

Montana Historical Society  
Board of Trustees Quarterly Meeting  
October 19, 2023, 9 A.M. MDT  
Montana State Capitol Room 152

**CALL TO ORDER:**

At 9 a.m., Jude Sheppard called the meeting to order. Jude recited the MTHS mission statement. Jenni Carr took roll. Steve Lozar gave a blessing.

**Montana Historical Society Board of Trustees members present:** Norma Ashby Smith, Tim Fox, Mary Helland, Bill Jones, Lorna Kuney, Steve Lozar, Ken Robison, Jay Russell, Jude Sheppard, Candi Zion

**Montana Historical Society Board of Trustees members attending virtually:** Carol Donaldson, Bill Whitsitt

**Montana Historical Society Board of Trustees members excused:**

**MTHS Staff present:** Molly Kruckenberg, Director; Emily McKeever, Administrator; Jenni Carr; Administrative Assistant/Membership Coordinator; Ginny Sullivan, Development Officer; Eve Byron, Public Information Officer; Laura Marsh, Outreach and Education; Roberta Gebhardt, Library and Archives Program Manager; Jennifer Bottomly-O'looney, Museum Program Manager; Diana Di Stefano, Publications Program Manager; Pete Brown, State Historic Preservation Program Manager

**Review of Minutes:**

**Motion:** Bill Jones moved to approve the meeting minutes from the July 19, 2023, board meeting. Ken Robison seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

**President's Report:** Jude began her report by thanking staff for their efforts putting on the History Conference. She thanked the trustees and staff for being present.

**Director's Report:**

**MTHS Staff Update:** Molly introduced new staff who were hired this quarter. Samantha Gilk wasn't present for SHPO but will be introduced later in the meeting. There are four new security staff that Emily McKeever introduced: Larry Ridge, Paul Degolier, Kyle Willbanks, and Bonnie Durant. Emily also introduced our new Fiscal Officer, Tami Gunlock. Roberta Gebhardt introduced a returning employee, Maggie Meredith. Roberta also introduced intern, Emma Brandt. Molly mentioned Hannah Grable, another intern who was unable to attend the meeting.

Molly announced the retirement of Zoe Ann Stoltz. Steve Lozar commented that Zoe Ann was a valuable member of the MTHS team.

Molly recognized Kendra Newhall and Rowena Harrington for receiving the Governor's Excellence Award. They have spent an exceptional amount of time packing inventory – more than 60,000 artifacts. They planned, packed, and met all goals and deadlines regarding the move.

**Statistics:** Molly went over the most recent statistics for visitors, public program attendees, subscribers, and members. We have had an increase in social media interactions.

**Legislative Update:** This past quarter Molly presented to the Legislative Council, provided a tour to the Education Interim Committee, and presented to the Education Interim Budget Committee. The Education Interim Committee will conduct a study on moving MTHS to the Department of Administration instead of keeping MTHS under the Department of Education. Several appointments have been made for the Montana 250 Commission.

**50<sup>th</sup> Annual Montana History Conference:** Close to 400 people attended the conference (between attendees, staff, and speakers). Molly thanked staff for making the conference a success.

**Montana Heritage Center Update:** The Montana Heritage Center (MHC) is coming along. The outside is looking more and more complete with the tile and stonework getting finished. There is a lot going on with the parking lots and exterior. The addition and existing Veterans and Pioneers Memorial Building (VPMB) have been cut through and are now connected. The furniture plan has been completed this quarter. MTHS is continuing design work for all the spaces every day.

Jude asked what the reaction is when Molly takes people on tour. Molly said it's often, "Wow, I didn't know it was going to be like this." There has been a lot of positive feedback and people tend to walk away excited.

Molly presented the numbers associated with the MHC. She informed that trustees that MTHS announced raising \$57.3 million during a news conference with Governor Gianforte on Oct. 3. This kicked off our capital campaign. Around 150 people attended the press conference. Molly also took a moment to recognize the Sletten team for their hard work.

**Montana History & Civics Education Endowment:** The endowment was announced at the Oct. 3 Press Conference. This aims to bring all Montana students to the MHC during their school careers. The initial endowment goal is \$10 million. There is currently \$2.2 million pledged. The Governor has stepped in on leading this fundraising campaign. Martha Kohl had done a pilot program offering \$500 to schools before the closing of the exhibits and the response was outstanding. This endowment will build on Martha's efforts and prioritize helping students get to the MHC.

Emily McKeever discussed the financial aspects of the endowment and our decision to go through a Foundation for some of the donations, so donors could take advantage of the endowment tax credit. Donors not interested in the tax credit can donate directly to MTHS. MTHS has selected a foundation based on an initial set of criteria: low administration fees, online access to donor database, knowledgeable staff, invested assets greater than \$20 million, expert experience and longevity, and a professional, reputable investment firm. After passing the initial criteria, MTHS addressed a second set of criteria: audited by reputable independent audit firm, lowest administration fees, high program expense ratio and low administration ratio, strong investment returns, and highest trend of gift growth during the past three years. In the end, MTHS decided to go with the Whitefish Community Foundation. Emily was able to meet with them and is excited about collaborating with them.

Jay Russell asked if the Whitefish Community Foundation was part of the Montana Community Foundation. Emily clarified they were not.

Jay asked if the tax credit was still 40% for individuals, and 20% for corporations. Emily confirmed that was the case.

Ken Robison asked if the Foundation for Montana History was considered. Emily confirmed that it was considered, but due to not having online access to donor information and having higher administration fees, that foundation was not selected.

**Heritage Keeper & Heritage Guardian Award Ceremonies:** MTHS has wrapped up the ceremonies for the winners of the awards. Molly thanked the trustees for their selections and participation.

### **Membership and Development Report:**

**Membership:** Ginny Sullivan updated the trustees on what has been going on with Membership and the integration of subscribers into the membership database to clean up data and streamline efficiencies.

**Development:** The Fall Appeal is coming up and will go out the first week of November. This winter, MTHS will go public with the campaign asking all Montana citizens and beyond to donate. MTHS has contracted with the marketing firm Sovrn for the next two years. The media enhancements campaign did wrap up – thanks in a large part to the Governor. The mobile concept is changing, as MTHS is integrating a digital aspect to it. Ginny is working with the design consultants and the marketing firm to market the campaign.

Bill Whitsitt asked about the change to the mobile and if it would open sponsorships of the mobile to be available to more people. Ginny clarified they're sticking with the 200 images.

**Naming Opportunities:** Ginny presented some naming opportunities that need approval.

Café Plaza: Westmoreland Plaza

Historic Lobby: Tom Nygard

Director's Office Conference Room: In Memory of Velva Toley

General Media Enhancement Recognition: Town Pump Charitable Foundation

**Motion:** Steve Lozar moved to approve the naming rights as presented. Candi Zion seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Steve Lozar added that Tom Nygard was at the press conference, and although he lives far away his heart is still in Montana.

### **Public Relations:**

Eve Byron gave the public relations report. She mentioned that even though MTHS is closed, it's still present online, tv, radio, and in the news. Molly was interviewed for a podcast. Eve talked about working on the press conference and thanked Sletten for their efforts in putting it on. MTHS has continued with

its increase in followers on social media. It is exciting how many people not only connect with us but share their stories also.

Eve left some copies of the Society Star, which came out last week, so the trustees can get them. Jude thanked Eve for her terrific work as we've had more publicity in the last couple of years than ever before.

**BREAK:** Jude announced a break at 10:15 A.M. Jude called the meeting back to order at 10:32 A.M.

### **Library & Archives:**

Roberta Gebhardt gave the Library and Archive's report. She updated the trustees that staff have continued to assist the public to the best of their ability while working in an active construction zone. They are continuing to work on processing projects and bringing in new records. Roberta updated trustees with news that the free public portal is available on the MTHS website for Newspapers.com and Chronicling America.

Ken Robison asked if he could get instructions in writing so that he could access Newspapers.com. Roberta stated that yes, she would provide that, but also there will be trainings and press releases to help get the word out.

**Deaccession:** There is a French Gulch cased image that staff believes is actually Colorado, not Montana, so they are wanting to return it to the appropriate entity.

**Motion:** Bill Jones moved to approve the deaccession of the French Gulch cased image. Lorna seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Central Services Report:**

Emily McKeever apologized to the trustees for not having financial reports ready as she had been covering multiple positions that have vacated since the last board meeting. Emily asked if she could present the documentation in the interim at the approval of the board. They agreed.

**Financials:** Emily presented the current happenings in the finance office. As previously mentioned, she is covering other positions, and recruiting for those vacant positions. She has been training on new procurement protocols and training on new state public information request protocols. She has been evaluating and vetting Montana Foundations for the endowment. There has been ongoing analysis for Federal shutdown implications.

**HR:** Emily has been working with Carol Loomis to update positions and their pay after union negotiations. She discussed the recent employee resignations, and current recruitment.

**IT:** Rennan Reike has been busy with the Montana History Conference activities. He also migrated our primary file and print server to a new VM, and migrated web analytics from Angelfish to Google Analytics. He has been busy with the general technology requirements of MTHS and keeping staff up and running while managing his normal workload.

Security and Facilities: Jerry McGee has been managing the VPMB and MHC security and day-to-day maintenance of the buildings. He's busy training the new security personnel and keeping the buildings functioning and organized.

Store: Dianna Berry has been doing amazing at the store. She has changed some of the merchandise and book offerings, which have increased traffic and sales. Her performance is phenomenal, and Emily praised her efforts.

Norma asked for more information on the increased sales. Emily commended Dianna for being the biggest reason for the increase in sales. Dianna takes pride in her position and researches what is most appealing to the customer base. She studies and finds the right books to offer, as well as looks at different vendors to find items in different price ranges to give people a wider variety.

**Motion:** Jay Russell moved to approve the hiring of new employees. Tim Fox seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Museum Report:**

Jennifer Bottomly-O'looney presented her report. She commended her staff for working under tough circumstances as the VPMB is under construction. She praised Rowena and Kendra for their ongoing efforts and their much-deserved Governor's Award of Excellence. Jennifer and her staff are continuing to work with the design team to plan exhibits for the Heritage Center. The museum has received its compact storage and is in the process of getting it installed. Planning has begun for how to get artifacts back into the new building. Molly mentioned that there is timelapse footage of the high-density storage getting installed.

Steve Lozar and Bill Jones commented on the storage and how excited they are about it.

Eve mentioned work happening in the House Chambers – replacing the carpeting. Jennifer mentioned that Museum staff are working closely with the contractors and capitol staff to protect the Russell during the update.

### **O & I Report:**

Laura Marsh presented the O&I report as Martha Kohl is at the Educator's Conference in Billings. Martha will be discussing footlockers and programs with the educators, and Melissa will be talking with them about History Day. Laura praised Christine Brown for the success of the History Conference. Laura discussed the Youth Archaeological Survey Program, Clue at the Governor's Mansion, and a walking tour of China Row. She shared the upcoming events including the ongoing lecture series, Halloween at the Original Governor's Mansion, MT History Trivia, Christmas at the Original Governor's Mansion, and the Indian Citizenship Act anniversary.

Candi remarked that she's very impressed with the outreach toward a younger generation.

Bill Jones asked if History Day used to be more prominent in the state. Laura clarified that yes, it was, but it had dropped off in recent years, so they are trying to bring it back.

## **Publications:**

Diana Di Stefano presented on the goings on of the publication team. Diana highlighted that the autumn issue of *Montana the Magazine of Western History* (MMWH) has gone out. The cover is by Richard Buswell. The magazine has had to be a little more creative in what goes into the issues with limited access to images, however it emphasizes diversity. Diana has been working to get the magazine digitized to reach a larger audience.

Diana updated ongoing press projects. The newest book is *The Quest: A Montanan's Photographic Journey* by Richard Buswell. There was a book launch and exhibit of his photographs at the Myrna Loy in Helena. The images will be on exhibit until the end of October. Another book that has just gone to the printer is: *Catastrophe at Custer Creek: Montana's Deadliest Train Wreck* by Ian Campbell Wilson. MTHS should receive the book by Thanksgiving so it would make a great Christmas gift! The press is doing great.

Diana is going to the Western History Conference next week in Los Angeles.

Norma asked for some themes on upcoming issues of MMWH. Diana said the Winter issue will have an article about Buffalo Bill in Italy.

Mary Helland asked for some clarification on the magazine's indexing. She asked if there is digital indexing if a researcher is wanting to look for a certain subject and if the digital indexing works. Diana clarified that we do work with an entity called JSTOR, however they only index up to three years back. Unless you're subscribed to JSTOR, you must pay to read the articles. With Project Muse, if you are a member or subscriber, you will have access.

Ken Robison applauded the move to a digital magazine. Ken remarked on Richard Buswell's knowledge of Mullan Road.

Bill Whitsitt added that he is excited about the digital magazine. He asked if there was any cost or implications that the trustees should be aware of considering digitizing the magazine. Diana answered that yes, there is an annual fee that MTHS will pay to Project Muse, however, due to moving subscription management in-house the cost can be shifted to pay for that so it won't change the publications budget.

Bill Whitsitt also commented on Diana's Writer's Workshop at the Montana History Conference and how much he appreciated it, and how much he learned about the publications process.

Bill Jones commented that the cover of the Custer Creek book was a photo that his father took. His father was a passenger on the train and Bill provided other photos for the book.

## **SHPO:**

SHPO reported on the Youth Archaeology Survey Program, where they partnered with O&I. Several staff members gave a lot of their time to make this happen. DNRC also provided staffing and knowledge for the program. Pete hopes this is a lasting form of outreach and he hopes to do it again. Pete also hopes it will cultivate interest in the profession. He discussed SHPO's grant program. Pete introduced Samantha Gilk, who is the new grants officer. SHPO just met with MSU's Dean of the graduate school, Craig Ogilvie,

with a plan to expand a fellowship to MSU that they currently have with the University of Montana. They will continue to work with him to craft this fellowship.

Ken praised Kate Hampton for all she does for SHPO and MTHS. She has been working with Ken as he seeks two grants for a church in Great Falls. He also mentioned that Kate has offered to be the principal speaker for the Black Heritage meeting in Great Falls in February.

Jude asked if anyone from SHPO has been to Havre to see the Chinese cemetery. Pete said he didn't think so, and Jude offered to take him to it.

**BREAK FOR LUNCH:** Jude broke for lunch at 12:01 P.M. Jude called the meeting back to order at 12:28 P.M.

#### **Unfinished Business:**

##### **Heritage Keepers Award Committee Report:**

Molly shared some staff thoughts on the Heritage Keeper Awards for consideration. These awards are important, and she feels that it's crucial that we continue the awards; however, doing four of them was a stretch for the staff. Molly asked the trustees to consider choosing fewer awardees. Staff ask that awards be limited to two. They also would like the trustees to limit the timeframe of the awards to between June and August as autumn gets very busy for MTHS staff. It also would be beneficial to move to an online form to simplify and create more efficiency for submitting the nominations.

Steve Lozar stated he is in support of this. There are often adjustments throughout the years, and he thinks it's beneficial to adapt.

MTHS is also asking that a trustee participate in each of the award ceremonies – even if it's just as simple as passing off the award and shaking the hands of the winners.

Bill Jones remarked that he agrees with the online form so that submissions must come in complete. He would like the trustees to rank the nominations as they come in.

**Motion:** Bill Jones moved to approve the recommendations as laid out by MTHS staff. Steve Lozar seconded.

Tim Fox asked if applications could be carried over to a subsequent year automatically. Molly expressed concern that this could increase applications to unmanageable amounts as MTHS is getting a lot of them. Candi suggested making "honorable mentions." Ken doesn't agree with making an honorable mention as it points out they were not selected. Ken would like a plaque that lists the Montana Heritage Keepers displayed somewhere in the Heritage Center. Tim withdrew his roll-over comment.

**Motion:** Jude restated the motion: Bill Jones moved to approve the recommendations as laid out by MTHS staff. Steve Lozar seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Thomas Minckler Collection:**

Molly shared that when we have approached acquisitions in the past, we have a procedure that we follow, regardless of the size or price. It is important that we have an independent third-party appraisal that is paid for by the proposed acquisition's owner. This ensures that the value of the collection is at or above what we agree to pay. Then, we would enter into an agreement with the collection owner. These steps provide protection for both MTHS and the collection owner. We need to make sure we're considering this is the best decision for the State of Montana and the Historical Society. It is part of an administrative rule for the MTHS that the collection owner pays for the appraisal.

Molly noted that Thomas Minckler has provided pricing, however, it didn't meet the standard of a third-party appraisal, so MTHS is asking that he provides that before the state considers purchasing his collection.

Tim has some experience with this as he had artwork from his office appraised and eventually donated to MTHS. There are standards for this type of appraisal and there are people who meet those standards. Tom had put together an appraisal with a book seller who had experience; however, it did not meet the standards and the document is outdated. Tim agrees that we want to move on the collection, however, we need to communicate what needs to be done and respect the opinions for the collection. Tim would like to communicate with Tom that we would like to start the process and lay out what the appraisal process looks like. The bottom line is that we must comply with the law and the policies and procedures.

**Motion:** Tim moved that MTHS contact Tom Minckler to get the ball rolling toward getting the collection appraised and follow the administrative rules in doing so, so that MTHS can subsequently enter a purchase agreement with him. Ken seconded, provided that fundraising happens concurrently while waiting for the appraisal.

Tim remarked that there are several issues with starting fundraising concurrently – intent being a big one. MTHS can't ask for money for a specific item without having that item secured. Tim also stated that MTHS doesn't know how much money to raise prior to an appraisal.

Jay asked if we could enter an agreement with Tom prior to the appraisal that laid out terms.

Steve commented that he would also like to obtain the collection. However, he was taken aback by Ken's email to Molly holding her personally liable if MTHS loses the collection and stated that it was inappropriate. Steve said that collectively if MTHS doesn't acquire the collection, then shame on the trustees, not shame on Molly.

Tim is intrigued by Jay's idea; however, Molly would need to get legal advice before MTHS could do anything like this. MTHS would need a state lawyer to outline the necessary steps, so MTHS follows the proper procedures.

Molly stated that an appraisal doesn't need to take multiple months. She said it does not have to be a complicated process as they could use Tom's book and his catalog of items. Molly doesn't know the current appraiser's qualifications, but he could be valid. Molly said it is possible to get an appraisal by the January board meeting where the trustees could then make a motion.

Mary said there should be a certified appraisal of the collection and full index of items, so MTHS knows what is being purchased.



Tim pointed out that MTHS already is in the midst of a capital campaign and raising money for the Heritage Center, so the timing is difficult as MTHS staff are overwhelmed as it stands. He added that no one wants to lose this opportunity. Tim does not agree to change the motion for the caveat that Ken placed.

Bill Whitsitt reiterated that there are a lot of unknowns. The appraisal letter MTHS received stated there was not a way to fully appraise the collection; however, it is a requirement to pay for the collection. Bill would like to continue the communication with Tom Minckler and seek expedited information for potential appraisers so MTHS can demonstrate to Tom that it is very serious.

Bill Jones pointed out that the current appraisal is more than a year old, so at this point it does not carry a lot of weight since they do expire. Additionally, Tom has added materials and raised the price significantly without sharing what the additional items are. Bill proposed MTHS get the appraisal started, get us set up to raise the funds, and communicate with legal counsel to pass the state's requirements.

Molly and Ginny already have been talking to folks who can assist with the fundraising efforts. MTHS would need to take on a contracted employee to work behind the scenes to fulfill fundraising prospecting, paperwork, mailings, etc.

Emily clarified that MTHS needs to reach out to Tom to say, "Yes we are very interested, but please provide an appraiser who meets the Montana standards so that we can proceed with acquiring the collection." Tim added that he agrees, but he would like to be involved to ensure that person meets the qualifications.

Ken asked what MTHS could offer Tom as guidance to appraise the collection with standards that are acceptable. Tim received uniform practices that were provided by MTHS staff. Ken asked if that can be provided, and Molly agreed that staff could provide that.

Another issue with the appraisal is that it offers a lot of praise for the collection, which is unusual for an appraisal; also, the pricing in the appraisal was provided by Tom Minckler himself.

**Motion:** Tim Fox moved that Tom Minckler provide an independent, third-party appraisal of the collection and that the appraisal meets professional appraisal standards, paid for by the collection owner. And that MTHS communicate with the collection owner the Montana administrative standards 10.121.205(8) that must be met. Bill Jones seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Jay asked MTHS to verify that Tom Minckler understands our interest and intent and is following the rules, not making him jump through unnecessary hoops. Tim and Jude volunteered to go with Molly to discuss the collection with Tom in person.

Jude asked Ken to apologize to Molly, and he declined, stating he didn't think Molly has ever expressed interest in obtaining the collection and his words were to get Molly's attention. He thinks Tom also needed to hear what Ken has to say. Ken is in communication with Tom, who is stating that his collection has been valued modestly. Candi reiterated that personal attacks on employees are not appropriate. Jude reiterated that MTHS needs peace and needs to go through the proper procedures.

**New Business:**

Introduction to DocuSign: Jenni went through a brief overview of DocuSign and that she would walk through any trustees who needed assistance.

Jude stated at the last meeting Bill Whitsitt requested a tour of the Original Governor's Mansion, and Jude mentioned that she would like to do that. Molly will arrange that for January or April depending on the board's preference.

**Public Comment:**

There was no public comment.

**Closing Statements:**

Mary Helland commented on behalf of Benji Daniels; he asked Mary to announce that he had recast a skull in bronze with a distressed white finish. His health is failing, and he would like to have it placed somewhere of importance. He is looking at selling it for \$225,000 and she asked that the trustees think of any institution that would be interested in the skull to reach out to Mary. Steve suggested the Salish Kootenai tribes, and suggested he reach out to Tom MacDonald or the Salish Kootenai college. Molly mentioned that the Crow Tribe is building a Cultural Heritage Center as well.

Candi offered a closing prayer.

**Motion:** Tim Fox moved to adjourn the meeting. Steve Lozar seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:44 P.M.