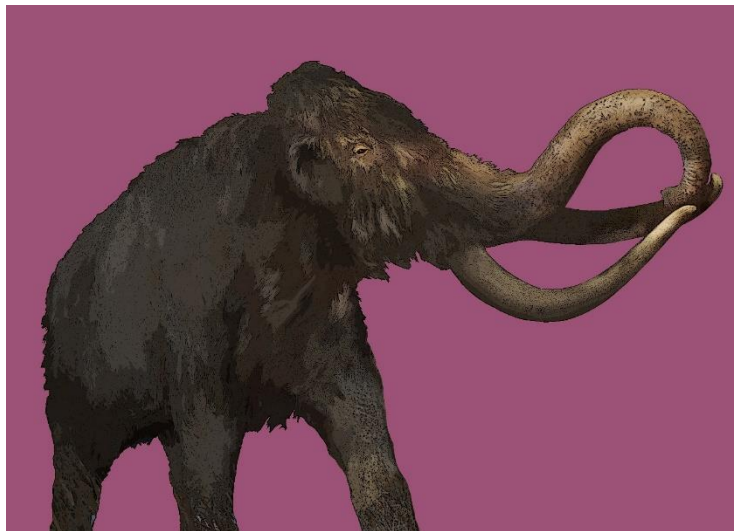


Rambles #14: Unauthorized Musings of a Socially Distanced Exhibit Designer

Birds at the Feeder—I enjoy watching birds at the feeder, not so much the squirrels, or an errant deer. I started a wool embroidery which I call birds at the feeder—but of the little gray birds who winter over—with spring migrations I'm seeing a few new visitors—a pop of bright yellow as an American Goldfinch, a busy excitable flock of Bohemian waxwings, footprints in fresh snow, on neighbor's roof, and a lot of chittering! In the woods we watch for the first bluebirds, flocks of snow or Canadian geese. Robins are colorful residents staring in the windows—everyone busy nestmaking and feeding. In the collections here at the Histo, is an amazing folio of Audubon prints. It was quietly on display for a brief time, our carpenter made a support for this overlarge folio. When paper works are kept in proper conditions (dark, climate and humidity controlled), the quality and colors are pristine! Audubon's studies are breathtaking, his detail exacting, yet capturing movement, life.



Rambles #13: Unauthorized Musings of a Socially Distanced Exhibit Designer



The Exhibits Are Lonely—

Sometimes I swear that our exhibits come alive. With our doors closed for now, things seem to shift slightly—I'm pretty sure Big Snowy (our reproduction mammoth skull) puts on her body and dances around the gallery. I haven't caught her, but I'm sure the skull has shifted, and sometimes the stand she is on seems to be slightly askew!? Sometimes the other skulls too have repositioned... I sometimes think I hear weird

trumpeting, and stomping—did the floor shake a little? Not an earthquake, but something rhythmic, something that makes one want to take one's foot.

If you listen, you might hear, da da tap tap da da da tap...Big Snowy is very light on her feet for something so huge, da da tappity tap.

Rambles #12: Unauthorized Musings of a Socially Distanced Exhibit Designer

Long sleeve—We have in our collections a beautiful Chinese shirt, which we sent out for conservation before our Forgotten Pioneer exhibit. When the shirt came back, the conservator made the comment that the person who wore it must have been a gorilla because the sleeves were inordinately long and the shirt itself quite broad.

For each exhibit we produce, we try to respect the customs and culture depicted. Our Chinese exhibit challenged us in many ways to try to depict the Chinese in Montana and show the clothing in our collections to our best understanding. In my scramble to understand this shirt and other items of clothing I had to reach into my poor memory banks—for I was sure I had seen images of Chinese wearing clothing with overlong sleeves. And indeed, I did find that the Chinese had quite rigorous protocol for clothing, color, and symbols which reflected social status and profession. This lovely shirt with its overlong sleeves may have been worn/owned by a scholar, definitely someone of a higher status since the sleeves would interfere with manual labor.

Each exhibit we do, especially when depicting another culture, challenges my cultural bias—forcing me to try to be as sensitive as possible to representing our collections in the most respectful way I or we understand. We try to include consultants to help us in that endeavor, and to correct things when we get them wrong.



Numbers: 1986.79.21, 1986.79.94, 1986.79.105, and L2014.08.05 (even this image may misrepresent how this shirt was worn, mixing clothing items of different classes to represent the human form.)

Rambles #11: Unauthorized Musings of a Socially Distanced Exhibit Designer

Loss and Darkness—This place of loss and darkness—we've been here before...in transitional stages, birth, adolescence, school, vocation, war, marriage, ...to death, whether those we love, or ourselves. What gives us strength, the courage to continue?

One hears on the news that people are returning to family time, creativity, connection, stories. Past cultures gathered together in slow times (winter), those times when story, community, family, played a larger role: time of rest and replenishment, especially of the spirit.

Rambles #10: Unauthorized Musings of a Socially Distanced Exhibit Designer

What we Carry

Our predecessors, and even ourselves, carried or kept some mementos to help them move forward during hard times. A soldier or warrior might carry a Bible or cross, an amulet or power shirt, maybe a photo of loved ones, a lock of hair. Pioneers carried what they could, sometimes having to jettison possessions along the way. There are stories of abandoned pianos and other furnishings littering the plains as the struggle toward a new land proved harder than was imagined. Pared down to the essence, still we humans hold on to that one most important “thing”—photo, amulet, book, lock of hair—kept secret, kept close to bide one through the darkness.

I muse on this, as this morning I put on earrings, gifts from good friends, and my mom, to shore me up on another day, working remotely, in isolation. I am fortunate to have my dogs, my friends and birth family, to work at a job I love, with passionate and dedicated people. We are not so much different from our predecessors living in remote homesteads, or camps, looking forward to spring and gathering together again in community. Journey through collections on our home page MHS.mt.gov to see what has been carried, saved, treasured. Journey through your own life to find what carries you.

[Click here](#) to download a printout of an immigrant’s trunk from our collection. What do you think it carried to the US from Germany?

Rambles #9: Unauthorized Musings of a Socially Distanced Exhibit

DesignerBaking Bread—Baking bread yesterday I got to thinking about bread baking in the past. I guess, it is a “thing” right now to be baking bread when everyone is trying to limit outside ventures, but in the past usually if one wanted bread, one made it themselves. My understanding is that there was a reliance in capturing “wild yeast” (sourdough), since neat little packets of dry yeast, or even cake yeast was not readily available. Sometimes a starter was shared and kept nurtured. Interesting to note that some sourdough was replaced by “berm” from beer making, and that baker’s yeast has been available for less than 150 years. (thanks to our friends at Wikipedia).



MHS Archive Collection, PAC 90-87.6035-005

Here's an image of Evelyn Cameron making bread in her kitchen, 1904-1908 (slow rising bread). Note her multiple-use surfaces. No fancy appliances, or marble counter tops.

I remember from my early days of baking that older recipes would talk about baking in a slow, moderate, or hot oven—wood stoves had 3 temperatures—slow/moderate/hot. Moderate was roughly the temperature one wanted for baking of bread—maintaining and regulating temperature was a skill. I bet the learning curve produced some chewy results!

Rambles #8: Unauthorized Musings of a Socially Distanced Exhibit Designer

Behind the Scenes—There is a process occurring behind the scenes here at the Montana Historical Society. Work comes in to be catalogued, condition-reported and carefully put away. When we look at objects, or art, for possible exhibition, we assess items for their



looks, sure, but also for their back story (their provenance), their condition (in need of conservation, or good to go?), and how well they fit the story we are trying to tell.

We look at their mount needs (how we will display them) and case needs (how we will protect them). We think about how long an item will need to be on exhibit and plan ways to mitigate exposure on items susceptible to damage

caused by light. Clothing might need a mannequin; artwork, matting and framing; other items small mounts or supports to allow an item to “shine.” Archival and fragile items may need rotation.

It is a process we are used to, but from the outside it may seem as if, in between mounting exhibits, that we aren't we're doing much. Protecting and sharing our history is a charge we take seriously. And like so many professions, what one sees is only a small part of what we do.

Rambles #7: Unauthorized Musings of a Socially Distanced Exhibit Designer

Leger Art—Prairie Edge sent me a tease for Ledger Art, as a place in history, and the lives of the Plains Indians. It joggled my poor brain and brought to mind the winter count we have in the collections here.

As I understand, winter counts were (are) records of events that happen over a period of time. Usually one image for an important event each year.

I must put in a disclaimer here, that I am a simple exhibit designer, not a historian. And though I pick up information from my more scholarly co-workers, I might express it somewhat sideways (less than factual).

Our winter count shows images for a flood (1825), for a meteor shower (1833) the year that “the stars fell”, inter-tribal tiffs, victories, hard winters, and 1838, second year of smallpox.

We are living this historic event, but so too did people in the past. How might you depict an accounting of your life? By the way the Winter Count was created by Medicine Bear, see below.



Winter County by Waníyetu Wowápi Tǎ́ Matǎ́ Wakǎ́ŋ (Medicine Bear), Yanktonai Sioux, Deer hide, ink, paint, ca 1823-1911
Gift of Lee Enterprises, ex. Col. Mathew Lohmiller, 1976.14.01

Rambles #6: Unauthorized Musings of a Socially Distanced Exhibit Designer



My Cabin, Montana, 1866 by Peter Tofft, watercolor, 1996.89.01

Isolation—I was trying to find some good images of homesteading to compare with the isolation some may be feeling currently. Since I am working in isolation it is a bit more challenging, although I do have online connection to some of the Historical Society's collections.

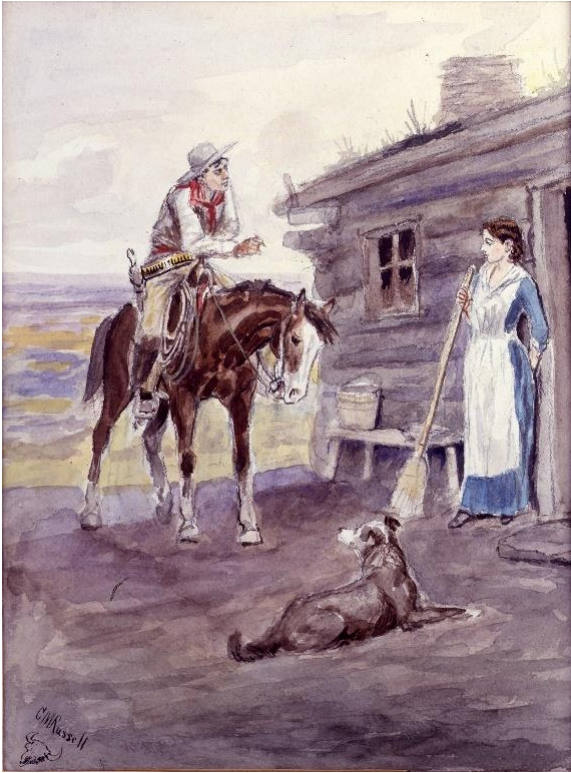
Early homesteaders might find themselves isolated for months at a time in the winter,

and even fair weather often meant hard work, getting food and supplies to weather winter, and prove up. Imagine being in a small one room cabin with spouse and kids. Heat comes from a woodstove, or fireplace, which also doubles for cooking and heating water. No indoor plumbing, a root cellar for perishables. No wifi. Sometimes the only book might be a Bible.

Not a homesteader but a seeker of gold, Peter Tofft painted an ideal scene of himself hunkered down by the fire, reading. Cozy view, though if you look you will see corner of bed at right and table, food and clothing suspended from ceiling and walls to avoid nesting and nibbling of mice and other varmints. That's not a TV over the fireplace, but a painting, connection to others is through books or imagination, occasional trips to town for necessities, mail, and news.

Rambles #5: Unauthorized Musings of a Socially Distanced Exhibit Designer

Stories—Stories, here I go again...we all carry stories with us, family, friends, our own, his- (and her)story—cultures—there is that messy place (that I reside in) where so much comes together. In my own family, we have the mythic story of my paternal grandfather, who ran away from home at age 12, made it to Texas and came to Montana on a cattle drive. Was he enamored with the cowboy and western stories, as was Charlie Russell, such that he was bent to follow that route?



My understanding is that many of the early cowboys, were indeed boys, and young men. Rough living and riding would be more a young person's game—broken bones, bowlegs and creaky joints often the tell-tell mark of an aging wrangler.

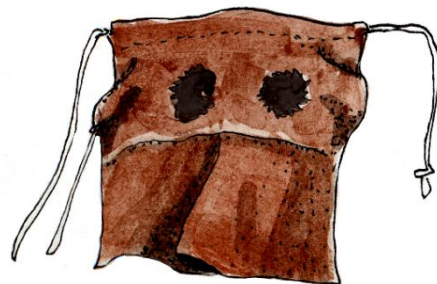
Teddy Blue Abbott writes a tale of cowboy life, adventures on the open range, and the changes that came as homesteaders and others tied up the range, *We Pointed Them North*. He eventually settled down to a small ranch and married life, maybe partially because those early “wild west” days had passed, and age puts a certain sensibility to our heads, if only because our bodies protest the exuberance of our past youth.

Charlie Russell titled this *Cowboy on Horse Talking to White Woman*. MHS Museum Collection, 1980.19.01

Rambles #4: Unauthorized Musings of a Socially Distanced Exhibit Designer

Mask—In this strange time, as so many do, I went to Costco to purchase some items. It is strange now to go to any public vendor and be one of many masked and gloved people. Sometimes we smile at each other for the irony—but unless our eyes crinkle it is hard to tell. It adds to the sense of unreality. At any rate trundling down the aisles behind a gentleman in cowboy hat and vest with a bandana mask—another gentleman coming the opposite way put up his hands as if being robbed (which is how it feels). A chuckle and we all go on our way—but the brief levity lightened my mood.

In the museum, we have a robber's mask on display, a simple square of brown cloth with eye holes cut out. It doesn't seem like it would be very good as a mask, a modest breeze could remove your cover—which may be how it ended up in our collection!

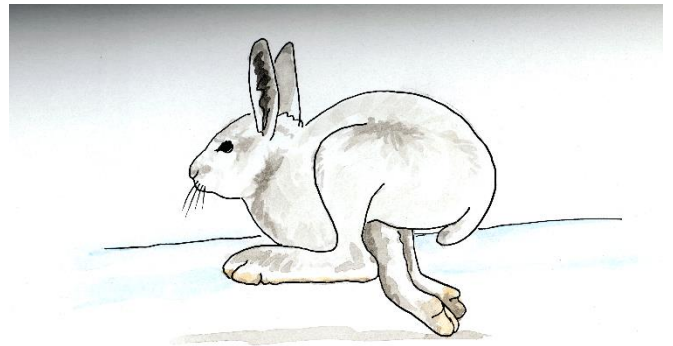


Rambles #3: Unauthorized Musings of a Socially Distanced Exhibit Designer

Joe Scheuerle—We have lots of art at the Histo—Charlie of course is our star, but currently we have an exhibit of Joseph Scheuerle's work in our lobby gallery. Scheuerle was a contemporary of Russell and would meet up with Russell and others to travel to the reservations to paint from life. Scheuerle kept a sort of journal on the backs of many of his paintings—short synopses of his encounter with subjects—sometimes a weather report, sometimes a character report. Much of our Scheuerle collection has been gifted to the society, as is much of our collections. The vision of the state's founders, donors, lenders, staff and public make rich and varied treasures to our collections. We regularly exhibit fits and starts of our collections, usually with thematic exhibits in our Northeast Gallery, and 2-dimensional shows in our Lobby Gallery. We shine objects or highlights of history on our Montana Moments wall in our Homeland Gallery—and have augmented, or updated sections in that same gallery. We augment many of our exhibits with items lent by individuals, other museums and institutions, as we also loan our work to other museums. We are working toward the transition/addition to our current building and new and exciting exhibits and experiences—which will mean working behind the scenes to make it all happen. The talented staff here are reaching out through social media and other media to keep information and excitement going. Our home page is a great resource during this time of isolation. Cheers! The rambling exhibit designer.

Rambles #2: Unauthorized Musings of a Socially Distanced Exhibit Designer

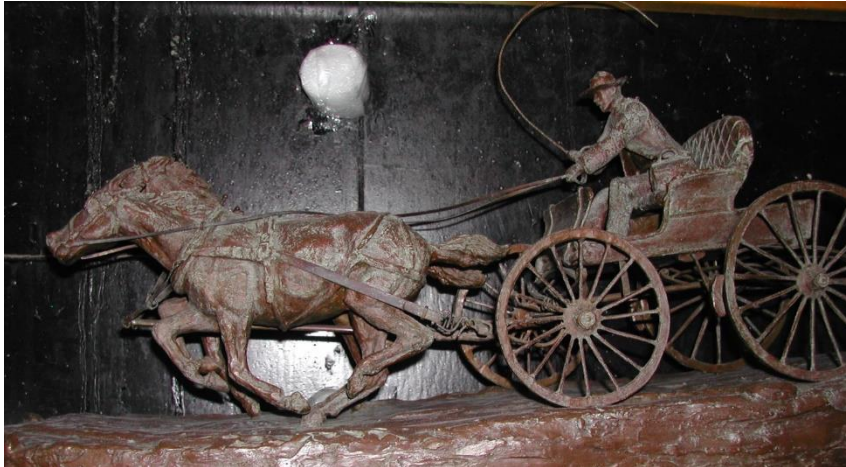
Snowshoes—Trekking with my dogs on Sunday, breaking trail in fresh snow—not enough snow to pull out snowshoes, enough snow to get a workout. I got to thinking about how much our ancestors needed to rely on observation to survive. From observing animals, tracking their movements, finding food or water by watching—a cache hidden by squirrels or mice—game killed by another predator (pay attention, lest you become dinner too)—even to creating tools that benefit movement. Were the first snowshoes created by watching the snowshoe rabbit, whose pear-shaped back feet are mimicked by the shape of some style snowshoes?



Rambles #1: Unauthorized Musings of a Socially Distanced Exhibit Designer

Pioneer Doctor—Reading *Pioneer Doctor* by Mari Grana, a fictionalized account of a real person, Dr. Mary Moore Atwater. Dr. Atwater began her Montana medical career in Bannock, Montana Territory, working for the mining industry. She was an important player in the establishment of the State Tuberculosis Hospital at Galen and worked hard to educate people about health hazards in the camps and early town. She fought hard for

women's rights. She was in Helena during the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918, when doctors were in high demand and sequestering, masks, social distancing were in place. Early doctors traveled on horseback, foot, carriage or wagon—racing out to treat patients in towns and hinterlands. Always, always the prayer of let me be in time...



Earl Heikka captures the drama of the country doctor, racing to an emergency, in this bronze.