



# Society Bulletin

Member newsletter of the Montana Historical Society

WINTER  
2026



## Discovery! ~~Open for Business~~

Free to explore, yours to discover:  
the Montana Heritage Center opens its doors



FROM THE MTHS DIRECTOR

# It took an army.

The Montana Heritage Center is home to the Montana Historical Society, which preserves our past, shares our stories, and inspires exploration, to provide meaning for today and vision for tomorrow. We inspire people’s innate sense of discovery to connect this and future generations to Montana’s story.

On December 2 we reached the culmination of two decades of dreaming, vision, and hard work, with the opening of the Montana Heritage Center. As you will discover when you visit, the Heritage Center is not just a building. It is the home of Montana’s memories. It encourages visitors to explore and engage with our past. It is a community-centered space, inviting visitors to learn about the past together.

Countless people worked tirelessly to make the dream of the Montana Heritage Center a reality. In addition to our major donors, the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation and Norm Asbjornson, 1,300 Montanans and supporters of Montana history contributed to the construction of the Montana Heritage Center, providing \$60 million in private funds for this public-private partnership. We are humbled by their generosity.

Many people contributed to the construction of our beautiful building. Under the direction of the state’s Architecture and Engineering Division, the team at Cushing Terrell worked tirelessly on the design and

functionality of the building. Sletten Construction brought the plans of our architects and engineers to reality. The galleries in the Heritage Center are exceptional, providing immersive experiences based in our history. Our vision for those spaces was brought to life through the work of several design, fabrication, and production teams led by Cinnabar and the Richard Lewis Media Group.

We are indebted to many partners, including the Montana Legislature, the sovereign nations located in Montana, and the fifteen members of the Montana Historical Society Board of Trustees, and to the people of Montana for their support and encouragement.

But, building the Montana Heritage Center would not have happened without the hard work and dedication of the Montana Historical Society staff, past and present. Every member of the MTHS team has contributed not just their time but also their passion, creativity, and enthusiasm to ensure the Montana Heritage Center is the world-class representation of Montana and its past that it has come to be. I am awed every day by these people that I am privileged to call colleagues.

Without the contributions of the MTHS team and all our partners, the Montana Heritage Center would not be the legacy project that it is. We hope that if you haven’t visited yet, that you will soon. And we invite you to join us as we continue our celebrations with a series of Grand Opening events June 25 to 28, 2026.

—Molly Kruckenberg, *Director*



Molly Kruckenberg





During a celebratory ribbon-cutting ceremony on December 2, 2025, hundreds gathered to witness Montana Governor Greg Gianforte, major donors Dennis Washington and Norm Asbjornson, Montana Historical Society Director Molly Kruckenberg, and MTHS Board President Tim Fox commemorate the completion of an extraordinary collaborative effort.

*“The Montana Heritage Center is not just a building. It is the home of Montana’s memories. It encourages visitors to explore and engage with our past.”*

—Molly Kruckenberg



## Top 5 questions about the new Montana Heritage Center

### Q. What are your hours?

A. The Montana Heritage Center is open seven days a week. See column at right for daily hours.

### Q. How much does admission cost?

A. Admission is free and open to all visitors.

### Q. Are guided tours available?

A. Guided public tours of the museum galleries will begin in February 2026. Self-guided tours are available now.

### Q. Is the Library & Archives open?

A. The Library & Archives reference room will open to the public in spring 2026.

### Q. What can I see at the Montana Heritage Center?

A. The Homeland Gallery, the Charles M. Russell Gallery, the Changing Gallery, The Gift Shop, an outdoor Habitats Trail, Norm’s Café, and so much more!

### HOURS

#### Monday

9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.

#### Tuesday

9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.

#### Wednesday

9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.

#### Thursday

9:00 a.m.–6:30 p.m.

#### Friday

9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.

#### Saturday

10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.

#### Sunday

12 noon–5:00 p.m.

Guided tours of the Montana Heritage Center will begin in February 2026, with the Library & Archives reference room opening in spring 2026. A multiday Grand Opening Celebration is planned for June 25–28, 2026.



To learn more about the Montana Heritage Center and see our full FAQ, visit [mths.mt.gov/about/mhc](https://mths.mt.gov/about/mhc)



# A Café with a View

The Dive Bakery will operate Norm’s Café in the Montana Heritage Center, the first year-round café located in Montana’s capitol complex.

The Dive Bakery, a Helena institution for two decades, is bringing its signature cinnamon rolls, caramel rolls, crepes, scones, and locally roasted coffee to the Heritage Center while continuing to operate its popular 11th Avenue location.

“As a fourth-generation Montanan, partnering with the Montana Historical Society feels like coming home,” said Stephanie Boysen, owner of The Dive Bakery. “We already serve many state employees and capitol visitors,



and we’re thrilled to welcome tourists from around the world who will discover Montana’s story at the Heritage Center.”

Norm’s Café honors Norm Asbjornson, a Winifred native who rose from modest beginnings to build AAON, a leading HVAC manufacturing company. Asbjornson’s \$10.4 million gift to the Heritage Center reflects his commitment to giving back to his home state, particularly in education and cultural preservation. His contribution funded both the café and the interactive Mine Shaft Experience exhibit.

“Norm’s story embodies the Montana spirit—hard work, innovation, and a deep connection to this place,” said Molly Kruckenberg, director of the Montana Historical Society. “Having a café that bears his name, operated by a homegrown Montana business, creates the perfect welcome for everyone who walks through our doors.”

Visitors to Norm’s Café will enjoy multiple seating options, including an outdoor patio and the Sleeping Giant Terrace—a landscaped green space with sweeping views of the Sleeping Giant mountain formation. Whether you’re fueling up before exploring our three museum galleries, taking a research break in our Library & Archives, or just enjoying the view with a caramel roll, Norm’s Café is here for you. ■

## LIBRARY & ARCHIVES HIGHLIGHTS

# Unpacking the Archives

As the Society looks ahead to reopening the Larry Len and LeAnne Peterson Library & Archives reference room this spring, the Archives team has been working hard behind the scenes preparing the collections for public access. After months of construction and renovation, every archival stack must be carefully cleaned, unwrapped, inventoried, and reviewed before researchers can safely return.

The scale of this work is significant. The Library & Archives houses thousands of published materials, more than 470 manu-

script collections, over 2,800 small collections, thousands of government records, over 2,000 oral histories, more than 1.25 million photographs, over 10,000 moving images, and hundreds of additional collections still awaiting processing. All Library & Archives staff, in rotating shifts, are working to unbox the Library collection and place books in their new shelving location; meanwhile a team of six Library & Archives staff members have started the demanding process of vacuuming, mopping, unwrapping materials, shifting boxes, organizing shelves, and documenting locations, one box at a time.

This work is more than custodial. Each box and volume must be handled with care, assessed for possible construction-related damage, and stabilized as needed to ensure long-term preservation. Only after this work is complete can the collections be made safely available again to researchers, students, educators, and the public—both in person and online.

This may be the quieter side of public history, but it helps the collections speak volumes about Montana’s history. Before a researcher opens a box or a student encounters a primary source, the Library & Archives team has already done the careful, often unseen work that makes access possible. We look forward to welcoming researchers back once the dust settles—literally—and the collections are ready! ■



Members of the Archives staff tackles dust, debris, and tightly packed stacks as they work to preserve and protect Montana’s history for future generations.



## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### Winter Presentations

Beginning January 15, the MTHS Lecture Series runs every first and third Thursday at the Montana Heritage Center, 225 N. Roberts St., Helena.



Mike Jetty presents Indigenous Stories around the Helena Valley January 20, 2026

### January 20 Indigenous Stories around the Helena Valley

Presented by Mike Jetty,  
co-sponsored by Prickly Pear  
Land Trust • 5:00–7:00 p.m.

### February 12 Poindexter Modern Art Workshop

6:00–8:00 p.m.

### March 14 History Kids Time

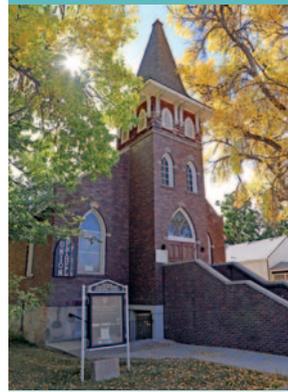
10:00 a.m.–12 noon

### March 28 Historic Winter Ball

5:00–9:00 p.m.

**Save the date** and plan your trip to Helena, Montana, June 24–28, 2026, for the Montana Heritage Center’s Grand Opening Celebration. Festivities launch with Alive@Five on the Capitol grounds along 6th Avenue—enjoy live music, food trucks, and the vibrant local atmosphere as we kick off a week of celebration. Explore the Heritage Center and downtown Helena, where a full slate of history-themed events and activities for all ages will bring Montana’s rich past to life.

Find the full  
calendar of  
MTHS Community  
Events here



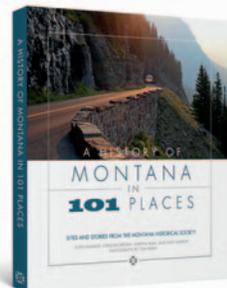
### Union Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church

A pillar of the African American community in Great Falls for more than a century, the Union Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church began holding regular services in the Electric City’s first fire station in 1890. The following year, African American residents gathered with white supporters to lay the cornerstone of their new building.

As in many church congregations, women took the lead in raising funds to construct this brick church. Completed in 1917, the new Gothic-style edifice incorporated the cornerstone of the original structure.

In 2024, a \$497,712 grant was awarded to stabilize and provide safe access to the historic church.

Learn more about Union Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in *A History of Montana in 101 Places: Sites and Stories from the Montana Historical Society*, published by the MTHS Press, and available now!



## Research Fellowships Now Available

The Larry Len and LeAnne Peterson Library & Archives is pleased to announce the return of its research fellowship programs in 2026. The fellowships will resume as the Library & Archives prepares to officially reopen to the public in spring of 2026.

Since 1983, these prestigious fellowships have supported 91 scholars in conducting research on Montana history. Previous fellows have published more than 30 articles in the Historical Society’s acclaimed publication *Montana The Magazine of Western History*, and have authored more than 10 books using materials accessed through these programs.

“We can’t wait to welcome fellows to the new Larry Len and LeAnne Peterson Library & Archives,” said Roberta Gebhardt, program manager for the Library & Archives. “We’ve been working hard behind the scenes to make more collections accessible for their research, and we’re thrilled to once again support scholars who are uncovering and sharing Montana’s stories.”

Fellows will have access to the Montana Historical Society’s extensive collections of millions of historic photographs, documents, and primary source materials. In addition to financial support, fellows receive research and editorial assistance throughout their projects.

Emily Arendt, who received a fellowship in 2022, praised the program’s impact: “Spending three weeks in residence at the archives of the Montana Historical Society offered an unparalleled opportunity to conduct research in a top-notch facility. From day one of research to the final stages of publication, I felt supported by people who were genuinely interested in my success.”

Three fellowships are now available:

- ▶ **James H. Bradley Fellowship**  
\$4,000 stipend (application deadline: February 15, 2026)
- ▶ **Montana History Network Fellowship**  
\$2,000 stipend (application deadline: February 28, 2026)
- ▶ **Dave Walter Fellowship**  
\$1,250 stipend (application deadline: April 1, 2026).

For complete award criteria and application requirements, visit [mths.mt.gov/research/fellowships](https://mths.mt.gov/research/fellowships). Questions may be directed to [mthslibrary@mt.gov](mailto:mthslibrary@mt.gov). ■

James H. Bradley papers, 1864–1881.



# Cultural Resource Database Research Fellow

In 2025, the Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) awarded its Cultural Resource Database Research Fellowship to Lisa Hunt, a Ph.D. candidate in the University of Montana Anthropology department. Ms. Hunt completed her fellowship in the fall. In her dissertation, she is researching the ancestral ties of Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara people to Montana. She is interested in learning how archaeological sites affiliated with these groups relate to the history of their ancestral homeland, their



From left: Professor Kelly Dixon, Ph.D., and Lisa Hunt.

split from the Crow people, and the transition to their current location in North Dakota. Ms. Hunt’s advisor is UM Professor Kelly Dixon, Ph.D.

In addition to a \$3,000 award, SHPO granted Ms. Hunt access to SHPO’s Cultural Resource Database and its 100,000+ digital site records, survey reports, and geospatial data. Her final product will contribute to the database and the body of knowledge about archaeology in Montana. SHPO funds the fellowship using database file search fees. ■

## MTHS PHOTO ARCHIVES

# Bodell Gifts Yellowstone Postcards

Mike Bodell’s childhood visit to Yellowstone National Park sparked a lifelong passion that culminated in one of the world’s most significant collections of park postcards. Mike went on to become a leading expert in postcards, publishing the definitive book on photographer F. Jay Haynes’s early Yellowstone postcards in 1995 and founding The Yellowstone Postcard Exchange, an influential newsletter for collectors that ran from 1996-2001.

In October of 2025, Bodell donated his remarkable collection—approximately 11,000 postcards—to MTHS, where he had spent years researching the Haynes archives. The gift transforms MTHS’s holdings into one of the world’s premier Yellowstone postcard collections.

“It’s rare to see a collection like this,” said MTHS

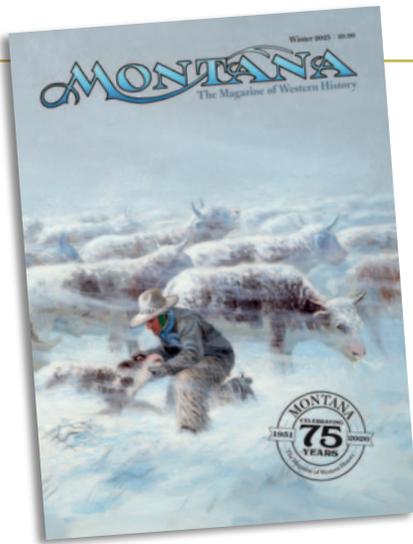
Photograph Archives Manager Jeff Malcomson. “It approaches a comprehensive coverage of YNP post-

card publishers and subject matter, plus it’s a high-quality collection with many cards in excellent condition or better.”

The collection focuses on pre-1915 postcards from Yellowstone’s “stagecoach era,” including cards dating to summer 1897—among the oldest known Yellowstone postcards in existence. While MTHS already possessed a strong collection of Haynes-published postcards, other publishers were underrepresented. Bodell’s donation fills this critical gap.

During the handover, Bodell spent hours sharing his expertise with Malcomson, identifying special interest cards and discussing their historical significance. “It’s an amazing opportunity to gain intimate firsthand knowledge from the actual collector,” Malcomson noted. “Mike put great time, care, and interest into building this collection. His generosity in gifting it is profound.”

Beyond postcards, the donation includes dozens of books on Yellowstone and postcard collecting, park ephemera, as well as archival records documenting Bodell’s contributions to the field. Montana Historical Society Library & Archives staff are processing the materials to be made available for public research access in 2026. ■



## MTHS PUBLICATIONS

# A Montana Treasure Turns 75

Montana The Magazine of Western History is proud to celebrate our seventy-fifth anniversary in print with a special anniversary issue. Robert Lindneux’s 1926 oil painting, *Drifting in a Blizzard, Montana*, graces the wraparound cover, showing a cowboy tending to a distressed calf in a howling snowstorm. Within the anniversary issue, we solicited two special articles: a history of the Museum’s collections by Kirby Lambert, and a history of the magazine by Charles Rankin, along with a history of urban renewal in Helena and a look at the politics of Prohibition in Montana.



Castle Geyser, Yellowstone National Park, circa 1900-1902.



# Historical Societies Partner for Workshops

The Montana Historical Society and the State Historical Society of North Dakota collaborated to deliver professional development opportunities to educators across the Montana-North Dakota border region. Made possible through the Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources Great Plains Region grant and coordinated by the National Council for History Education, this partnership aims to strengthen social studies instruction and expand access to quality professional development for rural teachers.

The collaboration addresses a critical need in the region. Teachers in rural communities often face challenges accessing the same level of professional development available to their counterparts in larger communities. Through this initiative, educators within approximately 250 miles of the Montana-North Dakota border on either side can participate in free workshops designed specifically for grades 6-12 social studies instruction.

The inaugural workshop, “Historical Thinking through Indigenous Histories,” took place last fall in Sidney, Montana, and attracted 20 educators from throughout the region. Participants explored tribal histories of the upper Great Plains using primary sources from sovereign nations in the area, including the Northern Cheyenne, Crow, and Lakota tribes.

The workshop content was crafted to align with both North Dakota’s Native American Essential Understandings and Montana’s Indian Education for All standards—a focus that addresses curriculum standards in both states while honoring the rich Indige-



nous heritage of the region.

An additional grant-sponsored workshop is scheduled for the spring. All workshops include coverage of travel, lodging, and stipend costs for attending teachers.

### About the Grant

Since 2006, the Library of Congress has awarded Teaching with Primary Sources (TPS) grants to build a nationwide network of organizations that deliver educational programming, and create teaching materials and tools based on the Library’s digitized primary sources and other online resources. Each year members of this network support tens of thousands of learners to build knowledge, engagement, and critical thinking skills with items from the Library’s collections.

The National Council for History Education’s work focuses on three areas: professional learning, community building, and advocacy. NCHE sustains relationships with educators and educational organizations and advocates for K-12 history education and the professionalism of teachers. The NCHE Great Plains region serves North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, and Oklahoma. ■



# Montana Historical Society Welcomes New Employees

### Administration

**Mike Bakker**, *Database Administrator*

Mike joined the Montana Historical Society team in September 2025. He is tasked with centralizing data for the new CRM, modernizing and automating Historical Society functions, and creating a welcoming digital patron experience. A lifelong Montanan who moved to Helena in the 1980s, Mike has an everlasting love for history and museums. His early interest in computing began in Havre, where he learned to code on a Commodore 64. In his free time, he continues to build on these skills by developing web pages, designing specialized game systems, and constructing retro arcades.

### Library & Archives

**Rebecca Lewis**, *Registrar*

Rebecca started at MTHS in November and works with the museum’s artifact collection to catalog, unpack the new storage space, and more. She came from Virginia where she previously worked at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum for 11 years. Originally from Washington state, she enjoys hiking and kayaking as well as reading, puzzles, and cross stitch.

**Kurt Keller**, *Archival Photographer*

Kurt grew up in Ohio and attended school at RIT in Rochester, New York, and Kent State in Ohio, earning a degree in photographic illustration. He has lived in Helena with his wife for the past 31 years, operating a photography business for the past 30 years, and worked for State Print and Mail as an image scanning technician for the past 5 years. He is very excited to join the MTHS and looks forward to new adventures.

### Marketing

**Katie Lindner**, *Social Media Coordinator*

Katie joined the Montana Historical Society in November. Born and raised in Helena, she and has a deep love for Montana and enjoys outdoor activities like hiking, skiing, and playing tennis. She graduated from the University of Montana with a degree in Sociology and has experience in marketing. Katie is excited to be on the team and help promote the Montana Heritage Center.

## GIFTS MADE IN LOVING MEMORY AND HONOR

Each year, the Montana Historical Society receives gifts in memory of lost loved ones and in honor of friends. These gifts keep Montana’s history accessible to all. Gifts listed here are those received between August 2025 and November 2025.

*In Memory of Patricia Williams Burkhardt*  
Ted Mead

*In Memory of GB Carson*  
Miranda Carson

*In Memory of Wayne and Betty Cummings*  
Bonnie Nagode

*In Honor of Ellen Fritts*  
Nikki DesRosier

*In Honor of Norman A. Hanpa*  
Jennie Stapp

*In Memory of Mary Hoffmann*  
Susan Near

*In Memory of George Luther, US Army*  
Jack Frantal

*In Memory of Dorothy Oliveira*  
Anne Daniels

*In Memory of Alice Ringquist*  
Neil and Marilyn Ringquist





# MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

225 N. Roberts • P.O. Box 201201  
Helena, Montana 59620-1201

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## MTHS DEVELOPMENT

### *Donor Highlight:* **Oakland Family Foundation**

After MTHS announced in July that it had reached \$59 million of its \$60 million goal and launched a public appeal for the final \$1 million, Montanans and supporters from beyond the state responded with overwhelming generosity. The grassroots effort narrowed the gap to just \$165,000, at which point the Oakland Family Foundation stepped forward with the campaign's closing gift.

The Oakland Family Foundation, a private foundation that supports educational programs throughout Montana, saw the Heritage Center as an investment in the state's future.

"Montana's history belongs to all of us, and ensuring that future generations can learn from and be inspired by these stories is essential," said Ashley Whitney of the Oakland Family Foundation. "We are honored to play a part in bringing this transformational project to completion."

## OPEN FOR BUSINESS

### **The Gift Shop**

The Gift Shop (formerly the Museum Store) has made its move from downtown Helena and is now officially open at the Montana Heritage Center.

You'll find it in a prime spot next to the Central Commons, right across from the Homeland Gallery. It's easier than ever to browse our carefully curated collection of Montana and Indigenous-made goods, plus an impressive selection of Western history books.

We are also launching a brand-new online store with a completely redesigned shopping experience. Whether you're visiting in person or browsing from home, finding and purchasing the perfect item has never been simpler—or more enjoyable.



### **Hours:**

**Mon, Tue, Wed,**  
**Fri, Sat:** 10 a.m.–5 p.m.  
**Thur:** 10 a.m.–6:30 p.m.  
**Sun:** 1 p.m.–5 p.m.  
Shop online anytime:  
[mths.mt.gov/Shop](https://mths.mt.gov/Shop)