

**Montana Historical Society
Board of Trustees Quarterly Meeting
January 16, 2025, 9 A.M. MST
Opportunity Bank Conference Center
1550 Vandelay Ave
Helena, MT 59601**

CALL TO ORDER:

Tim Fox called the meeting to order at 9:01 a.m. Jenni Carr took roll.

Montana Historical Society Board of Trustees members present: Norma Ashby Smith, Kim Briggeman, Tim Fox, Mary Helland, Bill Jones, Pete Johnson, Lorna Kuney, Steve Lozar, Rachel Reckin, Ken Robison, Bill Whitsitt, Candi Zion

Montana Historical Society Board of Trustees members attending virtually: Carol Donaldson, Jay Russell

Montana Historical Society Board of Trustees members excused: Jude Sheppard

MTHS Staff present: Molly Kruckenberg, Director; Emily McKeever, Administrator; Jenni Carr; Administrative Assistant/Membership Coordinator; Ginny Sullivan, Development Officer; Martha Kohl, Outreach and Education Program Manager; Roberta Gebhardt, Library and Archives Program Manager; Jennifer Bottomly-O'looney, Museum Program Manager; Jeff Bartos, Publications Program Manager; Pete Brown State Historic Preservation Program Manager

Steve Lozar blessed the meeting in Salish.

Review of Minutes:

Motion: Ken Robison moved to approve the October minutes. Mary Helland seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

President's Report – Tim Fox

Tim announced the Heritage Keeper Award nominations have gone live. The Heritage Keeper will be awarded at the April board meeting. Ginny added that the press release went out Wednesday.

Tim thanked the staff for their work and said MTHS staff have a lot to be proud of and an exciting year ahead.

Tim explained that the budget office has requested a motion to use money from the Bair Trust to pay the salary of a modified public relations position. This was previously approved in 2019, but it ended up being unnecessary. Molly provided a memo with that information. Pete asked if there was currently an employee in the position or if this would be a new position. Ginny clarified that there was currently an employee in the position, Claudia Bickel.

Motion: Bill Whitsitt moved to approve the use of up to \$200,000 from the Bair Trust for a modified public relations position until other funding is available. Carol Donaldson seconded.

Discussion on the motion: Rachel asked for clarification on the term “non routine” position. Molly answered that it is a non-routine position because they assist the development office which is still a new department within MTHS. Ken asked how there is \$200,000 in interest on a \$500,000 donation. Bill Jones stated that he believes a lot of the interest has been accruing as the donation happened in 1985. The position would be paid for through the interest and not dip into principle. Kim asked if it was a position through the State of Montana or MTHS. Molly clarified that the position is with MTHS, and “public relations” is the classification of the position since she works with the public, but she helps in development.

Restatement of the Motion: Bill Whitsitt moved to approve the use of up to \$200,000 from the Bair Trust for a modified public relations position until other funding is available. Carol Donaldson seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Bill Jones requested a report on the trust accounts. Emily McKeever offered to provide a report by the next board meeting.

Director’s Report – Molly Kruckenberg

Molly began her report by announcing that the Heritage Center will be opening this year which is an exciting prospect. She is confident the Heritage Center will be open by November.

MTHS Staff Update: Molly continued her report with a staff update. Publications manager, Jeff Bartos introduced Luke Duran, Graphic Designer and Shannon Kelly, Associate Editor. Sue Leferink introduced Bennet Aube, IT System’s Support. Jerry McGee introduced Myles Chandler, Security Guard and acknowledged Allison Leake as the new Event and Facilities Coordinator who was not present but will be starting on Tuesday. Finally, Molly introduced Jay Tussing, Sales Associate and Stacey Martell, Accountant.

Motion: Norma Ashby Smith moved to approve the hiring of new employees. Lorna Kuney seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

This quarter MTHS had three retirements in Eve Byron, Public Relations; Roberta Jones-Wallace, Museum; and Tammy Ryan, Publications Business Manager. Molly wished them all a happy retirement. Lorna asked if MTHS provided anything for the retirees. Molly said MTHS does not, but staff did recognize them at their last All Staff Meeting.

Three staff members received longevity awards within the state of Montana: Melissa Munson, Dave Colamaria – both 5 years and Mary Ann George – 15 years.

Statistics: Molly provided statistics regarding visitors, reference interactions, and outreach attendance. She continued with membership statistics, and social media statistics. Molly mentioned that items continue to be accessioned.

Montana Heritage Center Update: Work continued through the summer and early fall on the exterior of the Heritage Center. Current work is ongoing in the renovation with abatement and

reconfiguration of spaces. The Homeland Gallery has a lot of changes with wrapping up finishing the base of the space so that Cinnabar can come in and start installing exhibits.

The museum finished moving into the addition with a huge effort and thanks to Kendra Newhall who organized the majority of the move.

Molly was able to travel to Boston to meet with RMLG who are working on the media enhancements throughout the Heritage Center. Molly shared a video of one of the mock-ups, "Homestead Life." She explained that the quotes and photos in the videos came from Roberta in Library and Archives.

In addition to construction, Molly stated how MTHS staff are working behind the scenes to prepare for opening such as hiring event staff, planning procedures, and other administrative tasks.

Legislative Update: Molly revisited the LC2079 Attachment bill to the Department of Administration that was discussed heavily at the October 2024 meeting. She announced that the bill was killed and would not go through. Tim stated it was a relief and explained how it was unnecessary. Molly mentioned that MTHS staff are currently tracking 56 bills. One that is being closely watched is HB166 which will Revise Montana Historical Society laws (repeals termination dates) and HB5 Long Range Planning (Funds to replace boiler at the Original Governor's Mansion). Tim said board members are welcome and encouraged to monitor bills as well and if anything comes up that they have questions or concerns about to reach out to Molly.

Rachel asked about a bunch of bills she's seeing posted about "generally revising state preservation" laws, and if staff have any information on them. Molly clarified there is no text available currently, but she is watching those closely and will update if there is anything of concern that arises.

Molly reviewed the requested budget that is currently in front of the legislature. MTHS is requesting about \$340,000 in the budget that will primarily cover the Employee Pay Plan. There is an additional request for funds for a new Customer Relations Management (CRM) software and a staff member that would manage that, and other databases used by MTHS staff.

There are board members that are up for senate confirmation: Kim Briggeman, Bill Jones, Tim Fox, Rachel Reckin, Pete Johnson, and Candi Zion. Molly asked these board members to attend their confirmation hearing and say a few words.

Bill Whitsitt asked if there are any questions of the increase in budget, how should MTHS staff and board respond. Molly stated that about half of the budget comes from the General Fund and the other half comes from the Bed Tax (hotel accommodations etc.). Steve Lozar reminded the board that the Bed Tax fund saved MTHS from a huge deficit one year as their General Fund request was dismissed.

Membership-Development-Communications Report – Ginny Sullivan

Molly introduced Ginny as the new Development, Membership, and Communications/Marketing Manager. Moving forward, there will be one report covering the three items instead of broken out. Ginny thanked the staff and board and then began the public relations report. Ginny is working on

modernizing and expanding outreach efforts as MTHS gears up to open the Montana Heritage Center. She is honored to lead the effort and grateful for the support of other MTHS staff as she transitions into her new role.

Ginny summarized several of the positive news reports that have gone out regarding MTHS. The social media team continues to turn out great content to keep people engaged with MTHS. She has begun tracking social media statistics so those will change over the coming months, but the idea is to get more accurate. With support from the Department of Commerce, MTHS will receive funding to amplify marketing before the grand opening. Ginny has put in a “limited solicitation” for a graphic designer that will support all programs, and a second one will go out for a website redesign and digital marketing.

Ginny gave an update on membership statistics for the quarter. She announced that with the help of publications manager, Jeff Bartos, a comeback letter to about 10,000 former subscribers will go out this quarter.

Ginny went through the Patron Survey that went out from August-October 2024. She explained this will be an annual survey conducted to see trends over the years. Overall, the survey garnered a positive response, but MTHS staff will want to focus on engaging younger audiences.

Finally, Ginny updated the board on the Development Report. She asked the board to sign “thank you” cards to several donors to show their appreciation for their contribution and support. The year end giving raised \$392,415; the 2024 year-end appeal (equipment for researchers) raised \$79,805. Overall, the Montana Heritage Center has received \$58,918,098.82 which is so close to the \$60 million goal. The Education Endowment is currently at \$3,413,534 and MTHS will continue to fundraise for that cause.

Naming Opportunities: Tribes Today Media named for the Greater Montana Foundation; Children’s Gallery named for Sletten Construction Companies; Library & Archives Conference Room named in Memory of Joan F. and Richard C. Shirley; Montana Reflections Seating Areas named in memory of Mignon Waterman; Amphitheater named for Sletten Construction Companies; Fossil Discovery Feature named for Royal and Norma Johnson; Montana Reflections Seating Areas named for Central Plumbing, Heating, Excavation and the Waldenberg Families; and the Boulder Batholith named in Memory of Roberta L. “Bob” Marks, and for Dennis and Priscilla Dickert.

Motion: Pete Johnson moved to approve the naming opportunities as listed. Carol Donaldson seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Discussion on the motion: Lorna asked if Sletten donated actual money or time/services. Molly clarified it was a monetary donation in the amount of \$1 million total. \$500,000 went to the Education Endowment, and the other to the naming opportunities.

Bill Whitsitt asked about broadcasting at the event center and in the classrooms. Bennet advised that he is working on it, and Bennet will send a link out to the board regarding the tour.

BREAK: The board took a break at 10:24A.M. to reconvene at 10:35A.M.

Program Reports:

Library & Archives – Roberta Gebhardt

Roberta gave an update on the L&A department. Staff were able to move into temporary workspaces in the addition with some staff working in the Event Center, and other staff working in the Scriver building. The nitrate storage vault has been completed so staff were able to move all the nitrate film. The humidity and temperature have been adequate to preserve the nitrate film. The vaults are very important to preserve the film and prevent the nitrate film from spontaneously combusting. Staff are working on processing additional collections they have acquired during the closure. Roberta shared two online collections they have completed digitizing. The Livestock Brand Registrations for Montana (1873-2010) is now available on the Montana History Portal. She shared how these brands can be recorded and traced. [Slide 41] The second online collection was the Montana Places Photomechanical Postcard Collection. Jeff Malcomson has been working on creating metadata for 10-12 postcards per week. Roberta shared an example of the post cards. [Slide 43] Kim asked how to access the collection. Roberta shared the link: [Montana Historical Society Library and Archives | Montana History Portal](#) . Mary asked if there would be any effort to transcribe the postcards for those that are hard to read. Roberta answered that would be a huge undertaking. Lorna asked if the postcards would be a place to find famous autographs. Roberta answered, “that’s a possibility.” The board gave kudos to Roberta and her staff for their efforts.

Administration – Emily McKeever

Emily provided the financial report to the board members. She reviewed pledge payments and gave thanks to Ginny for her efforts with fundraising and development. She let the board know that MTHS has 27 trusts with the Board of Investments. Some are in short-term trusts; others are in long-term trusts. Emily will provide a full detailed report of the trusts at the April board meeting. She reviewed the statement of activities for the department. Emily stated that MTHS is on track for spending the general funds. She explained the budget and there were no questions from the board.

Museum Program – Jennifer Bottomly-O’looney

Jennifer thanked MTHS staff for their help with the Museum move. Now begins the process of unboxing all the artifacts and materials. The shop is ready to use so Jake will begin working on exhibit cases and mounts for artifacts. Cinnabar will be at the Heritage Center next month to begin assisting installation. The plaque to Marilyn Miller was installed outside of the Secretary of State’s office. The plaque honoring Chuck Johnson will be unveiled during the legislative transmittal.

Motion: Steve Lozar moved to approve the loan of the Chinese altar to the Yellowstone Art Museum. Lorna Kuney seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Discussion on the motion: Kim asked the size of the altar, Jennifer said about 5'x3'. Tim asked how it would be transported and if there was insurance. Jennifer stated that someone would pick it up and a certificate of insurance would be provided.

Motion: Ken Robison moved to approve the loan of 18 John L. Clarke pieces to the C.M. Russell Museum. Lorna Kuney seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Outreach & Education – Martha Kohl

Martha provided a tribal plaza brochure that her staff have been working on. One of the tour guides was asked for more information, so they created this as an educational addition that is available at the capitol. It is the first session since 2016 that MTHS has a regular tour program. Tours at the capitol are available 9A.M. to 3P.M. Martha applauded Laura Marsh for her efforts in outreaching and engaging with the community. This spring, MTHS will be sponsoring Native American Studies for everyone.

Montana250 is a program that is attached to O&E. They are working on pop-up exhibits to commemorate the 250th of the United States.

Publications – Jeff Bartos

Jeff began his report congratulating Tammy Ryan on her retirement, and the void she left since she was part of the publications team for over 30 years. There is a plan in place to replace her in the coming months. Jeff gave his appreciation to Shannon Kelly for joining the team. The winter issue of the magazine mailed in mid-December. The Spring 2025 issue is well underway. Publications is planning on doing an “anniversary” issue for the 75th anniversary of the magazine for the Winter 2025 magazine. Working with membership on different projects. Montana the Magazine of Western History is available on Project Muse. A direct mailing went out in the autumn that lost money but gained 183 new subscribers. Shannon Kelly took over the social media from Tammy when she retired. Two new books have been published since the last BOT meeting: The Land of Beginnings by Doug MacDonald; and the Place the Gods Touched Earth an Anthology of Montana’s Poets Laureate created in partnership with the Montana Arts Council. There are some reprints in the works. Publications has collaborated with O&E on an upcoming book, 101 Places, that will be released in late summer. There are several other book projects in the works. The 2026 calendar will be “food themed.” Norma asked if they’ve been asked to put books on tape. Jeff answered that they are working on something with Ian Wilson, author of Catastrophe at Custer Creek, however there is a lot of work and expense involved so it’s something they’ll continue to investigate. Mary thanked Jeff for introducing her to Thomas Savage’s work. Bill Whitsitt commented on the great issue of the magazine, and asked how MTHS markets the books and whether excerpts drive sales of MTHS press books.

SHPO – Pete Brown

Pete gave an update on SHPO. In January, they published the annual report of activities including the goals set in their Historic Preservation Plan. This is located on the website under the “about” tab. He acknowledged Damon Murdo’s Governor’s Excellence award for creating a paperless application process which has made SHPO’s work more efficient. Kate Hampton’s work with the Union Bethel Church applying for over \$700,000 is included in the report. This will help Union Bethel meet ADA standards.

SHPO launched it’s SHPO Brick and Mortar Grant. Lindsay Tran is the lead on the project. There are \$120,000 to award and applications are due February 10. There have been a lot of questions regarding the grant but it’s moving along.

SHPO awarded a contract to an architectural historian, Jessie Nunn to do an architectural survey of Big Timber.

Properties have been officially added to the National Register of Historic Places: Regis Grocery Store, Manley’s General Store in Garnier, Riverside Park in Laurel. Several more have been nominated: Castle Rock Lodge, Butte vicinity; Gardiner Bridge, Gardiner; Farmers Trading Company, Bridger; the Tipton Ranch, Rimini. The board will meet this week to amend or vote on the nominations. There have been some reappointed or newly appointed board members: Mary Williams, Chris Averell, Delia Hagen, Marv Keller, Rose Krieg, Laura Evilsizer, Kellyanne Terry, and Phillipe Gonzales. Ken thanked Pete for mentioning the Union Bethel Church. Ken mentioned the construction costs have increased, so unfortunately, they are short around \$400,000 and will need to rebid the contract but it will go under contract soon. Ken acknowledged the Black History of the church.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Update on Theft of Library & Archives Materials and Sentencing Hearing – Molly Kruckenberg

Molly provided a quick update on the sentencing hearing of Brian DiAmbrosio that happened on December 16, 2024. Mr. DiAmbrosio was sentenced to 6 months in a federal penitentiary, followed by 1 year of probation, and he is required to pay restitution. Work continues in Library & Archives as they search for missing items and work to reacquire them. Tim mentioned that at the last BOT meeting, the plea agreement did not include jail time. Things changed and Mr. DiAmbrosio was sentenced to the 6 months which Tim felt was a better punishment. Mr. DiAmbrosio is required to report to federal prison within a month and will be barred from MTHS property and archives. Jeff added that other agencies are removing his press books and recycling them. Rachel attended the sentencing hearing, and she acknowledged how well the MTHS staff cooperated with the prosecution and FBI. Kim offered kudos to Eve Byron, who sent out a press release after the hearing that was picked up by several news stations.

Break for Lunch The meeting broke for lunch at noon to reconvene at 12:30 p.m.

NEW BUSINESS

Lorna wondered if asked about a soft opening in the summer to engage business at the bookstore. Molly answered that the space would not be ready for the public by the summer. Molly said that work will continue but a soft open will happen in November with the ribbon cutting, and then a large Grand Opening celebration in the spring. Ginny said there will be an early peek for the History Conference attendees.

Bill Whitsitt commended Jenni on the survey and offered to work with her to reach out not only to people who are currently interested in history, but who might not know they're interested in history. He suggested using a qualified research organization and consider thinking about ways to engage with people that aren't yet patrons. Regarding the Event Center, Bill Whitsitt stated that he believed it was on the right track with the use of technology and ability to host events outside of "history." Pete suggested reaching "young professionals" groups in town, hosting events for them, and really engaging with them since they get out and about. Martha added that they have hosted events for Helena Young Professionals, but it was a great idea to reach out to the rest of the state.

Steve offered concern that MTHS has been "accused" of becoming a "Helena" organization and he commended the History Conference for getting out of Helena. Steve remarked that it's not easy to select towns as it comes down to the community and whether events are successful.

Tim said that the people that are attracted to the board are committed to the mission, and he appreciates them. Tim congratulated Norma Ashby Smith who was selected for the Montana Cowgirl Hall of Fame.

Public Comment: Tim asked for public comment. There was none.

ADJOURNMENT:

Motion: Bill Jones moved to adjourn the meeting at 12:49P.M. Mary Helland seconded. The motion passed unanimously.