Maclean.

Shop online at [mhs.mt.gov](http://mhs.mt.gov) or call the store directly at (406) 444-2890. 🌟



*Fundraising* (cont. from p. 3)

to help honor and preserve the state's history.

Two additional gifts totaling \$60,000 also were received.

The Montana Historical Society is committed to raising \$15 million for the Heritage Center construction and updates to its current historic building.

Already, MHS has raised close to \$7 million. The state's lodging facility use tax will provide an additional \$41 million, and a \$7 million bond from 2005 also is contributing to paying for the project.

"We can't thank everyone enough for their dedication in making the Montana Heritage Center a reality," Kruckenberg said. "I look out my window at the work and see progress every day, due in large part to our supporters."

More information on the project is available at [MontanasMuseum.org](http://MontanasMuseum.org). 🌟

## What's New in Publications

The 2021 winner of the Paladin Award is Kerri Keller Clement for her article "What is a Country Without Horses? Robert Yellowtail and Horse Herd Restoration on the Crow Reservation, 1934-1944."

It was published in the Autumn 2020 edition of *Montana The Magazine of Western History* and selected by the magazine's board of editors. Clement's article also was the winner of the Emerging Scholar Contest in 2020.

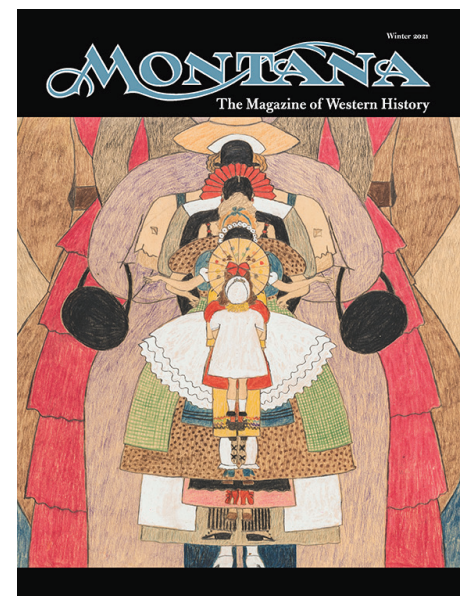
Clement writes about the interwoven histories of the Crow and horses. She focuses on the Bureau of Indian Affairs' slaughter of Crow horse herds in the 1920s and Crow Superintendent Robert Yellowtail's efforts to restore the herds and revitalize horse culture in the 1930s.

In October, magazine Editor Diana Di Stefano and Associate

Editor Jeff Bartos traveled to Portland, Oregon, for the annual Western History Association Conference. They hosted a table in the book exhibit hall; met with past, present, and future authors; and attended presentations. The annual editorial board meeting also is held at the WHA conference. Among other items, the board discussed term limits for board members and the feasibility of a digital version of the magazine.

The upcoming Winter 2021 issue of the magazine calls attention to women's agency, activism, and enfranchisement. This special issue represents a range of new scholarship that explores Western women's history, with a focus on the myriad impediments to enfranchisement that included gender, citizenship, race, occupation, and access to the polls. While passage

of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 was noteworthy, the ongoing struggle for equality merits historians' continued attention. 🌟



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# Montana Historical Society

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The Montana Historical Society invites proposals for the **2022 Montana History Conference**, September 22–24 in **West Yellowstone**, where we will celebrate the **150th anniversary of Yellowstone National Park** with sessions exploring the history of Yellowstone, national and state parks, tourism, outdoor recreation, and the preservation of Montana's scenic wonders.

The deadline for submitting proposals is March 4, 2022. You will be notified by March 30 whether your proposal has been accepted; we generally receive more proposals than the schedule will accommodate.

The conference is primarily comprised of blocks of three concurrent sessions that last one hour and fifteen minutes. Each session has two speakers who each present for twenty-five minutes, with the remaining time used for introductions and joint Q&A; with three presenters, each gets twenty minutes. The program committee pairs speakers whose topics relate in some way or, if you prefer, you can submit a panel proposal comprising an entire session.

We appreciate the time and effort that a presentation entails but are not able to pay for speakers' travel or lodging expenses. We do, however, provide speakers with a complementary conference registration, including meals and events.

Click [here](https://mhs.mt.gov/education/ConferencesWorkshops/HistoryConferenceCallForProposals) to **submit a proposal online or go to <https://mhs.mt.gov/education/ConferencesWorkshops/HistoryConferenceCallForProposals>**

For more information, contact Christine Brown at (406) 444-1687 or [christine.brown@mt.gov](mailto:christine.brown@mt.gov).