

Fort Harrison VA Earns Governor's Preservation Award

Gov. Greg Gianforte is honoring the Fort Harrison Veterans Affairs staff for preserving National Register properties while providing housing for homeless veterans.

The 2021 Governor's Preservation Award recognizes the efforts of Fort Harrison staff to make habitable eleven unoccupied 1890s residential buildings. Although these grand, multi-unit houses were homes to military and VA staff for a century, they were generally abandoned due to their costly maintenance. That took dollars away from the agency's primary health-care mandate.

Fortunately, the VA's commitment to end homelessness among veterans gave these viable buildings value far beyond their historic and architectural merit. The agency's Enhanced-Use Lease Program meant a qualified private developer could preserve the historic buildings using private capital and Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits, not applicable to a federal agency.

In 2017, the VA staff worked with developer Beneficial Communities to lease the eleven Fort Harrison buildings. The Freedom's Path project now provides twenty-six residential units for veterans and their families.



Governor Greg Gianforte



SHPO Officer Pete Brown

The \$11 million project included \$9.6 million in historic building rehabilitation.

"The Fort Harrison Campus is listed in the National Register of Historic Places," said State Historic Preservation Officer Pete Brown. "That allowed Beneficial Communities to qualify for the Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits, which is a program administered by Montana's Historic Preservation Office."

"The credits leveled the playing field on a costly project and enabled a greater private investment to go

toward the public good in a noteworthy way for its scale and positive impact."

Gov. Greg Gianforte said the staff set the stage for this project.

"Their work maintained the dignity of these great buildings and repurposed them to serve a greater need," he noted.

Now, the parklike campus is home to ninety-six veterans and their families, who live in a stable, positive, and therapeutic environment in the company of veteran peers. ★

MHS and HCTV Create Virtual Capitol Tour

The pandemic threw a curveball at Montana's 4-H and Future Farmer of America's annual tour of the Montana Capitol building, so 4-H and FFA coordinator Andee Baker

turned to the Montana Historical Society for help.

The state agency partnered with the nonprofit Helena Civic TV's Jeanie Warner to create [a video tour](#)

of the capitol building that's now available online to the public. The 4-H and FFA students used the video as part of their Citizenship Seminar.

Virtual Capitol Tour (cont. on p. 2)

Viewpoints

An accurate version of history is made up of multiple viewpoints, as no two people experience the same event in the same way. Think for a moment about your personal experience on 9/11/2001. The circumstances differ for almost everyone. I was at home getting ready for work and watched on the television in my living room as the towers fell. Where were you? What did you experience?

How we interpret history—including if or how we incorporate differing points of view into our story—has changed over time. Take, for example, my friend Rodger Henderson's article on the 1870 Marias River Massacre in the Spring 2018 issue of *Montana The Magazine of Western History*. Rodger explored historical documents and spoke with Native Americans to hear their oral traditions and reveal a more balanced story of the massacre, adding the viewpoint of the Piikuni to that of the U.S. military. Research on the Marias River Massacre just a few decades ago did not include the

Piikuni viewpoint, and even called the event the Baker Massacre, which was more reflective of the military perspective.

As we work on the interpretation components of the new Montana Heritage Center—think exhibits—we are striving to ensure that multiple viewpoints are included in the telling of Montana's story. Our efforts aim to include perspectives from all the different peoples who call Montana home, while showing how our different experiences have common themes. One small way we're doing this is by comparing similar items from various cultures. An 1860s child's boot, a Chinese woman's bound foot covering, and a moccasin are all shoes, and all made to protect our feet. But they represent differing cultures and reflect distinct traditions and ways of life. By looking at and reflecting on diverse perspectives, we see a more authentic story that helps us understand both our differences and our similarities, just as Rodger did in his retelling of the



Marias River Massacre.

Including different points of view in our telling of Montana's history is extremely important. But we also are interested in many viewpoints, including yours, on the design of the Montana Heritage Center. We have been working hard to gather input from many different stakeholder groups,

Director's Corner (cont. on p. 3)

Virtual Capitol Tour (cont. from p. 1)

"The virtual videos about the Montana Capitol and Original Governor's Mansion provided by the Montana Historical Society were informative and interesting," Baker said. "When these videos were shown to 4-H and FFA members, the students were beyond intrigued by the history, not only enjoying the videos but learning more about Montana history."

The tour is given by Deb Mitchell, who is with the Society's Outreach and Interpretation program. Mitchell said she enjoyed the opportunity to tour the capitol with Warner prior to the 2021

legislative session and share the capitol's history with students.

"This pandemic threw us all a curveball, so we threw one right back," Mitchell said. "Now the capitol tour can come to the classroom or into the home. However, there is nothing better than having students visit the capitol and feel the energy that is here. We can't wait for the day when students and other visitors can join us once again."

The Montana Historical Society also has a video tour of the Original Governor's Mansion, which the public can watch online at mhs.mt.gov.

"At a time when we can't always

visit the places where we learn about our past, we're excited at MHS to share those stories and experiences virtually," said Molly Kruckenberg, MHS director. ★



Deb Mitchell with the Montana Historical Society, worked with HCTV on a video tour of the Montana capitol building.

Two Substantial Acquisitions of Montana's African American History

BY HEATHER C. HULTMAN

Photographs provide a window into the past. Whether from the recent or distant past, photos capture an impression of an individual, object, group, etc. to be shared with current and future generations. Recently the Montana Historical Society Photo Archives acquired several unique photographs from a major auction that offer a window into Montana's nineteenth-century African American history.

James Priestly Ball was a successful African American photographer who arrived in Helena in 1887 to establish the "J.P. Ball and Son" studio. Notable events that Ball documented during his time in Helena include a series of images of two men convicted of murder before, during, and after their hangings in 1896, as well as the laying of the cornerstone for the Montana State Capitol building in 1899.

Ball's arrival in Montana was preceded by work in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Minnesota, which was followed by a move to Seattle in 1900. He was one of the country's earliest, longest working, and most well-known African American photographers.

Collection PAc 2021-01 includes

four black-and-white photographs on cabinet card mounts by J.P. Ball & Son while in Helena, as well as three by J.P. Ball & Son in Seattle. Images in the collection include two family portraits, a man posed next to a pillar, and photographs of young children. The images in this collection are windows into Montana and Washington culture between 1888 and 1902. More than one hundred examples of Ball's work can be found through our online catalog and on the Montana Memory Project website at MTMemory.org.

Mary Fields, also known as "Stagecoach Mary" or "Black Mary," was the first African American woman in the United States to become a postal service star route (contract) mail carrier, bringing the mail from the town of Cascade, Montana, to St. Peter's Mission, from 1895 to 1903. Fields arrived in Montana circa 1884 and moved to Cascade around 1894. She was a respected Montana community member until her death in 1914.

Collection PAc 2021-02 contains one uncased tintype of Fields, taken between 1870 and 1880, before she came to Montana. Fields is seated with her hands

crossed. The tintype is the best representation of Fields held by the MHS Photo Archives. 🌟



An uncased tintype of "Stagecoach Mary" Fields, taken between 1870 and 1880.

About Us

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

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Director's Corner (cont. from p. 2)

including educators, museum colleagues, and the tourism industry. This input helps ensure that we are considering the needs of our partners. One group that has provided a substantial amount of input so far is our tribal partners. These dedicated representatives from each of Montana's tribes have been meeting monthly to provide feedback on many parts of the building project, from the landscape's trail,

which will feature native plants, to the *Sovereign Nations* exhibit, which will highlight contemporary Indian life.

We will be reaching out to you, our members and supporters, to gather your thoughts on the design of the Montana Heritage Center. While updates about the center are always available on the project website at MontanasMuseum.org, we want to hear your voice. We will host two virtual town hall

meetings, on April 22 and 27, to hear your thoughts on the design. Look for information on the project website about how to review the current designs and join the meeting.

The Montana Heritage Center provides us with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to explore new ways to share Montana history. Everyone's viewpoint is important in this story, and I hope that you will share yours! 🌟

Magazine Wins Wrangler Award



A typical home on the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation, circa 1920s. Photo by Jessamine Spear Johnson

The Montana Historical Society's publications program was thrilled to learn in early March 2021 that an article from *Montana The Magazine of Western History* won a Western Heritage Award.

Also known as the Wrangler Award, the honor comes from the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum for best short non-fiction article.

The winner was "Transitions in the Changing West: The Photographic Legacy of Jessamine Spear Johnson," by Tempe Johnson Javitz, published in the Winter 2019 issue.

Javitz's article featured Johnson's photographs, which captured life on an eastern Montana ranch in the early twentieth century. The images portray the mix of traditional and modern practices that came with new technology and the shifting socioeconomic status of the family.

The award will be presented in September at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City.

"We're so proud to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of this

iconic event, which honors the individuals and creative works that continue the special legacy of the American West," said Natalie Shirley, museum president and CEO. "With both the 2020 and 2021 honorees and inductees being recognized this year, it's sure to be an exciting weekend."

For ticket information and other schedule updates, visit nationalcowboymuseum.org/westernheritageawards.



Jessamine Spear Johnson with her horse at the X4 Ranch in Kirby, Montana, in 1920. Photo by Annabelle Johnson Moody

Greg LeDonne Honored as Emerging Scholar

In January, *Montana The Magazine of Western History* concluded its second annual Emerging Scholars Contest, with the honor going to Greg LeDonne.

He's a graduate student at Boise State who writes about neoliberalism, public lands, and the tensions between the Old and New West. Look for his article in the Autumn 2021 issue.

Along with being published in the magazine, LeDonne will receive free registration, travel, and accom-

modations to the 2021 Montana History Conference in Butte.

The contest attracts article submissions from graduate students, early career faculty, and independent first-time authors.

The judges, who also serve on the magazine's board of editors, evaluated the submitted manuscripts for depth of research, original content, clarity of writing, and, most importantly, level of interest for our readers.

Congratulations Greg! 🌟

MHS Teams with MTN for Black History Month

As part of the Black History Month celebration, the Montana Historical Society partnered with MTN (Montana Television Network) reporter Alexie Aguayo to spotlight historical African American figures.

Helena Mayor Wilmot Collins and MTN weather forecaster Asia Raye read excerpts from written works of African American figures in Montana while being filmed in the Montana Historical Society lobby.

Collins read from one of Montana's three early African American newspapers, *The Colored Citizen*. The excerpt was an editorial written by the paper's editor, James Presley Ball Jr., who wanted the African American community to unite in the effort to make Helena the state capital.



Wilmot Collins

“We ask the aid and cooperation of our fellow citizens on behalf of our people and of this Enterprise,” Collins read. “Just in proportion to the aid received will result be obtained. We launched this Venture with no enemies to punish but very very many kind friends to favor.”

Raye read a 1953 letter from the Montana Federation of Colored

Women's Clubs that MHS provided. The letter involved House Bill 73, which allowed anyone equal access to places “of public accommodation and amusement.”

“In the Senate, the bill got a favorable report from the Judiciary Committee, and should have been brought to the floor,” Raye read. “The bill was reassigned to the Cities and Town Affairs Committee. The bill was allowed to remain in the committee, and died there, without ever having been brought to the floor of the Senate for vote.”

MTN included a [link](#) to *The Colored Citizen* that we digitized. The station also included [links](#) to the newsletter and photos from MHS. 🌟

New Employees at MHS

Renee Kelley

Renee Kelley is the new grants contracts coordinator for the Montana State Historic Preservation Office.



She brings more than seven years of experience in nonprofit and government sectors, having previously worked at the Newport Historical Society, Holter Museum of Art, and Department of Natural Resources & Conservation.

She has a bachelor's degree in history and music from the University of Portland and is currently working on her master's in public administration at the University of Montana.

Kelley said she was drawn to SHPO by a passion for historic preservation that started in part with a summer guiding tours of the Montana State Capitol and Original Governor's Mansion way back in

2010.

When not in the office, Kelley loves long, rambling walks with her husband and three kids through Helena's historic west side.

Aaron Genton

Aaron Genton is the Museum Program's collections historian. He is responsible for developing exhibits, managing interpretation of the Original Governor's Mansion, and conducting historical research and sharing it with our visitors and the public, among other duties.



Genton comes to the Montana Historical Society from Kentucky, where he worked with the public history and museum communities for more than a decade. During this time, he worked for two of the most unique historic and cultural sites in the state, spending three summers

underground leading interpretive programs at Mammoth Cave National Park, and nine years as collections manager at Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill. In addition to his day job, he served as a board member for the Kentucky Museum and Heritage Alliance.

His public history career has been full of surprises—he never expected to be doing this as a real job. His move to Montana was just as unexpected. Genton joined the staff during the challenging time of the coronavirus pandemic and has been adept at navigating the intricacies of learning a new job and developing relationships with the rest of the MHS family.

Genton already has proven to be a valuable member of the team with his efforts toward interpreting the new *Montana Homeland* exhibit, slated to open in the Montana

New Employees (cont. on p. 6)

Heritage Center in 2023.

"I'm looking forward to learning about the depth and relevance of Montana's history while tapping into the collective knowledge and experience of my amazing colleagues at MHS," Genton said.

Laurie Chipps

Laurie Chipps recently joined the team in the Montana Historical Society's Research Center as the technical services librarian. She has a long background in library special collections and more recently worked for nearly eight years at the Art Institute of Chicago's Ryerson & Burnham Libraries as a catalog and reference librarian, and eventually as the serials librarian.



Looking for a change of scenery from Chicago and the Midwest, in 2015 Chipps took the long journey from Chicago to Montana by riding her bicycle across the country from Virginia to Oregon. During that trip she passed through Missoula and decided to make it her new home. She worked for the Adventure Cycling Association, which had inspired her cross-coun-

try adventure and created the maps she used along the way. During her four and a half years with the national nonprofit, she worked in the routes and mapping, membership, and guided tours departments and helped countless others go on similar bicycle experiences.

The more time she spent away from libraries, however, the more she missed the work and longed to get back into the field. Chipps was excited when this opportunity at the Research Center recently arose. To be able to work with such an amazing collection and learned colleagues while combining her love of local history, architecture, and genealogy on a day-to-day basis is a dream come true.

"I'm like a kid in a candy store while walking and biking around Helena," she said. "There are so many historic homes and buildings to look at, and I'm always finding something new to admire and research. This town provides the perfect combination of interesting architecture alongside limitless access to the outdoors right out my back door."

Kyler Mozell

Kyler Mozell is the State Historic Preservation Office's new cultural records assistant.

Mozell grew up in southern California and is a 2020 graduate from the University of Montana.



He first became aware of the field of archaeology while studying geology in college. The combination of history, science, and the outdoors seemed like the perfect blend of his favorite interests. Not long after, he changed the course of his college career from geology to anthropology with a focus in archaeology. He has an undergraduate degree in archaeology and certificates in GIS and historic preservation.

Mozell previously worked on the SHPO-UM GIS digitization project, in which UM students digitized SHPO's hard-copy site records and plotted historic site locations on SHPO's GIS map. Mozell began this work as a student intern in 2019 before taking the lead position upon graduating.

"I am excited to be here working with the SHPO and doing my part to preserve our state's history so that future generations will be able to learn from it and enjoy it just as I have," he said. ✪

A Matter of Reckoning MHS Helps Reshape Dialogue about Women

BY CARRIE SCOZZARO, MONTANA SENIOR NEWS

It's been said that those who don't know their history are destined to repeat it, but what about those for whom the past is a blank (or nearly blank) page? Beyond those who willingly ignore their past—which is the focus of the quote attributed to Winston Churchill and others—how can marginalized groups achieve their full potential if they do not see themselves represented

positively, if at all, in the nation's chronicles?

To remedy that, many organizations in a position to do so are increasingly committed to reshaping the dialogue—namely about women and people of color. On a national level, the government created Women's History Month in March 1987, six years after first recognizing Women's History

Week. It can be the catalyst for further celebration and recognition.

More recently, the Smithsonian got the green light from Congress to create a Women's History Museum in Washington, D.C. (and an institution recognizing Latinos), some twenty-three years after grassroots activists began

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A Matter of Reckoning (cont. from p. 6)

pushing for such a place.

In Montana, the Historical Society has helped fill in the gaps with such efforts as its Women's History Matters website.

The site was created in 2014 to commemorate the anniversary of Montana women's right to vote one hundred years prior. That's actually five years ahead of the one hundredth anniversary of the passing and ratification of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, which stated that voting rights "shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex."

The MHS website is about more than suffrage, however.

Harriette Cushman and Susie Walking Bear Yellowtail, for example, are but two women featured in blog entries on the site, which also includes oral histories, photographs, 130 articles originally published in *Montana The Magazine of Western History*, and a bibliography collection extensive enough to make any researcher swoon.

Yellowtail was the first Apsáalooke (Crow) to not only graduate from college but also to use her nursing degree to better the lives of her people through medical care and advocacy on the state and national level. Cushman almost singlehandedly helped grow the state's fledgling poultry industry from the 1920s onward, founded the Montana Institute for the Arts in 1948, and championed educational success for Indian students at Montana State University.

"I really like the blog entries the best—especially ones that feature lesser-known people and issues," said Martha Kohl, website project manager, who serves as the historian for the MHS Outreach and Interpretation Program, which includes curriculum development.

According to Kohl, the blog entries were created for the site



Harriette Cushman (Left)

through two contests: one for established scholars and one for graduate students.

Site organizers also worked with Montana's Office of Public Instruction to create women-centric curriculum materials. "Resilience: Stories of Montana Indian Women" includes essays originally written for the Women's History Matters website and later published by MHS in a book titled *Beyond Schoolmarms and Madams: Montana Women's Lives*. Kohl said several related lesson plans are featured on the MHS website (mhs.mt.gov/education/women), including "Ordinary People Do Extraordinary Things," which addresses both English/language arts and social science standards.

MHS tracks usage to the site, which Kohl said has remained consistent: between 65,854 and 77,936 hits per year since 2014, for a total of 504,698 views so far.

Topics pulling in higher viewer counts include the Montana State Orphanage and the Native American championship girls' basketball team from Fort Shaw. Another popular post describes the extraordinary life of Mary Fields, a former slave who arrived in Cascade during the 1880s to help with St. Peter's Mission,



Susie Yellowtail (Back Row Center)

forged her own path with jobs (and a few nefarious habits) traditionally reserved for men, and was admired in print by Montana's own Gary Cooper.

Although MHS is no longer adding to the Women's History Matters website, the Facebook page has about 3,800 followers, according to Kohl. Learn more at montanawomenshistory.org or Facebook.com/montanawomenshistory. 🌟

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Montana Historical Society

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Membership

Are you ready to plan a day or two out of the house?

One of the great benefits of being a member of the Montana Historical Society is being part of the Time Travelers,

whose museum reciprocal membership program includes more than three hundred organizations in forty-plus states across the country.

Members of these organizations receive a variety of exclusive benefits and privileges, such as free admission, gift shop discounts, and much more. People interested in receiving these benefits must join one of the museums listed on this site, which includes the Montana Historical Society.

Go online to timetravelers.mohistory.org or call Jodel Fohn at (406) 444-2918 to find locations and great museums to visit! 🗺️

