

## Living in Historic Times

Now we know what it feels like to live in historic times.

After Gov. Steve Bullock issued the stay-at-home directive for Montana in March, the Montana Historical Society followed suit. We asked employees to work from home if possible and shuttered the museum exhibits, store, Original Governors Mansion and MHS Research Center.

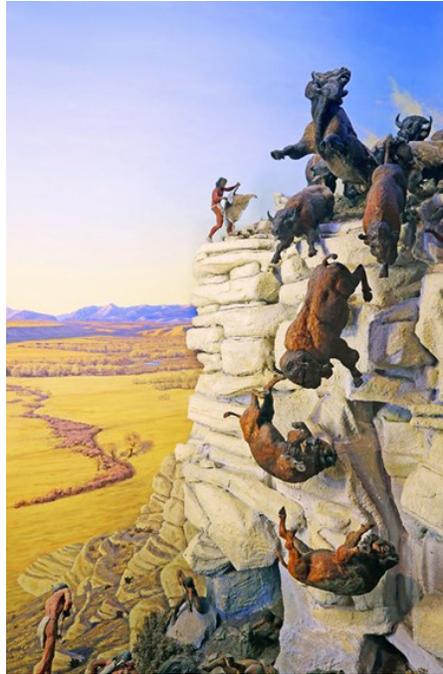
It was difficult and at times depressing. Yet staff members came up with ideas on how to temporarily connect over long distances.

For example, staff created our [Montana COVID-19 Archive Survey](#) to add contemporary voices to the historical record for future generations.

We challenged the public to imitate art that we posted online from MHS collections using objects or people already in their homes. The results were creative, fun, and resourceful, especially the re-creations of our vintage [“Buffalo Jump Diorama” in the Homeland exhibit](#).

It also was a good chance to remind folks of MHS’s [video tour of the Mackay Gallery of Russell Art](#), the [online gallery of Charlie Russell’s art](#), and the [virtual tour of the Governor’s Mansion](#).

Online [educational opportunities](#) were in high demand as teachers scrambled to create engaging work-from-home historical activities. Lesson plans were updated regularly, and staff met weekly on Zoom with social studies teachers to address their needs. The



**Left:** Buffalo Jump Diorama, wax figures by Gardell Dano Christensen, 1952. Background by Dale Livezey, 1988; 1988.118.01. **Right:** Buffalo Jump Diorama, by Nathan Andecker, 2020



store’s sales increased after a social media [promotion for free shipping](#) on purchases of \$50 or more.

Eight new properties were approved for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and await final federal approval. The Research Center answered requests for information and added more digital content online. The museum continued to collect, preserve, and interpret artifacts while preparing for the upcoming exhibit of portraits in our collection. The summer magazine is published, fourteen new National Register signs went out, and three new Centennial Farm and Ranch properties were recognized.

We reopened our doors in June, confident that no matter what the future holds, the past few months remind us that history’s lessons remain more relevant today than ever. 🌟

### About Us

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

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## The Tale of Two Directors

The Montana Historical Society is making history itself by appointing Molly Kruckenberg to be its first woman director in 155 years.

Kruckenberg will take the reins from Director Bruce Whittenberg on October 1, when he steps back from full-time duties. Whittenberg, who has been at the Montana Historical Society for nine years, is retiring but will stay on in a limited role through the end of 2020.

Kent Kleinkopf, president of the MHS Board of Trustees, said executive transitions often can be difficult. But Kruckenberg's longtime experience heading the Montana Historical Society's Research Center, coupled with Whittenberg's willingness to help when needed, should make the change seamless. "Molly has been in a leadership role for many years, and not just in her area of expertise. She quietly inspires people, and her breadth and knowledge of the Montana Historical Society is extensive," Kleinkopf said. "Then to have Bruce volunteer to stay on as a mentor, and to help out in other ways, shows his commitment not just to the new Montana Heritage Center project, but to the historical society as a whole."

Kruckenberg has worked at the Montana Historical Society for twenty-one years, after earning a bachelor's degree in history and a master's degree in library and information science from the University of Pittsburgh. She said she is honored to be selected as the new director, noting that Whittenberg has positioned MHS for a bright future. "This is an exciting time for our institution as we approach construction of the Montana Heritage Center," Kruckenberg said. "As the new director of the Montana Historical Society, I will ensure that all Montanans have the opportu-



Molly Kruckenberg

nity to learn from, interact with, and enjoy our history. Our staff is amazing, their work is exceptional, and I look forward to the opportunities and challenges that come with the position."

Whittenberg is a former Lee Enterprises publisher who led the Billings Gazette, Helena Independent Record, and Iowa's Quad City Times. He founded Leadership Montana in 2004 and took the helm of the Montana Historical Society in 2011.

Whittenberg's largest accomplishment for the Montana Historical Society was getting bipartisan support during the 2019 legislative session for construction of the \$52 million Montana Heritage Center, after more than a decade of efforts.

Yet Senate Bill 338 isn't just about the Montana Heritage Center, Kleinkopf noted. It also includes a provision for historic preservation grants for public and private museums and historic properties across Montana. "Those grant opportunities are in perpetuity for all sorts of organizations around the state, in every county," Kleinkopf said.



Bruce Whittenberg

"Bruce was a key negotiator on that part, even though he might not be willing to 'fess up to that, but he was. Bruce is, without a doubt, the most successful director we have had in our lifetime. He had a world of experience coming into the position and has been an exceptional fundraiser. With his robust enthusiasm, he has that inspirational ability to bring people on board."

Whittenberg plans to remain in Helena and hopes to see more of his grandchildren, Lula and Oliver, who live near Seattle. He looks back on his time as historical society director fondly. "Believe it or not, the MHS is a whole lot less about the director than it is about the highly skilled and passionate people who make the director look good," Whittenberg said. "I could not be more proud to have had the opportunity to be on this team. Under Molly's leadership, it will only get better."

This story was breaking news across the state and reached almost 6,000 people on social media within twenty-four hours of the announcement. 🌟

# Montana Heritage Center Moves Forward



An artist's rendering of the proposed Montana Heritage Center design shows what the \$32 million facility could look like from an overview. The proposal calls for the new addition to be built on Sixth Avenue. Illustration courtesy of Cushing Terrell

On June 8, the Helena City Commission unanimously agreed to vacate a short portion of Sixth Avenue, between Sanders and Roberts streets, to accommodate the new Montana Heritage Center design.

“We are thrilled with the support from the commission,” Montana Historical Society Director Bruce Whittenberg said after the meeting. “We look forward to working with

our neighbors throughout the construction process.”

The original Heritage Center design from a decade ago envisioned an underground tunnel across Sixth Avenue to connect the existing Veterans and Pioneers Building with the new Heritage Center. But when Cushing Terrell (formerly CTA) considered that arrangement, they quickly realized the many constraints of that design.

“Although a preliminary concept for a new Heritage Center was developed in 2010, we needed to start the design process from the beginning, not only to update the concept, but to incorporate new directives and priorities,” said John Lewis, director of the state Department of Administration, which is in charge of constructing the facility. “The main concerns communicated to us throughout the site selection process were for access, visibility, and parking. These important considerations are at the forefront of this entire process.”

The new building is meant to mimic the diversity of Montana’s landscape. It’s the first new structure on the Capitol Campus in almost 40 years, and the architects noted that this is an amazing opportunity to create a spectacular structure that complements the capitol while reflecting all that makes Montana special.

Groundbreaking is scheduled to take place this summer. 🌟

## Centennial Program Doesn't Slow Down

Although the pandemic forced Montana Historical Society interpretive historian Christine Brown to put her series of “Meanwhile, Back at the Ranch” lectures on ice indefinitely, it didn’t put a stop to promoting this popular program.

In lieu of bestowing owners with their new roadside signs during her presentations, Brown mailed the signs to each owner. Most owners were delighted to get a surprise package in the mail, especially after a few weeks of quarantine.

The quarantine also helped some farm and ranch families clear their desks, gather up family docu-

ments, and apply for Centennial Farm and Ranch status. New inductees include the Bunyak Farm in Sunburst, established in 1920; the Benson’s Upland Farm near Plentywood, established in 1907; and the Danielson Farm near Homestead, established in 1906.

These farms never left family ownership, still retain some or all of the original acreage, and are in production by a lessee. The Bunyaks, Bensons, and Danielsons will soon get a signed certificate from the governor and a shiny new roadside sign to mark their property. 🌟



Bonnie Stringer Anderson is delighted with her new Centennial Farm and Ranch roadside sign. Photo provided.

# One Million Newspaper Pages Now Online

More than one million pages of Montana's newspapers, and the stories they carried about lives, deaths, disasters, and everything in between, are now available with the click of a few computer keys through a Montana Historical Society project.

The Digitized Montana Newspapers Project involves two free online resources that allow the public to search newspapers dating back to 1864. Digital Projects librarian Natasha Hollenbach said that newspapers are one of the most used collections at the Montana Historical Society, which is why the organization started digitizing them in 2009 through a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Through the program known as [Chronicling America](#), more than 324,400 pages from at least 94 Montana newspapers from 1864 to

1963 can be found online. The second resource is [Montana Newspapers](#), which is a searchable database containing more than 687,000 pages from 114 Montana town, county, school, and tribal newspapers dated from 1873 to 2018. The newspapers on the two sites don't overlap, and MHS continues to add content to both.

"The [MHS newspaper collection](#) is primarily microfilm, which often is challenging to work with," Hollenbach said. "Having [material online](#) also provides access for people who can't travel to Helena. Previously, researchers had to know the date and location of an event to find an article, or they had to spend days looking page by page on microfilm. Now they can search more than one million pages from Montana newspapers and find things they

never would have known to look for."

Molly Kruckenberg, program manager of the MHS Research Center, noted that newspapers are an incredible source for researchers, genealogists, students, communities, and anyone else who wants to look at the past. Montana Newspapers' content selection is based on a geographical town or county, while Chronicling America focuses on a theme or topic. For example, content from after 1922 was digitalized on Chronicling America with an eye on the boom and bust cycles in mining, logging, agriculture, and the oil industry.

For more information on the project, call Hollenbach at (406) 444-7428 or email her at [nhollenbach@mt.gov](mailto:nhollenbach@mt.gov). The collections can be found at [mhs.mt.gov/research/collections/newspapers](https://mhs.mt.gov/research/collections/newspapers). 🌐

## Archiving COVID-19 for Historians

BY JODIE FOLEY

MHS RESEARCH CENTER

The Montana Historical Society is capturing the thoughts, stories, and images of our residents as they navigate life during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Two surveys were launched in March, one for students and one for the public. They were part of a challenge to help pass the time, while collecting information for future generations and historians.

The ongoing surveys include about a dozen questions, including what precautions are being taken, how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting jobs, and what the atmosphere is in their communities. Responders also can upload photos, artwork, poems, videos, or other media to inform future generations about the COVID-19 experience.

As of June, nearly 370 responses

were received—213 from students and 164 from the general public. Responses came from many smaller communities like Arlee, Hysham, and Wibaux, as well as Montana's larger cities like Billings, Helena, and Missoula.

Coping tools often involved using technology to connect with family and friends, including online video chats. Walks, hikes, and other outdoor activities also were common.

When listing challenges or disappointments, students spoke about missing friends, teachers, and school events. Non-students listed loneliness, anxiety, and feeling cooped up and cut off from loved ones.

People commented on the quiet streets, concerns for local businesses and efforts to help, including signs in windows supporting healthcare workers.

Answers to questions about

changes brought by COVID-19 centered on the economic impact, the need to focus on what is important like family and relationships, and changing definitions of heroes—many saying they howled with the world at 8 p.m. each night in support of those on the medical frontlines.

And finally, when asked what they wanted to share with future Montanans, the responses varied, but many focused on hope for lessons learned:

*"I hope that folks in the future can look back on this time and say, 'People back then really used this crisis as an opportunity to focus on what truly matters, and to heal the political and socioeconomic wounds that were laid bare by the virus.'"*

Share your thoughts and experiences of COVID-19 at <https://mhs.mt.gov/about/QuarantineActivities>. We want to hear from you! 🌐

# Longtime MHS Exhibit Preparator's Death Leaves Void

The death of longtime museum preparator Todd Saarinen on May 26 left a huge void at the Montana Historical Society. He will be deeply missed by his colleagues, both for the amazing caliber of his craftsmanship and his inimitable personality.

"There is no one else quite like Todd," museum administrator Jennifer Bottomly-O'looney said. "He was one of a kind, a vibrant and essential part of the museum team, and a dear friend."

Saarinen began working at MHS while still a teenager. He helped with the construction of the *Montana Homeland* exhibit, MHS's contribution to the celebration of Montana's statehood centennial, which opened in the fall of 1988.

Following art school in Arizona and other ventures, Saarinen returned to MHS in 1993 as a full-time preparator. Since then, every exhibit or other building project bore the mark of his expertise.

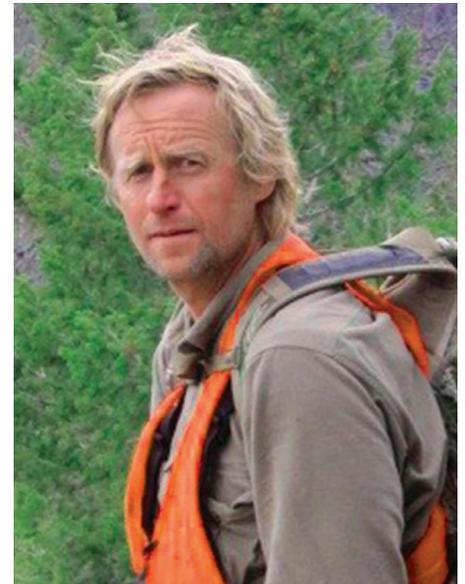
"Todd could build anything,"

noted exhibit designer Roberta Jones-Wallace. "His skill was matched only by his creativity! Our exhibits, and our visitors, were the beneficiaries of his talent. It is hard to put into words just how much he contributed working here."

Because he shied away from public attention, most people never knew who to thank for construction of the museum's award-winning exhibits.

Saarinen was born in Butte and grew up in Helena. He was an avid outdoorsman who was most at home hunting with buddies, hiking, or working alone in his woodshop. True to his love of Montana and his Scandinavian roots, Todd relished cold weather and would, occasionally, don a lightweight jacket if the temperature dipped below zero. Retired museum technician Vic Reiman credited Saarinen as being "the most creative curser I have ever known."

Bottomly-O'looney said she and her coworkers feel lucky that Saarinen shared his skills and his life with them. "We are thankful for having been able to work with him for so long and the fact that, even though Todd is gone, we are still surrounded by his extraordinary craftsmanship and artistry," Bottomly-O'looney said. 🌟



## History Conference Gets Real—Virtually Anyway

While hindsight might offer perfect vision, predicting the future is not easy. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are canceling for 2020 the eagerly anticipated 47th Annual Montana History Conference—**20/20 Vision: Looking Clearly at the Past.**

Instead, the gathering will take place in 2021.

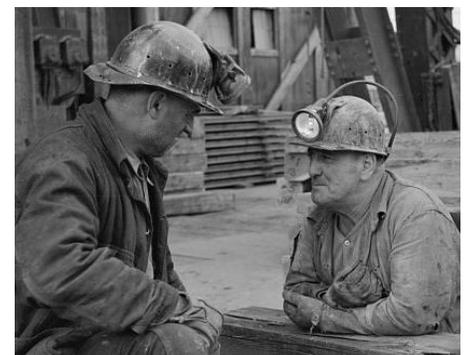
"Butte is just too unique of a place to capture virtually," MHS director Bruce Whittenberg noted. "So we will wait until we can gather in person to present the lineup we had originally planned for the Mining City this fall. Hopefully, all our speakers will still be able to join us, and we will attract more attendees than ever next year."

In the meantime, MHS staff are planning a virtual, nontraditional conference for September. "We are not sure exactly what that's going to look like," said Outreach and Interpretation Program manager Kirby Lambert. "But we have a creative team and promise to come up with something worthwhile, even if it won't be quite as much fun as gathering in Butte."

Stay tuned for more details on this year's virtual gathering and mark your calendars now for the 48th Annual Montana History Conference to be held in Butte on September 23–25, 2021, at the Copper King Conference Center.

2022 will find us in West Yellowstone celebrating the

150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Yellowstone National Park and the birth of "America's Best Idea." 🌟



We will see you in Butte in 2021. In the meantime, we are putting our heads together to unearth an exciting virtual experience for this fall. Untitled photograph of Butte miners by Arthur Rubenstein, Library of Congress LC-USF33- 003109-M2.

# Longtime Alder Gulch Steward Passes Away

BY ELLEN BAUMLER  
FOR THE SOCIETY STAR

May 22, 2020, marked the end of an era with the passing of Alder Gulch legend John D. Ellingsen. For more than forty years, Ellingsen was a careful steward, interpreter, and advocate for Virginia City and Nevada City.

Born in Great Falls in 1947, history captured his imagination early on. By 1972, armed with a master's degree in history and applied arts from Montana State University, he was working for the Bureau of Land Management at Garnet when Charles Bovey offered him a job at Virginia City. Ellingsen took a substantial pay cut to become the working backbone of Bovey's efforts at Nevada City and Virginia City. Twenty-five years later, Ellingsen was indispensable and came with the deal when the State of Montana purchased the Bovey properties. He realized a pay raise from his \$7-an-hour job and gained a title: curator of history.

Ellingsen was as much a fixture in Alder Gulch as any character he interpreted. His uniform included jeans rolled at the cuffs, a plaid flannel cap, and a huge chain full of keys—literally keys to both cities—that jangled with every step. Ellingsen was enthusiastic, accommodating, sensitive, quirky, and full of encyclopedic facts. He truly had a story for every nail.

Ellingsen's legacy goes beyond storytelling and interpretation. The music machines in Bovey's world-renowned collection had fascinated Ellingsen since childhood. He studied under experts for months, learning how to replace parts and keep the machines blaring out their old-time tunes. He also shoveled loads of snow off sagging roofs and did all kinds of building repairs.

Although unrelated to the Boveys, he was unquestionably their spiritual heir. He was so meticulous in preserving Virginia City's historic



layers and so respectful of his mentor that even disposing of Bovey's cigarette butts became a major controversy.

Ellingsen received many honors, including a Special Governor's Award for Historic Preservation in 1997 from the State Historic Preservation Office, recognizing him for his lifetime devotion and stewardship. In 2017, Virginia City's Discovery Park was dedicated to him. Ellingsen's book, *Witness to History*, preserves some of his legendary stories, but those of us who learned from him directly will be forever grateful. It was a privilege to have known him. 🌟

## New Faces at MHS



**Vickie Sheppard** is the new grants and contracts coordinator for the Montana State Historic Preservation Program.

Sheppard moved to Montana after living in Portland, Oregon, for forty years. She has a bachelor's degree in finance and a master's degree in accounting from Alameda University.

She cofounded an electronics manufacturing company that made live sound reinforcement consoles used by U2, Garth Brooks, Steve Miller, and other high-end acts. She spent the next twenty-five years working with manufacturers

at the controller/plant accountant level, including a \$20 billion garage door manufacturer, an art glass manufacturer, and one of the largest smoked salmon producers in the country. Sheppard also worked for ERP software providers and gleaned experience in government accounting, then was the corporate controller for a \$100 million ambulance conglomerate.

She has three grown daughters and enjoys hiking, rafting, four-wheeling, and both water and snow skiing.

**Steffany Wood** is joining the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) as a short-term employee to manage the shared SHPO and University of



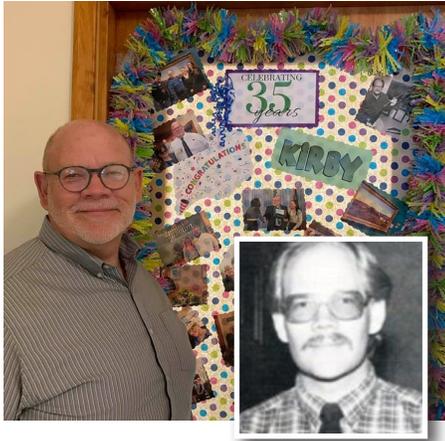
Montana Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Project.

University of Montana anthropology student interns will use GIS to digitize the maps of almost 6,000 cultural resource properties (including historic properties, archaeological sites, and traditional cultural places) and almost 6,000 cultural resource inventories across nine counties in western Montana.

Wood's primary role will be to process and import the digitized GIS files into SHPO's State Antiquities Database. This is the fourth summer

*New Faces (cont. on p. 7)*

# Lambert Celebrates 35 Years at MHS



In May, Kirby Lambert celebrated his thirty-fifth anniversary as a Montana Historical Society employee.

“I’ve been extremely lucky to be

associated with such a great place and so many wonderful people,” Lambert said.

He was hired sight unseen in 1985 as museum registrar. He arrived from his native Texas a short time later intending to stay a year—or maybe two. “If you had told me when I started that I’d still be here thirty-five years later, there’s no way I would have ever believed you,” he said.

Lambert served four years as registrar, thirteen years as curator of museum collections, and five years as curator of art before assuming his current duties as program manager for Outreach and Interpretation in 2007. He’s curated more than two dozen exhibits, authored or coauthored

almost twenty books and articles, and attended thirty-five annual history conferences, masterminding the last thirteen of those gatherings.

However, Lambert admits that meeting his wife, Becca Kohl, who worked for thirty-seven years in the MHS photograph archives, was by far the most important milestone.

MHS Director Bruce Whittenberg notes that in an iconic institution of western history, Lambert has a history all his own. “He is our ‘go-to source’ for the stories and perspectives that have shaped our state’s and this institution’s heritage. Kirby is as big a part of the history of the MHS as anyone in the past 155 years.” 🌟

## New Faces (cont. from p. 6)

the project has run. Wood hopes to add about 12,000 digitized GIS files to the database by the end of the fall.

Wood worked at SHPO from 2014 to 2016 as the cultural records assistant. The position was her first foray into the world of historic preservation and cultural resource management. After leaving SHPO and moving to Michigan with her husband, she started working on a master’s degree in historic preservation from Eastern Michigan University.

“I’m excited to be back in Helena and working at SHPO this summer,” Wood said.



**Jeff Bartos** is the new associate editor in the Montana Historical Society’s publications program. Bartos will divide his time between editing

*Montana The Magazine of Western History* and MHS Press book projects.

Bartos earned his PhD in history

from Montana State University in Bozeman in 2018. His research looked at the careers of three prominent American mining engineers who worked for British mining and investment firms in South Africa and western Australia.

“While these are strange times to start a new position, the welcome I’ve received from everyone here at MHS has been incredible,” Bartos said. “I’m looking forward to meeting everyone as we open back up, and if anyone wants to nerd out about mining history, come find me!”

The Montana Historical Society is pleased to have Bartos here to share his expertise on Montana history and apply his skills to manuscript development and photo research.



**Eric Newcombe** is the new historic architecture specialist at the Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).

Born in the San Bernardino Mountains of Southern California, Newcombe grew up in the Lake Arrowhead community surrounded by four generations of family members.

Newcombe attended Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, majoring in secondary history education. He taught at Williams High School in Arizona and Rim of the World High School in California before heading to Colorado State University (CSU) for a master’s degree in public history, focusing on historic preservation.

Newcombe is excited to start his new job and exploring a new state. An avid lover of movies and baking bread, he plans to spend some time reigniting those hobbies while taking advantage of Montana’s outdoor scene through hiking, fishing, and camping.

“I look forward to being a team member at the SHPO and working with the Montana Historical Society overall,” Newcombe said. 🌟

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## We love our volunteers!

We love our volunteers! Typically, volunteers receive longevity awards at an annual volunteer appreciation luncheon. This year, volunteer coordinator Katie White made socially distant deliveries to celebrate their milestones of service. Pam Hulbert celebrated thirty years of service, and Mary Gail Carmony, Patti Shearer, and Barbara Smith have shared their skills with us for twenty years. Elaine LaCroix has volunteered for fifteen years, and Marie McAlear and Julie Stoner have helped out for ten years. Hitting the five-year volunteer mark are Bill Anderson, Glenda Bradshaw, and David Clark-Snustad. Thank you for all your years of dedicated service. 🌟