

MTHS Celebrates ‘Topping Out’ with Ceremony

BY PHIL DRAKE, HELENA INDEPENDENT RECORD

Dennis Washington said he never dreamed he would be a part of the history of Montana, “but I am and I like it.”

The Montana billionaire was among about 200 people gathered May 17 at a “Topping Out” ceremony for the \$81 million Montana Heritage Center, in which a foundation run by Washington and his wife, Phyllis, donated \$25 million when the project hit funding hurdles due to increased costs for labor, building materials, and supply shortages.

Dennis Washington encouraged others to make donations as well.

“If you don’t give, you don’t get the joy of giving,” he said. “And believe me, you’re the one who gets cheated at the end.”

The Montana Historical Society ceremony included Historical Society Director Molly Kruckenberg, Gov. Greg Gianforte and first lady Susan, contractor Erik Sletten, the Washingtons, Helena Mayor Wilmot Collins, and Smokey Rides at the Door of the Blackfeet Nation.

The new 66,000-square-foot addition, expected to open in 2024 or early 2025, will have expanded galleries, so visitors can see more of the art and artifacts held in trust by the Montana Historical Society. It also will include meeting rooms for up to 300 people and a public café.

As part of the project, the historical society’s current 70-year-old building will be renovated with

“Topping Out” Ceremony (cont. on p. 3)



Tom Ferris



Gary Marshall

What's the Point?

The curators, archivists, and historians at the Montana Historical Society are putting in long hours to create exhibits that will make our new home a place that inspires exploration.

Recently I sat in on one of the meetings focused on the new Montana Heritage Center exhibits. Creating an exhibit is complicated. First, the story and its components are identified, then the artifacts are selected, cases and layouts are designed, artifacts are properly mounted, and photographs and illustrations are carefully chosen. Finally, the exhibit's components literally need to be put in place in the gallery.

We are about midway through the exhibit process, which means we're making final adjustments to the story, artifacts, and layout. During this meeting, one of our curators asked the group: "What's the point?" This is a guiding question as we make difficult decisions about which items will be included in our exhibits. Even with more than 30,000 square feet of exhibit space, it's critical that each compo-

nent exhibit contributes to telling the story.

We are often asked "What's the point?" about history. History is not about establishing a singular truth, but rather about using evidence gathering and critical thinking skills to engage with and learn from the past. By using the letters, diaries, books, and artifacts preserved by history organizations, historians continually investigate the past. Sometimes our perspectives on events evolve, as we unearth hidden resources or investigate evidence in new ways. Continuing to study the past helps us better understand our society today and how it came to be. It helps us understand where we've been, where we are now, and where we can go from here.

History adds depth and understanding to our lives. Without it, we lose the vital context that helps us comprehend our world today. With it, we gain valuable insight into our society and can make more informed decisions on how to move forward.

Whether it is through our new



books, our online resources, or our exhibits, I invite you to continue to investigate and explore the past with us. ★

MTHS Announces Heritage Keeper, Heritage Guardian Awards

Arlyne Reichert and Margie Smith are recipients of the 2022 Heritage Keeper Award, while the Sons and Daughters of Montana Pioneers recently was named as the prestigious 2022 Heritage Guardian winner.

[Both awards](#) are bestowed annually by the Montana Historical Society Board of Trustees.

The Heritage Keeper Award honors Montanans who provide distinguished service to the state and people of Montana by protecting our history and culture.

The Montana Heritage Guardian Award recognizes the outstanding record of accomplishment of a person or organization that has had a profound impact on Montana's history.

Awardees have demonstrated exemplary commitment, effort, and impact in identifying, preserving, and presenting Montana's historical and cultural heritage for current and future generations.

"These awards represent the highest honor the Historical Society can bestow upon those

doing the daily work of saving Montana's past for future generations," said Hal Stearns, MTHS board president. "Their contributions, and their level of devotion, are amazing."

Sons and Daughters of Montana Pioneers

The Sons and Daughters of Montana Pioneers (SDMP) has been protecting, safeguarding, and preserving Montana history for 130 years.

Awards (cont. on p. 3)

“Topping Out” Ceremony (cont. from p. 1)

new classrooms and expanded galleries and research center.

Rides at the Door provided an opening prayer and asked the holy spirits and creator God to bless and protect all in attendance and to watch over their families.

Kruckenberg said the heritage center will be more than a building that is the home of the big history of the Big Sky State.

“It will be a community space that invites conversation between generations. It will be a place that inspires visitors to explore our past and to learn from it,” she said. “It will share the stories of all

Montanans, to provide meaning for today and vision for tomorrow.”

The steel beams, put in place at the end of the ceremony, signify that the highest point of the new Montana Heritage Center has been constructed.

Hundreds of students at 15 schools across Montana put their signatures on the beam during the past two weeks, museum officials said.

The heritage center’s cost has grown by 53 percent, from its original price tag of \$53 million to \$81 million, due to skyrocketing prices for labor, building materials, and

shortages. The ground blessing ceremony took place in September 2020, following a nearly 15-year effort to build a new facility. It is designed by the architectural firm Cushing Terrell and is expected to bring in 78,000 more visitors a year and create \$7.5 million more in annual tourist spending.

Hal Stearns, president of the Montana Historical Society Board of Trustees, said it was a “fabulous” day, noting that the new center will be a benefit to schoolchildren who visit and a magnet for Montana.

“This will be a testament for Montana’s amazing story.” 🌟

Awards (cont. from p. 2)

Foremost among its accomplishments is the generous donation of the land on which the Montana Historical Society sits just east of the Montana State Capitol. Along with help from veterans’ organizations, the Sons and Daughters group was instrumental in establishing a permanent home for the Montana Historical Society.

SDMP also supports the James Kovatch/SDMP history scholarship at the University of Montana–Western, the Montana History Teacher of the Year Award, and a history room at Bannack State Park.

MTHS Director Molly Kruckenberg will present the Heritage Guardian Award to the Sons and Daughters of Montana Pioneers at its annual meeting Aug. 19 in Butte.

Arlyne Reichert

Reichert is known as Great Falls’ “Bridge Lady,” after spending nearly 30 years working to save the



Tenth Street Bridge. The iconic concrete arch bridge, which spans the Missouri River, was erected in 1920. It is Montana’s longest and oldest open-spandrel, ribbed-concrete arch bridge.

Reichert raised more than \$1 million for restoration of the bridge. It was closed in 1996 and slated for demolition, but she founded the nonprofit Preservation Cascade to save and restore the endangered structure. Today, it’s a pedestrian and bike pathway.

Reichert was honored in Great Falls on June 1 for her tireless devotion and commitment to saving the Tenth Street Bridge.

Margie Smith

For more than 40 years, Smith — a life-long Anaconda resident — has been a strong force within the Smelter City’s historic preservation community. Her get-it-done mindset saved the Anaconda Copper Mining Company’s smokestack, the



annual Smelterman’s Day celebration, and the Montana Hotel.

Smith worked with Anacondans to Preserve the Stack to raise funds and seek creative solutions to save the smelter complex’s most visible and evocative structure. She also nominated the stack to the National Register of Historic Places and negotiated a no-cost proposal with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to designate the 585-foot stack a state park.

In 2018, Smith revitalized the Anaconda Company’s annual Smelterman’s Day, an event previously held by the company, to bring people to Anaconda to celebrate the centennial of the stack. In two years, the event raised \$19,000 for the stack’s preservation.

Smith and her husband Pete also worked to preserve the landmark Montana Hotel in Anaconda. With help from volunteers, they raised more than \$100,000 to rehabilitate the facility as a first-class space for the community to gather.

A public ceremony to honor Smith’s preservation efforts will be held at 4 p.m. Aug. 5 at the Montana Hotel in Anaconda. 🌟

Sheehy Family Donates \$500,000 to MTHS



Tim Sheehy, founder and chief executive officer of Belgrade-based Bridger Aerospace, and his wife, Carmen Sheehy, recently donated \$500,000 to the Montana Historical Society (MTHS).

The funds are dedicated toward construction of the Montana Heritage Center, including enhanced military displays and incorporating the history of wild-fire in Montana.

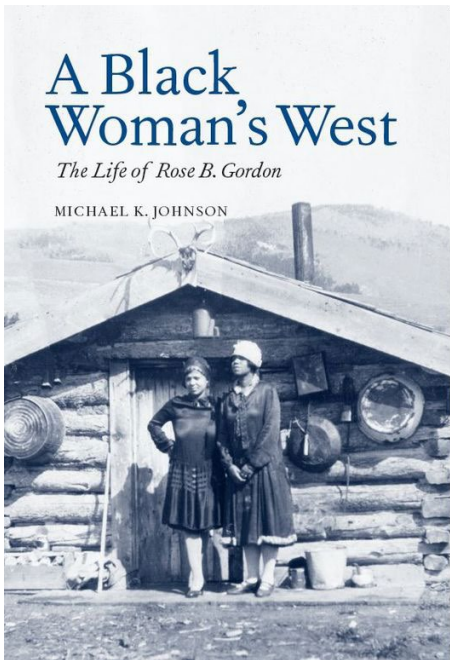
Sheehy is an American industrialist, aviator, and former Navy SEAL, with a degree in history from the U.S. Naval Academy. His love of history and desire to preserve the past prompted him to approach MTHS with the donation. His wife Carmen, also a Naval Academy graduate and former U.S. Marine officer, shares a passion for

education and youth engagement.

Molly Kruckenberg, director of the Montana Historical Society, is delighted with the donation from the Sheehy family. She said their vision fits well with the MTHS mission to save Montana's past, share our stories, and inspire exploration to provide meaning for today and vision for tomorrow.

"It's generous donations like Tim and Carmen's that will make the Montana Heritage Center a spectacular showcase for the treasures of the Treasure State," Kruckenberg said. "As I look out my office window, I see the long-time dream of so many MTHS directors taking shape. Their tenacity and vision, along with that of Montanans across the state, led us to this place." 🌟

MTHS Publishes Rose Gordon Book



A new Montana Historical Society book, "A Black Woman's West: The Life of Rose B. Gordon," by Michael K. Johnson, provides insight into what was an ordinary life in terms of day-to-day struggles, but an

extraordinary one in their sum.

Born in the Barker Mining District of central Montana Territory, Rose Beatrice Gordon (1883–1968) was the daughter of an African American chef and an emancipated slave who migrated to the West in the early 1880s.

"This forthcoming book will tell the story of the Gordon family — John, Anna, Robert, Rose, John Francis Jr., George, and Taylor — and pays tribute to Rose, who lived most of her life in White Sulphur Springs," said Diana Di Stefano, who manages the MTHS book publishing branch.

Rose Gordon was a restaurant owner, massage therapist, and caregiver. She also made a place for herself in the public sphere through letters to the editor and eventually through a regular newspaper column for the *Meagher County News* — a remarkable undertaking at a

time when Black women in America were largely denied a public voice.

Find the new book at the Montana Historical Society's store at 225 No. Roberts in Helena, or order online at <https://app.mt.gov/shop/mhsstore/a-black-womans-west-the-life-of-rose-b-gordon>. 🌟

About Us

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

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montanahistoricalsociety.org

To Wonderland and Beyond: 49th Annual Montana History Conference

Montana history enthusiasts will crowd around the campfire this year at the Rock Creek Resort in Red Lodge from Sept. 29 to Oct. 1 for the 49th Annual Montana History Conference.

This year's theme commemorates the 150th anniversary of the creation of Yellowstone National Park, with sessions on the history of Yellowstone and the Beartooth region, Indigenous heritage and culture, tourism, and more.

Workshops on Thursday cover topics ranging from historic preservation to tips for getting your historical books and articles published. Thursday also offers the perennial educators' workshop and the ever-popular, daylong Made in Montana Tour, which will include stops at the Smith Mine, a historic geological research station, the Carbon County Museum, local fabricators, and the Red Lodge Brewery.

Thursday evening kicks off in downtown Red Lodge with a progressive reception starting at the Carbon County Museum for heavy appetizers and moving to the Buses

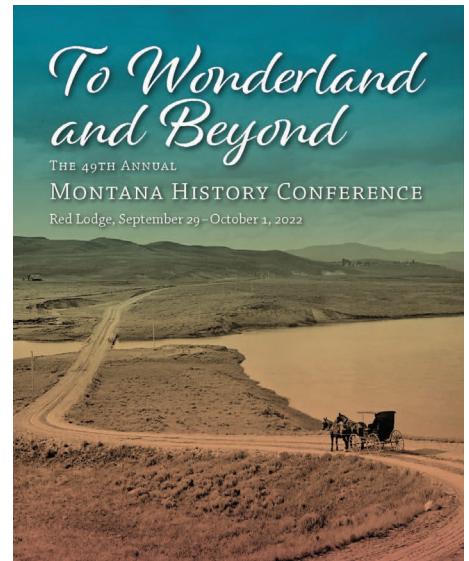
of Yellowstone Preservation Trust Museum for dessert. Afterward, stroll one more block to enjoy vintage Yellowstone National Park movies at the historic Roman Theater.

On Friday and Saturday, conference sessions will offer a wide array of topics on Yellowstone history ranging from Indigenous occupation to fashion, food, and architecture.

Friday night's banquet dinner will feature the always engaging Dr. Shane Doyle (Apsáalooke), who will speak about commemorating the park's 150th birthday with an All-Nations Teepee Village near Gardiner. Conceived in collaboration with representatives from 27 tribes and park staff, Doyle's project finds meaningful ways to reflect on and recognize the powerful Indigenous history of this landscape.

Saturday afternoon field trips highlight the Beartooth region's historical and cultural treasures — including a guided trip to Bearcreek to learn about mining history, a tour of Finnish heritage sites around Red Lodge, and a Crow country field trip featuring important Indigenous heritage sites.

The conference is planned in conjunction with the Carbon County Historical Museum and



Historic Preservation Office and the Yellowstone National Park Heritage and Research Center. Much gratitude also goes to the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation, Bureau of Land Management, Montana History Foundation, and Red Lodge Tourism Business Improvement District for funding support.

Full conference information was mailed by July 1 and online registration is opening soon. For hotel information and registration details, visit <https://bit.ly/MTHSHistoryConference> or email christine.brown@mt.gov. 🌟

Montana Historical Society Publishes Fourth-Grade Textbook

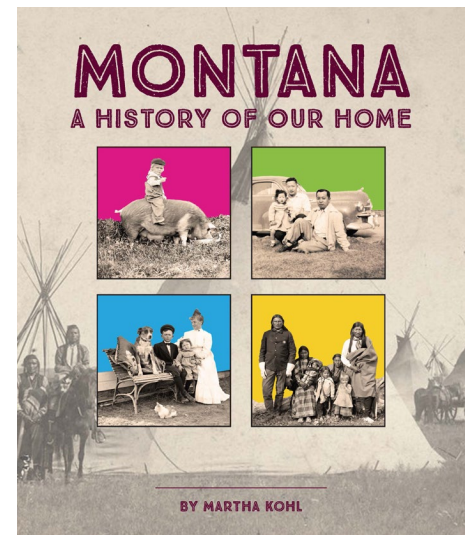
"Montana: A History of Our Home" is the new Montana Historical Society fourth-grade student textbook, which is available with a detailed and activity-filled teacher's guide.

The 96-page textbook offers a quick tour through 13,000 years of Montana history. Students will learn about Montana's 12 tribal nations and seven reservations; the immigrants who moved to Montana in the 19th and 20th centuries; and the trapping, mining, logging, farming, and ranching industries that drew them to the Treasure State. The book

also introduces students to amazing Montanans, from Northern Cheyenne Chief Dull Knife to photographer Evelyn Cameron.

The sturdy, hardback textbook will retail for \$35. Schools receive a 30 percent discount on classroom sets, which they can pre-order in advance from Farcountry Press, 1-800-821-3874 or sales@farcountrypress.com. Books are available starting in July.

Publication of the textbook was supported by the Bill and Rosemary Gallagher Foundation, the Montana Professional Teaching



Foundation, and many individual donors. 🌟

Zion Appointed to MTHS Board

Candi Zion is the newest member of the Montana Historical Society Board of Trustees.

Zion was appointed to the board in April by Gov. Greg Gianforte. A resident of Winifred, she brings with her a passion for history as a third-generation Montanan who is descended from homesteaders on both sides of her family.

“I have much experience in serving on a variety of boards and in dealing with local, state, and tribal governments; assets I believe could be of benefit to the MTHS board,” Zion said. “I am eager to serve my state in this capacity.”

MTHS Director Molly Kruckenberg welcomed Zion to the board, noting that Zion has a master’s degree in public history and historic preservation. Zion also served on the Teton Trail Museum board in Choteau and the Cascade County Historical Society board.

“Candi has conducted archaeological surveys and National Register nominations,” Kruckenberg said. “Candi’s on-the-ground experience with public history in Montana will be a great asset to our board.”

The 15 members on the MTHS board serve five-year terms and set policy for the Society. ⚡



MWH Celebrates Awards

BY DIANA DI STEFANO

This year *Montana The Magazine of Western History* celebrated 71 years of continuous publication with a slew of awards.

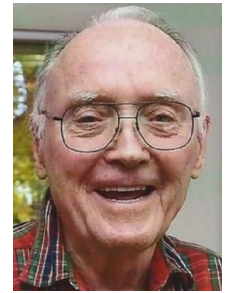
- Western Heritage Award (Wrangler Award) for best short nonfiction for Tracey Hanshew’s article: “Here she comes wearin’ them britches!’ Saddles, Riding Skirts, and Social Reform in the Turn-of-the-Century Rural West,” Winter 2020.
- John M. Cleary Homestead Honoree for outstanding support to Western literature and the Western Writers of America (WWA).
- Spur Award Winner for best Western short nonfiction to Shane Dunning, “The Right Man to Do a Wrong Thing: Charlie Thex, the Bear Creek Sheep Raid, and the Primacy of Fear,” Summer 2021, from the WWA.
- Spur Award finalist for best Western short nonfiction to Rosalyn LaPier, “Ella Mad Plume Yellow Wolf: Photographs by a



Native American Woman in the Early 1940s,” Winter 2021, from the WWA.

- Spur Award Winner for best Western Juvenile nonfiction to Steph Lehmann, “Montana History for Kids in 50 Objects: With 50 Fun Activities!” from the WWA. Published in cooperation with MTHS Publications.
- This is the third year in a row that an article from the magazine has won the prestigious Western Heritage Award, and the fourth year in a row we’ve received honors from the WWA. ⚡

Former MTHS Board President Dies



Stuart Connor, former president of the Montana Historical Society Board of Trustees, died at age 97 on March 15, 2022.

He grew up in Livingston and Billings, where he graduated from high school in 1942. He was a ranger in Yellowstone Park for several summers, then served in World War II. Connor graduated from the University of Montana Law School in 1949, spent four years with the FBI, then practiced law in Billings until his retirement in 1986.

Connor became interested in archaeology, his life’s passion, in the late 1950s. He was instrumental in the creation of the Montana Archaeology Society and the acquisition of Pictograph Cave site as a state park.

Memorials may be made to the Montana Historical Society, P.O. Box 201201, Helena, MT 59620-1201. Condolences may be made at www.michelottisawyers.com. ⚡

From the Museum Store

Cream of the West has been roasting Montana grains and producing natural cereal products since it was founded in 1914.

The MTHS Museum store is proud to offer Cream of the West's Roasted Whole Grain and 7-Grain cereals, Sweet Clover and Huckleberry honey, Montana Morning coffee, as well as Montana Crunch snack mix, a great-tasting, crunchy mix of rolled oats, barley flakes, dried cranberries, flaked coconut, and almond slivers.

Since 2002, Cream of the West has made its home in Harlowton, a town of fewer than 1,000 people in south-central Montana. The company and its employees are committed to developing sustainable agriculture and bolstering the economies of rural communities within the state. Cream of the West is a member of the Montana Department of Commerce's "Made in Montana" program.

Swing by the MTHS store in Helena to pick up your Cream of



the West products; order them online at mhs.mt.gov; or call 406-444-2890 to place an order. 🌟

New Employees

Bryan Baldwin

Philipsburg-native Bryan Baldwin is a new historian in the Outreach and Interpretation Program.



He recently retired after 22 years of service in the U.S. Army, with overseas tours in Korea, Germany, and Afghanistan.

Baldwin has a bachelor's degree in political science from Marquette University, a master's degree in economics from the University of Oklahoma, and is working toward a graduate certificate in Native American studies from Montana State University. He also is an Army certified field historian, having completed graduate courses in military history from the Army Command and General Staff College.

Baldwin is excited to delve into the world of architectural history as a sign writer in the National Register sign program and to assist with MTHS's many public outreach programs.

Judy Clay

Judy Clay is the Montana Historical Society's new financial officer.

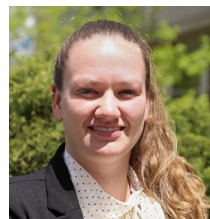
Clay comes to the position with a degree in secondary education and a minor in history from the University of Alabama – Birmingham, paired with years of financial and budgeting experience.



After working with the Department of Corrections, the Department of Justice as a financial manager, and 2.5 years with the Department of Agriculture as a budget analyst, Clay found her way to the Montana Historical Society. "I am so grateful to have the opportunity to join the team here, learn more about our fascinating activities, and watch the Heritage Center grow," Clay said.

Heather Doyle

Heather Doyle is the Museum Program's new and first staff conservator since the 1980s.



Doyle earned a bachelor's degree in art history from Brigham Young University – Idaho, as well as a graduate diploma in conservation studies and a master's degree in con-

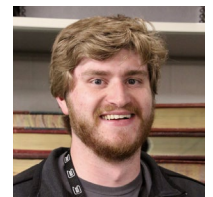
servation of cultural heritage, both from the University of Lincoln in the United Kingdom.

Her first task is to help the museum build a conservation program and to prepare artifacts for exhibit in the new Montana Homeland gallery.

"I love to work on objects, learn about them, and figure out how to conserve and preserve them," she said. "Each object has a unique story behind it, and sometimes those stories don't reveal themselves until you put it under a microscope."

Aaron M. Rau

Although a first-generation Montanan, Aaron Rau has a strong connection to our dynamic and vibrant state.



He holds a bachelor's degree in history from Carroll College in 2020, then entered Arizona State University's graduate history program. He also interned at the Montana Historical Society.

"Words cannot measure the excitement I have being a part of this amazing group of people who carry out the mission of the Historical Society," Rau said. 🌟

This document was printed at state expense.
Information on the cost of publication can
be obtained by writing MHS, Helena, MT.

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Pop-Up Exhibits at MHS

We’ve all got fascinating collections at home, but not everyone gets a chance to show off their collection in a museum.

That changed this spring for Helena area collectors — with everything from toothpick holders to vintage Santas — when the Montana Historical Society offered the opportunity for them to show off their treasures in our lobby during the Free Second Saturday event.

It was so successful that MTHS is repeating the event in September, October, and November 2022. If you are interested in highlighting your collection and would like to participate, contact Deb Mitchell at 406-444-4789 or dmitchell@mt.gov.