

**Montana Historical Society
Board of Trustees Quarterly Meeting
July 17, 2025, 9 A.M. MST
Sam Mitchell Building Room #261
125 N. Roberts
Helena, MT 59601**

CALL TO ORDER:

Tim Fox called the meeting to order at 9:04 A.M. Jenni Carr took roll.

Montana Historical Society Board of Trustees members present: Norma Ashby Smith, Kim Briggeman, Tim Fox, Pete Johnson, Bill Jones, Jay Russell, Ken Robison, Bill Whitsitt, Candi Zion

Montana Historical Society Board of Trustees members attending virtually: Carol Donaldson, Lorna Kuney, Rachel Reckin

Montana Historical Society Board of Trustees members excused: Mary Helland, Steve Lozar

MTHS Staff present: Molly Kruckenberg, Director; Emily McKeever, Administrator; Jenni Carr; Administrative Assistant/Membership Coordinator; Colton Tash, Public Information 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

Candi Zion blessed the meeting in Steve's absence.

Review of Minutes:

Motion: Ken Robison moved to approve the April 17, 2025 minutes. Norma Ashby Smith seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

President's Report – Tim Fox

Tim welcomed the staff and board to the meeting. He expressed his excitement for the Heritage Center as well as this quarter's report. He thanked the staff and hopes they feel fulfilled in the work they do. He noted that he has a meeting that he needs to attend at 11 A.M. and Bill Jones will take over this meeting during that time.

Director's Report – Molly Kruckenberg

MTHS Staff Update: Molly acknowledged the passing of Tami Gunlock, formerly the MTHS Fiscal Officer. The board took a moment of silence to recognize her. Molly welcomed the newest employees: Emily introduced to the Administration Office: Bo Antila, Fiscal Officer; Sierra Cotter, Security Guard; Kaylee Crum, Store Associate; For Library and Archives, Roberta introduced

Cassidy Vander Voort, Archivist; Tabitha Masters, Archivist; Abigail Coupe, Archivist; Dylan Yonce, Librarian; For the Museum office, Jennifer Bottomly O'looney introduced Hans Schrader, Curator of Collections; Nina Sanders, Curator of Indigenous Collections; Jeff Bartos introduced Karen Ogden, Business Manager to the publications team; The Outreach and Education office introduced AshLy Tubbs, MT 250 Commission Coordinator; Deborah Queen, Tour Guide.

Motion: Bill Whitsitt moved to approve the hiring of new employees. Pete Johnson seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Molly acknowledged that Jeff Bartos completed 5 years of service with MTHS, and Martha Kohl completed 30 years of service with MTHS. Starting at next year's July meeting, the society will reinstate the staff appreciation lunch that will occur annually. Molly shared some statistics with the board.

Montana Heritage Center Update: Molly began the Heritage Center update by letting the board know that the project is about 4 months away from completion. The floors and mobiles are getting installed. There is a significant amount of work ongoing in the Homeland Gallery. The Museum program is busy writing identification labels and working through final case layouts. The Charlie Russell and Changing Gallery are on a delayed schedule as the renovation is still underway. Some staff have begun moving into the renovation on the second and third floors. MTHS will be out of all rental units by the end of August – other than the store who will remain in downtown Helena until October. The café RFP (request for proposal) is under review. Bennet (MTHS AV Specialist) has been working through AV procurement and installation in the Event Center. Bill offered kudos to Sue and Bennet on their work in the Event Center. He recently attended a Montana Broadcasters Association meeting and there was a lot of excitement regarding the Event Center. MTHS staff continue to work with General Services Division (GSD) towards janitorial contracts and Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) to grant MTHS authority to manage their own spaces. There are plans to designate some parking for MTHS visitors. Candi asked about the panels hanging from the ceiling and whether they were completed by Midstate Designs. Jennifer stated that they were commissioned via Cinnabar, and she doesn't believe they were done by Midstate.

Legislative Update: MTHS was successful in receiving everything that was asked for from the legislature. The budget was approved as well as the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) database. There was also an approved contingency for the Heritage Center. Candi asked if it included salaries for staff members effected by the federal cuts (in the State Historic Preservation Office). Molly answered that it does not, however, MTHS has a plan to cover those salaries through the near future, and they continue to discuss backup plans. The Montana 250 Commission received a \$1 million appropriation for grants and funding.

Molly shared that the governor has shared an agency-wide initiative to centralize IT services, HR services, and procurement services through the Department of Administration. Molly will continue to report on the changes. Tim added that the Executive Committee discussed this during their meeting yesterday. His concern is that MTHS is a unique agency with unique needs. There are concerns about losing IT support. Molly will have an opportunity to identify and discuss those concerns and may call upon the board for support over the transitional period. The governor's office did make a statement that there will not be any cuts to staff over the transition. Administration will continue to advocate for MTHS staff.

Fee Categories: Molly shared that MTHS charges fees for services throughout the agency. MTHS staff are reevaluating the services. She asked the board to approve the fee categories that the Historical Society charges.

Motion: Jay Russel moved to approve the fee categories. Ken Robison seconded.

Discussion on the motion: Ken noted that a range wasn't given on some of the categories and asked why there was a reason they were left off. Molly acknowledged that they were very complicated and have not been finalized. The event space use varies greatly so the fees could vary significantly. Allison Leake has developed the categories, but it ranges quite significantly on a variety of factors. Ken asked if there would be a "menu" for the public to access to see the fees. Molly answered that there will be a form to fill out and Allison will connect with them discuss the needs and give them a quote. Bill Whitsitt asked if there was some consideration for significant donors. Molly answered that there are some donors that have it written into a gift agreement, but if it is not, they will pay the same rates. Candi asked for clarification on the SHPO fees. Pete answered that the \$25 would be in addition to the current \$35 fee. Kim asked if the costs are current costs or increases. Molly answered that they were current fees. Tim asked if MTHS would need to come back to the board to approve the fees themselves. Molly clarified that she's asking for discretion in deciding those fees.

Restatement of the Motion: Jay Russel moved to approve the fee categories. Ken Robison seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Relations:

- **Communications & Development** - Colton Tash; Claudia Bickel
Ginny Sullivan was out on vacation, so Colton presented the development report. The People and Lands of Montana campaign concluded July 1, 2025 and raised \$450,263.33 through 86 donors. The History and Civics Education Endowment (aka Student Field Trip Program) had a \$50,000 grant awarded by Blue Cross Blue Shield. Although MTHS has not pursued a campaign yet, it has already raised \$3,464,734. The final MTHS Capital Campaign Appeal went out in three phases: April – Appeal; May – “Thank you”; and June – digital Marketing. The total raised was \$94,244.40. Colton shared the google analytics chart showing the increase of visitations to the MTHS website once the digital marketing campaign began. Colton discussed the Thomas Nygard land MTHS owns in Three Forks, MT. After failing to sell the land in 2024, MTHS has contracted a new appraisal on the land which came in less than the former appraisal so after approval from the Land Board, MTHS will auction the land sometime in August or September. Pete asked if the cost of the land was currently included in the money raised for the MHC. Molly stated that the portion that was appraised when it was donated was, but anything MTHS receives beyond that will be added. Colton updated the trustees on the *Society Star* newsletter being renamed the *Society Bulletin* which will focus more on “upcoming” events instead of past events. It is also more ADA (American Disability Act) Compliant. Bill Whitsitt asked for

clarification on ADA Compliance and Colton responded that the font and color contrasts need to be readable. Colton moved onto the marketing side of his report, noting that the ribbon cutting is officially scheduled for December 2, 2025 as this date was ideal for the governor, Dennis and Phyllis Washington, and Norm Asbjornson. There are many tours and events plans underway. He stated that staff are working on a list of VIPs with the governor's office. Tim asked about including past stakeholders and trustees in the invites. Molly answered that they are included in the planning. Ken stated that it would be appropriate for Tim to be part of the ribbon cutting. Colton continued with press highlights and statistics. MTHS is closing out the contract with Sovrn, and has begun a contract with Gecko Designs to work on a website redesign. Kim asked how much "buy in" MTHS is getting from other counties for MHC and the 250. Colton noted that MTHS has received several requests for printed materials from MTHS to provide.

- **Membership** - Jenni Carr

Jenni updated the board with images of the new membership brochure and membership cards that are currently in process. She followed up with statistics on renewals this quarter, current members by location and current members by level.

BREAK: Tim called for a break at 10:25 A.M., to reconvene at 10:40 A.M.

Program Reports:

Administration – Emily McKeever

Montana History and Civics Endowment Management Plan: Tim Fox said that the executive committee discussed the Montana History and Civics Endowment Management Plan at length at their meeting on July 16. He reviewed the governor's plan to get students all across the state to the Montana Heritage Center. Emily provided a handout on the recommended MHCE Policy (draft). The executive committee recommended reviewing the policy at length, asking questions, and discussing the policy prior to making any decisions. The action item on the agenda has been tabled until a virtual August follow-up meeting when the board will vote. Emily explained that MTHS has the MHCE as a permanent fund, which is different from other trust funds as it is not given by individual donors. With other trusts, the donor often dictates how MTHS spends the money. This trust is funded by many donors, so MTHS developed a policy to outline how the endowment is managed and spent. The policy outlines the purpose, structure, investment, distribution, and publicity. This policy would include spending a portion of the funds on a part-time person to schedule the fieldtrips, as well as communicate with interested parties regarding the endowment. It also includes educational resources, and operating costs of providing tours at the MHC. Candi asked why Whitefish Community Foundation is the holder of the MHCE funds. Emily explained that she went through a robust process to review several foundations for these

funds including investment returns, policies, communication with donors, transparency with MTHS, etc. The Whitefish Community Foundation had the best return in meeting the needs of the endowment.

Reclassification of Director's Position: Tim followed up with the next action item being the classification of the Director's position. Beth Strandberg, MTHS HR Specialist had recommended a desk audit, and Molly's position has changed drastically with the pending reopening of the Montana Heritage Center. The executive committee recommended tabling this action item until the virtual August meeting as well. Tim would like to start that meeting by discussing the endowment, and then close the meeting for an executive decision on reviewing Molly's position and performance. Molly stepped out of the room to allow Beth to discuss the reclassification process. Tim acknowledged that this is an overview, and the robust discussion would occur during the August follow-up action meeting. Emily stated that the board has authority over the Director's position, and the work required. Emily has tasked the HR Generalist to review multiple positions within MTHS and verify that employees are classified and compensated appropriately. Beth is a certified classifier with the State of Montana and audited the Director's position duties and once she reviewed the duties, she researched the occupational standards that aligned with the position. The Business Executive position was designated as the most appropriate. Currently, the director's position is classified as a Program Executive. Candi recommended voting on the classification of the position as it seems straight forward. Bill Whitsitt stated that it is an important action item that will set some precedence for some things as a salary will need to be discussed. He acknowledged that Molly's performance will need to be a closed meeting. Bill Jones added that it is a complicated issue as there is potential that any decision they make could lead them to deal with the governor's office, budget office, and potentially the press.

Motion: Candi moved to table the two action items of the MHCE and Reclassification of the Director's position until August. Kim seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Discussion on the Motion: Jay asked if the board would be discussing the salary at the next meeting. Emily answered that she would provide the state's standard as well as comparable salaries of other directors. Kim acknowledged the extra work Molly has taken on throughout the last several years of construction, but asked the board to consider that they will be deciding on the classification of the director position, not Molly personally as eventually others will be in that position. The board agreed.

Library & Archives – Roberta Gebhardt

Roberta announced that the Research Center is slated to open in the spring. The exact date is still up in the air as construction is an unknown and has pushed back a lot of timelines. Additionally, several staff members have never worked the reference desk so some training will be necessary. L&A has procured "Preservica" a database that will store digital materials and have a public access portal. Terrance will review the program at the next board meeting. New staff retrieved collections from the Wier Building in Roundup. They also retrieved a collection from Hardy that features

correspondence, records, and professional development materials of Cheryl Hutchinson. L&A staff took a fieldtrip to Butte, Montana to visit the Orphan Girl and Orphan Boy mines, a tour of MBMG, and the Speculator Mine Memorial to improve staff morale and learn about Montana's mining.

Museum Program – Jennifer Bottomly-O'looney

Museum staff are busy at work getting the Homeland Gallery ready for the grand opening. Jennifer updated the board on work with graphics and signs. State Print and Mail declined the printing, so the staff are working on finding a vendor to prepare the graphics. The Japanese friendship doll, Miss Ishikawa, was restored by a conservator from Japan. MTHS will likely receive a loan request from Indiana University to join the other remaining friendship dolls in an exhibition. The doll has an entire wardrobe with accessory set. She is a treasure in the 101 Objects book. The CM Russell Museum has numerous pieces from the MTHS collection on display and Jennifer recommended if you're in Great Falls to go see them. Norma commented that 220 years ago today, Lewis and Clark came through our area, and she invited the board to a celebration on August 5 in Great Falls.

Outreach & Education – Martha Kohl

The History conference is coming up. Martha provided programs to the board to share. Online registration opens July 23. Candi will be doing a presentation on the History of Ranches in Judith Landing. Ken Robison is presenting on Belt. Bill Jones is presenting as well. There will be great workshops and tours to kick off the conference. The MT 250 Commission received \$1 million, and Martha acknowledged it's a lot of work to spend money responsibly. One half of the money needs to be spent on educational projects. The commission will meet soon to decide the remaining allocations, but they're currently discussing using it as a regrant program. O&E plans to spend some funds on pop-up locations at state parks. Bill Whitsitt asked about the change in leadership of the 250 Commission with the change in staff. Martha answered that Devon Malizia resigned for personal reasons but created a manual for onboarding AshLy Tubbs in her place. AshLy has ample experience managing a regrant program, so it happened at the right time. The commission is very balanced and has specific authorizing legislation to complete the things they're supposed to do. Norma mentioned that the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Commission will be in Montana next year and Sons and Daughters of Pioneers will be in Kalispell next year. Martha acknowledged that it would be great to work with them on outreach activities. Pete commented that there is a traveling exhibit called the American Revolution Experience and provided a flyer to get Montana on their list. Martha stated she would share it with AshLy. Martha continued with a presentation on promoting Social Studies Instruction in Elementary Schools. She also shared about teacher workshops that MTHS has hosted. Billings schools have adopted *Montana: A History of Our Home* which is going for a 3rd printing. Jay stated that he is part of the Lewis and Clark Commission, and they would like to collaborate with MTHS and the 250 Commission.

Publications – Jeff Bartos

Publications was the first program to move into the renovation and the program is fully staffed. Members of the publications team are working among other programs – primarily marketing and social media committees. *Montana the Magazine of Western History* is entering its 75th issue this winter. The summer issue was highly popular. Working on the autumn issue with an excerpt from *101 Places*. The emerging scholar winner will be presented in the issue. Project Muse has been

rolled out to members and the publications team will continue to work on getting more educational institutions subscribing that way. Social media has been steady. *101 Places* is currently being printed which is very exciting as it will be available at the History Conference. There are several book projects in the works. Jeff continues to think creatively about increasing membership numbers. Publications staff will be attending the Western History Association Convention, so Jeff will not be at the next BOT meeting, but Karen Ogden will report on the program on his behalf.

SHPO – Pete Brown

Pete highlighted that SHPO has been moved to the second floor of the renovation in the old research center so they feel grateful to be in. SHPO received notice of federal funding on July 1 which is great news. The state loaned SHPO funds from October to July, so they can now pay back that money which is a huge sigh of relief. The next federal funding application is due August 29, but SHPO does expect to receive that funding in a timely manner. The next concern is what the future holds for the next round of historic preservation funds. FY2026 starts October 1. Currently, it's unknown if that will be funded. It is unknown what the house and senate have proposed for that funding. Pete asked the board to reach out to the congressional delegation if they can. The basis of the grant funding is revenue from offshore oil drilling leases. Every state applies for and receives money from this grant. MTHS uses the money as baseline funding and SHPO cannot exist without the funding. It funds employees who then bring in revenue on behalf of SHPO to keep it running. 10% of the allocation is given away, so without the money there is no preservation happening. Jenni will send out the 2-page info sheet to the board if they would like to reach out. The next expense on the horizon is a database rewrite that is required by the State of Montana. SHPO needs to meet a federal ADA mandate and a security mandate. The way the current database is written, it is incompatible with the requirements. State Information Technology Services Division (SITSD) will need to rewrite the program which could take them 2-3 years *if* SHPO can afford to pay them. It will be about \$20,000 a month. The file search revenue is based on reviewing federal funding projects relative to what's available in the database. The majority of these projects are related to federal funding, so there are concerns that the revenue could decrease in a way that cannot sustain the maintenance and rewrite of the database. Emily, Pete, and Molly continue to meet with "plan b" if the revenue drops. One of the plans is to raise the file fee, however, they don't want to do that. It is unknown what this rewrite will cost – the hope is to get it between \$300,000-\$500,000. Staff are also researching additional state funds. SHPO has a responsibility to maintain the database based on state code. Pete asked if there are any vendors the state uses that could be a source for a grant or some way to defray the expense. Molly stated it is something MTHS can explore. Bill Whitsitt asked if there were any numbers in mind for what percentage or percentages the work SHPO is asked to do is required by state or federal mandates. Pete answered that to stay compliant they have to use the database. Bill Whitsitt requested information on the document Jenni will send out. Pete added that the quote for the database didn't get to SHPO until the end of May when the legislature was finished. He would like to put a request into the legislature to maintain the database in the future. Molly added that Emily is working on moving current funds around to accommodate SHPO's needs. Tim stated that the work that SHPO does is necessary, and the program has the board's support. Candi said that it's all driven by the National Historic Preservation Act that needs to be complied with and maybe raising the fees is an answer. She insisted that the board step up and support SHPO in this and be proactive.

LUNCH BREAK

Tim called for a lunch break at 12:13PM, to reconvene at 12:45PM

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Tim commented on the Great Falls Neighbor issue that Norma was featured in. Tim asked for any unfinished business. There was none.

NEW BUSINESS

Tim asked for new business. There was none.

Public Comment:

Tim asked for public comment. Norma thanked Tim for running an efficient meeting and thanked the staff for great reports. Bill Whitsitt also complimented the staff on their amazing work during the construction of the Montana Heritage Center. He complimented efforts to do things more efficiently and better. Molly reiterated his statements in thanking the staff for their intelligence and creativity. Tim stated that “we’re creating history” and how exciting it is to participate in “the big move.” He’s excited to be a Montanan, and he’s grateful for all the board and staff due, not just for the historical society but for their family and friends as well. He said that everyone in the room is a “treasure” to the state of Montana.

Kim Briggeman mentioned Norma’s John Steinbeck connection. She shared a story about her friendship.

Candi reiterated that she loves being on the MTHS board of trustees and enjoys receiving the reports.

ADJOURNMENT:

Motion: Bill Whitsitt moved to adjourn the meeting at 12:55PM. Jay Russell seconded. The motion passed unanimously.