



Society Bulletin

Member newsletter of the

Montana Historical Society

SPRING
2026

We can't wait for you to visit!



Save the Date and Celebrate with Us

Since our opening in December, we've welcomed more than 30,000 guests to explore the Montana Heritage Center and discover Montana history. Visitors are exploring the galleries and interacting with the past. They're learning at our lectures, events, and experiences. School students are traveling from across the state for tours of the Heritage Center, the Original Governor's Mansion, and the Capitol. And, most recently, they're digging into our collections in the newly opened Larry Len and LeAnne Peterson Library and Archives.

All this activity is so exciting to see in our beautiful new home. I hear regularly from our visitors that they are returning multiple times to explore our spaces. I see them shopping for Montana-made products and books in our gift shop, eating and drinking in the warmth of Norm's Café, and attending meetings and conferences in our welcoming event spaces.

I hope you've been able to explore the Heritage Center. If you haven't yet, come visit! And make plans to visit us in late June for our History Celebration, to mark the opening of our new home. We're busy plan-

ning a great four-days of history-themed events at the Heritage Center and around Helena.

Over those days, we'll be hosting several different events to welcome you, our members, to the Heritage Center. On June 24, Wednesday evening, we'll kick off the celebration by hosting Helena's weekly, summer music event, *Alive at Five*, on Sixth Avenue. After that, you're invited to join guided tours of our galleries and interpretive trail, historic sites in Helena, and the Capitol. Our curators will share their thoughts on the exhibits with you. We'll celebrate with indigenous food, and we'll keep celebrating with a members-only lunch and a donor gala. The culmination of our celebration will be an event hosted by the Montana 250 Commission in recognition of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

For four days we'll dig into and explore Montana history at the Heritage Center and throughout the Helena community. I hope that you'll mark June 24-28 on your calendars and plan to join us to celebrate the opening of the Montana Heritage Center!

—Molly Kruckenberg, Director



Molly Kruckenberg

30,000
visitors

If you haven't yet made the trip to Helena, there's no better time.

Start planning your visit today:

montanamuseum.org



We're open!

The Larry Len and LeAnne Peterson Library & Archives reopened for in-person research on March 17. The new facility offers expanded access to Montana history through updated technology and improved research spaces.

The space includes eight research tables, six computer stations with access to digitized newspapers and Sanborn maps, and two copiers for scanning materials. Three staff members are available during open hours to assist patrons. A nearby waiting area provides water and secure lockers for personal belongings.

The redesigned space features wall-to-wall bookcases housing photo binders, ready reference materials, and vertical files documenting key people and events in Montana history. New equipment includes microfilm readers, a ScannX digital book scanner with audio capabilities, and ADA tools to support accessibility.

This reopening marks the return of in-person research after more than three years. Over the past year, the team has expanded to include new archivists and a reference historian. In addition, staff have completed extensive training in archives, photo collections, and library science to support researchers effectively.

With its doors open again, the Library & Archives enters a new phase, providing greater access to our collections and staff expertise to help you with your research. Visit mths.mt.gov/research/visit



Larry Len & LeAnne Peterson Library & Archives



Book your appointment to visit the Reference Room.

The Library & Archives provides access to the collections that document our past, including photographs, private and government records, newspapers, maps and published materials.

VISIT US

Tuesday – Friday
9:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon • 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
225 N. Roberts Street • Helena MT 59620

ASK US

406-444-2681
mthslibrary@mt.gov

Do it yourself

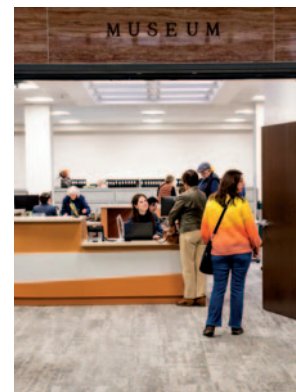
ONLINE CONTENT

Newspapers
Historical records
Photographs

ONLINE RESEARCH TOOLS

Archives West Finding Aids
Montana History Portal
Montana Shared Catalog

mths.mt.gov/Research/OnlineCollections



So, you think Archives wants your stuff. *What happens next?*

Most readers of the Society Bulletin know that Library & Archives has spent the last three years navigating uncharted territory. With collections wrapped and access dictated by construction, the archives staff faced a steady stream of challenges—especially when it came to incoming donations. How do we accept collections when stacks and workspaces are inaccessible? How do we say “yes” without even having offices?

With renovations complete, Archives and Photo Archives are settling into a new normal and are once again accepting larger donations. A key part of this transition is Tabitha Masters stepping into the role of Accessioning Archivist.

The accessioning process begins with the Library, Archives & Museum (LAM) Acquisitions Committee. LAM has refined the donation process to be straightforward and user-friendly. Potential donors complete a form on the MTHS website, sharing details

about their materials. Tabitha serves as the primary contact, connecting with donors and getting a first look at what’s being offered.

Each month, the LAM team evaluates submissions, asking important questions: Do we already hold similar material? Is it original, and is its provenance clear? Do we have the resources to care for it? Does it align with our collecting scope? And perhaps most importantly, will it inspire and serve the researchers eager to walk through our doors again?

We can’t accept everything—but approved collections are quickly surveyed, accessioned, and passed to processing archivists to ensure long-term care and accessibility. After years of ren-

ovation and relocation, we’re also able to reunite donor records in one place. So if you see Tabitha buried under paperwork, don’t ask! Please just fill out the Potential Donation Form.

Visit mths.mt.gov/research/PotentialAcquisitions



Montana Headwaters Book Prize

Sharing Montana’s stories forms the core of our work at the Montana Historical Society. One of the ways we share those stories is by publishing books, like *A History of Montana in 101 Places*. Now, through the generous support of Larry Len and Leanne Peterson, we will also celebrate the publication of all books on Montana history.

The Montana Headwaters Book Prize will recognize three books on Montana history. Annually, awards will be given for the top three historical non-fiction books on Montana history from the twentieth century or earlier. Winners will receive a cash prize and an award.

Larry Len Peterson noted, “As a river’s headwater is the origin of living water yet to come, an author’s work represents the freeing spirit of imagination, a gift to generations yet to come. After all, history writing is more about the future than the past. It’s bread for the journey.”

The inaugural award will be presented at the 2027 annual Montana History Conference. Books will be accepted for consideration beginning in September of this year. Watch our website for additional information and application instructions.



“The Whole Country was. . . ‘One Robe’”

Thanks to the generosity of donors from across Montana and beyond, the Montana Historical Society Press will release a new printing this spring of “*The Whole Country was. . . ‘One Robe’:*” *The Little Shell Tribe’s America* by Nicholas C.P. Vrooman.

The reissuing of the book—the most important and comprehensive history of the Little Shell Tribe—comes on the heels of the tribe’s federal restoration in 2019, a hard-won victory in a more than century-long battle to gain land and treaty rights.

“This book is a comprehensive chronicle of one of the most poignant, tragic, beautiful stories in human history,” writes Krys Holmes, executive director of the Montana Arts Council. “This is a culture forged in collaboration, founded in family, enlivened by beauty and music, and strengthened by almost unbelievable acts of courage and honor. Anyone living in the Northern Rockies region should know the story of the Métis people.”

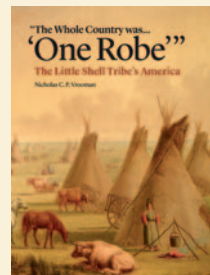
The book’s captivating story is central to a complete understanding of the heritage of the West. First published by the Drumlummon Institute in 2012, the book sold out rapidly.

Interest in Chippewa Cree and Métis culture has grown in the years since the Little Shell achieved federal restoration as the 574th recognized tribe.

“When the Drumlummon Institute approached us about partnering to reprint Vrooman’s book, we knew we needed to put it in the hands of new readers,” said MTHS Press executive editor Jeff Bartos. “We’re extremely grateful to our donors who made it possible to return the Little Shell’s extraordinary history to print.”

500 copies of the book will be given to the Little Shell Tribe to help the next generation learn their own stories and heritage.

“*The Whole Country was. . . ‘One Robe’:*” *The Little Shell Tribe’s America* will be available for purchase this spring at mthspress.mt.gov



CALENDAR OF EVENTS



All events at the Montana Heritage Center unless otherwise noted. The MTHS Lecture Series runs every first and third Thursday at the Montana Heritage Center, 225 N. Roberts St., Helena.

April 23

Abstract Mark Making
5:00–7:00 p.m.

May 7

Express Singers
12:30–3:00 p.m.

May 9

Kids Workshop
10:00 a.m.–noon

May 21

Salish Lifeways
6:30–7:30 p.m.

May 30

Screen Printing the WPA
10:00 a.m.–12 noon

June 24–28

Montana History Celebration
Montana Heritage Center
and locations around Helena

Find the full
calendar of
MTHS Community
Events here



Montana History Celebration!

Join us **June 24–28, 2026** at the Montana History Celebration to celebrate the opening of the Montana Heritage Center. This event is a celebration of all things history, art, culture, and community. Plan to come to Helena for a series of events scattered across Helena,



including special things to do right here at our headquarters, the Montana Heritage Center. You will receive an invitation to the private events and tours and as events get finalized and you will see all events that are open to the public on our calendar located on the Montana History Celebration page: MTHS.mt.gov/about/Montana-History-Celebration

Wednesday

Alive at Five on 6th Ave
(in front of the Capitol)

Thursday

Public and private tours
VIP reception and dinner

Friday

Membership luncheon and
public and private tours

Saturday

Traditional native games,
Indian tacos, workshops,
gallery and Capitol tours

Saturday evening

250 Celebration: reception,
musical performances, and
speakers, followed by a
celebratory event on the
Capitol Lawn

Sunday

Gallery tours



Several businesses and nonprofit organizations in Helena will be hosting events during the weekend, including Bank of the Rockies, Florence Crittenton Family Services, Grand Street Theatre, Helena Indian Alliance, Holter Museum of Art, Lewis and Clark County and City of Helena Historic Preservation Office, Montana WILD, Northwestern Energy, Preserve Montana, Stonetree Climbing Center, Touchmark on Saddle Drive, and Wild Montana. Activities include tours, workshops, kids activities, and hikes. There will be lots to do in Helena!

101 Places hits the road

Historian Kirby Lambert, co-author of our latest MTHS Press title, *A History of Montana in 101 Places: Sites and Stories from the Montana Historical Society*, is taking the popular new book on tour this spring and summer.

Lambert will make stops for book events and signings across the state, with events planned in Red Lodge, Kalispell, Livingston, Glendive, and places between.

“We’ve gotten an incredible response to the book from readers across the state,” said Lambert. “I look forward to sharing more about our research and the creative process behind the book with communities represented in its pages.”

Now retired, Lambert worked for more than 36 years at the Montana Historical Society where he served as museum registrar, curator of collections, curator of art, and director of outreach and education. He has co-authored several additional publications, including *Montana’s Charlie Russell: Art in the Collection*

of the Montana Historical Society, and is a regular contributor to *Montana The Magazine of Western History*.

Please see a schedule of 101 Places Book Tour dates below and check back for additional stops which will be announced at mhs.mt.gov/pubs/

- **Butte:** Wednesday, Apr. 22, Butte-Silver Bow Library & Archives, Noon
- **Glendive:** Tues., Jun. 16, Frontier Gateway Museum, Noon
- **Billings:** Thurs. Jun. 18, Western Heritage Center, Noon
- **Red Lodge:** Fri., Jun. 19, Carbon County Historical Society, 5 p.m.
- **Columbus:** Sat., Jun. 20, Stillwater County Library, 10:30 a.m.
- **Missoula:** Tues., Aug. 25, Missoula Public Library, 6 p.m.
- **Kalispell:** Wed., Aug. 26, Northwest History Museum, 6 p.m.
- **Browning:** Tues., Sep. 1, Blackfeet Community College, Noon
- **Livingston:** Thurs., Sep. 10, Elk River Books, 7 p.m.





The Gift Shop Launches New Online Store

The Montana Historical Society's Gift Shop is now available online at shopmths.mt.gov, offering an easy and convenient way to shop Western books and Montana-made gifts from anywhere. The redesigned website features modern navigation, searchable tools, and a growing collection of titles celebrating Montana's history, culture, and landscapes—including publications from the Montana Historical Society Press, children's books, coffee table volumes, and specialty titles on cooking, cowboys, and archaeology.

Store manager Aly Arnold said, "We're thrilled to share our book collection online and expand our inventory so customers can shop from home, no matter where they live." Future offerings will include Montana-made products, handcrafted items by local Indigenous artists, clothing, jewelry, and gourmet snacks.

Whether shopping in person at the Heritage Center or online, visitors can explore the very best of Montana's artisans and makers anytime. Visit the Gift Shop online at shopmths.mt.gov.



Montana Celebrates the 250th

Montana 250th Commission Awards \$420,000 to Support Semiquincentennial Projects

The Montana 250th Commission has awarded nearly \$420,000 to 32 organizations across the state to commemorate America's 250th anniversary in 2026. The grants support projects that highlight Montana's culture, history, and communities while connecting residents to the nation's semiquincentennial.

Following a call for proposals in September 2025, the Commission received 84 applications requesting more than \$2.4 million. A review committee evaluated submissions before the full Commission approved the final awards at its December meeting.

"From Indigenous history exhibits to veterans' memorials, oral history projects, and educational programs, these initiatives provide Montanans with meaningful ways to

engage with our shared history," said Commission Chair Chris Averill. "We are thrilled to see these projects come to life across the state, and we thank all applicants for their creativity and dedication."

Funded projects align with the Commission's guiding themes of "Doing History," "Our Ongoing American Experiment," and "The Power of Place." All projects must be completed and publicly accessible by December 31, 2026.

A separate Montana 250 Sponsorship Program will open in February 2026, offering \$500 to \$5,000 in support for qualifying events scheduled through the year.

For a full list of grant recipients and additional information about the 250th, visit www.america250mt.org

A Montana Tapestry

Traveling Exhibit brates Montana's 250 Years

As part of Montana's commemoration of the United States' 250th anniversary, the Montana 250 Commission, in partnership with the Montana Historical Society and Humanities Montana, is offering a free traveling exhibit for libraries, museums, and community centers across the state.

Montana Tapestry is a five-panel pop-up exhibit highlighting eight Montanans whose achievements have shaped the state and nation since 1776. Guided by the Dakota phrase Mitakuye Oyasin—"all my relations"—the exhibit invites viewers to explore their connections to Montana and the United States across past, present, and future. Featured figures include immunologist Maurice Hilleman, doctor and collector Caroline McGill, historic figures Pretty Shield and Granville Stuart, veteran and Indigenous leader Gilbert Horn Sr., librarian Alma Smith Jacobs, author Ivan Doig, and actor Lily Gladstone.



"Montana history is full of innovators and culture-keepers," said Molly Stockdale, vice chair of the Montana 250 Commission. "Montana Tapestry weaves their stories together and encourages audiences to see themselves among the threads that bind us as Americans."

Six copies of the exhibit will rotate statewide free of charge from March 16 through December 31, 2026, with each organization hosting an eight-week display. Companion panels highlighting Montana's places, people, plants, and animals in 1776 will also be featured at state parks. All 14 panels will be displayed together during the 250th celebration on June 27 at the Montana Heritage Center in Helena.

Montana Heritage Center Buzzed with Young Historians for National History Day

Helena got a history makeover on February 14, 2026, when the Montana Heritage Center welcomed 172 student historians for the West-Central regional National History Day contest—the biggest turnout in recent memory, more than double last year’s numbers.

Students in grades 6–12 from across western and central Montana showcased their projects in five categories: documentary films, exhibit boards, research papers, performances, and websites. These projects, months in the making under teacher guidance, highlighted the curiosity and hard work of Montana’s next generation of historians.

“The growth of History Day in Montana—from 50 participants in 2024 to over triple that this year—was amazing,” said Melissa Hibbard, co-coordinator of National History Day in Montana. “Hosting at the Heritage Center let these young scholars see themselves as part of Montana’s story.”



During the event, students also toured the newly opened Heritage Center and the State Capitol, gaining a deeper understanding of Montana history and government. More than 70 volunteer judges, including professional historians, university professors, and educators, evaluated the projects. Top finishers in each category advanced to the state contest at Montana State University in Bozeman, with winners ultimately earning the chance to compete nationally in College Park, Maryland this June.

This year’s statewide participation marked a huge leap—320 students presenting 240 projects, compared with just 86 students and 50 projects in 2024. The Helena contest was one of three regional competitions, alongside Kalispell and Dickinson, North Dakota.

For more on National History Day in Montana, at nationalhistorydaymt.org



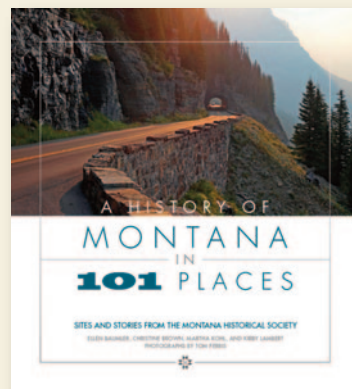
Montana Book Award Honors *A History of Montana in 101 Places*

The 2025 Montana Book Award Committee honored *A History of Montana in 101 Places* as one of four distinction books this year. Published by the Montana Historical Society Press, this richly illustrated work explores Montana’s history through the places that shaped it—from Indigenous sites and battlefields to mines, schools, and everyday structures.

Written by MHS historians Ellen Baumler, Christine Brown, Martha Kohl, and Kirby Lambert, with photography by Tom Ferris, the book brings Montana’s past to life, grounding stories in the landscapes and buildings that define the state.

The Montana Book Award, established in 2001 by the Friends of the Missoula Public Library, celebrates literary and artistic achievements connected to Montana. Awards will be presented April 15 at the Montana Library Association Conference in Great Falls.

Visit montanabookaward.org for details and 2026 nominations. Pick up a copy at shopmths.mt.gov



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 December 2025 and January 2026.

In Memory of Edward H. Bell
Catherine Maunu

In Memory of Dianna Broadie
Douglas Broadie

In Honor of Jennifer Peterson James
James and Lorraine Peterson

In Memory of Dr. Reno Parker
Barbara Parker and Todd Parker

In Memory of John P. Poston
Kathryn Poston

In Memory of Donna Wallace
Robert J. Rummel

In Memory of Mildred Ross Tressler Smith Wolfe
Barbara Gregovich





MONTANA

HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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MTHS DONOR HIGHLIGHT

Stockman Bank

Stockman Bank has long been a champion of Montana history and education. Its support for the Montana Historical Society reflects a deep commitment to helping students connect with the past and shape the future.

Most recently, the bank contributed \$15,000 to the History and Civics Education Endowment, presented during the grand opening of its new Helena branch. This gift helps fund school field trips to the Montana Heritage Center and State Capitol, giving students hands-on experiences with the state's history.

The contribution builds on Stockman Bank's earlier \$100,000 donation to the Montana Heritage Center capital campaign, which helped make the museum's creation a reality. "Our roots are based in Montana, and history is very important to us," said CEO Bill Coffee. "We value learning from the past to focus on the future."

Thanks to Stockman Bank's ongoing support, Montana students statewide can explore the state's history, no matter where their schools are located.



Extra! Extra!

Our favorite quarterly history journal, *Montana The Magazine of Western History*, is now available on newsstands at Barnes & Noble stores and other retailers in Montana, Idaho, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Washington. We're excited to make the West's premier history magazine available to more readers across the region!



Catastrophe at Custer Creek Now Available as Audiobook

Experience Montana's deadliest train wreck in *Catastrophe at Custer Creek*, now available on Audible and Amazon. On June 18, 1938, the westbound Olympian No. 15 departed Chicago for Tacoma, carrying 190 passengers in luxury and coach cars. Unaware, travelers were hurtling toward disaster as a storm swelled Custer Creek into a raging torrent. When the train crossed the bridge, 49 lives were lost and 75 injured. Author Ian Campbell Wilson recounts the passengers' final journey, from college twins and vacationers to a traveling nurse, while narrator Bruce Brown vividly brings them to life in this gripping historical account.

