

**Montana Historical Society
Board of Trustees Quarterly Meeting
July 18, 2024, 9 A.M. MDT
Opportunity Bank Conference Center
1550 Vandelay Ave
Helena, MT 59601**

CALL TO ORDER:

Tim Fox called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. He thanked the new board members and new staff for their attendance.

Jenni Carr took roll.

Montana Historical Society Board of Trustees members present: Norma Ashby Smith, Kim Briggeman, Tim Fox, Mary Helland, Pete Johnson, Bill Jones, Lorna Kuney, Steve Lozar, Rachel Reckin, Ken Robison, Jude Sheppard, Bill Whitsitt, Candi Zion

Montana Historical Society Board of Trustees members attending virtually: Carol Donaldson

Montana Historical Society Board of Trustees members excused: Jay Russell

MTHS Staff present: Molly Kruckenberg, Director; Emily McKeever, Administrator; Jenni Carr; Administrative Assistant/Membership Coordinator; Ginny Sullivan, Development Officer; Eve Byron, Public Information Officer; Christine Brown, Outreach and Education; 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

Review of Minutes:

Motion: Bill Jones moved to approve the April 18, 2024, minutes; Norma seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

President's Report – Tim Fox

Three new appointments were made at the previous board meeting: Kim Briggeman, Pete Johnson, and Rachel Reckin. Kim was able to join the April board meeting, but Pete and Rachel introduced themselves.

Molly announced that three re-appointments to the board: Tim Fox, Bill Jones, and Candi Zion. Their new terms will expire July 2029.

Director's Report – Molly Kruckenberg

MTHS Staff Update: Molly announced that a lot of new staff were added to MTHS. Starting in the Administration Program, Emily introduced: Sue Leferink, IT Administrator; Kenzie Baker, Accounting Tech; Randa Renenger, HR Generalist; Marco Uribe, Security; Scott Kanerva, Security; Bradley Russell, Security; Curt McAlpin, Security; Aly Arnold, Store Manager; Cindy Davis, Accountant. Roberta Gebhardt introduced new Library & Archives staff: Nani Hodges, Librarian; Dave Colamaria, Photograph Archivist; Terence Kratz, Digital Projects Archivist. To the Outreach and Education department, Christine Brown introduced: Darby Bramble, Museum Education Officer; Carly White, Tour Guide; Donna Rogne, Bryan Baldwin, Scott Falkowski, seasonal tour guides (not present). Jeff Bartos introduced himself as the new Publications Program Manager and introduced Luke Duran, Graphic Designer. Pete Brown introduced RJ Hillman as the new SHPO Compliance Officer.

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

Three retirements and resignations took place during the past quarter. Tom Ferris retired June 30. He was replaced by Rennan Rieke. Diana Di Stefano resigned effective July 5. Dianna Berry retired effective July 19.

Judy Marks Statue: Tim Fox explained that a statue of Judy Marks was approved by the legislature to be installed in the Capitol building. Tim welcomed Dave Galt, who spearheaded the Judy Marks statue fundraising with assistance from Lorna Kuney. There were more than 300 donors, and the artist Gareth Curtis was commissioned for the project. It will be erected on Friday, July 26, 2025, with an unveiling ceremony to follow on July 29. Dave presented the Montana Historical Society with \$12,000 to cover the cost of maintaining the statue. Norma asked if it was a full-length statue or just the bust. Lorna confirmed it was a full-length statue.

Quarter 2 Statistics: Molly reviewed the most recent quarter's statistics with the board. Nearly 2,700 people visited the Capitol and Governor's Mansion this quarter. More than 7,000 people participated in outreach activities. Nearly 5,500 people received *Montana the Magazine of Western History*.

Montana Heritage Commission and Stonewall Hall: The Montana Historical Society does not have authority over the Stonewall Hall restoration. The Heritage Commission hired a new Executive Director, Cal Poole. The Heritage Commission is overseeing the restoration, and they had enough funding to stabilize the structure, but there are financial hiccups. They are prioritizing the project.

Last Chance Tour Train: Molly provided an update on the Tour Train. The City of Helena and General Services Division (GSD) had concerns about the train's current location. Molly was not concerned about their location, as long as it doesn't block the entrance to the Heritage Center. They are discussing moving the train to Sanders.

Montana Heritage Center Update: Substantial work is going on at the Heritage Center. They are pouring the outdoor amphitheater space. Staff are working through the security aspects. Contractors are completing interior projects including drywall, paint, elevators, and the event center. Installation of the wood ceiling started. Molly invited the trustees to attend a tour after the board meeting today. Staff are adapting to the construction, working remotely as needed to

accommodate noise or temperature fluctuations. Norma asked when the grand opening is scheduled as of right now. Molly answered November of 2025 is the current projected date. Molly provided an updated schedule. Staff are deciding hours the building will be open to the public. Molly shared the current plan, which would expand hours to include weekends and possibly one evening a week. Finally, Molly provided the current Montana Heritage Center Budget and Cost Analysis.

Bill Whitsitt noted that the current draft report shows the opening date as summer 2025. He asked Molly to update that to read the current fall opening date so as not to confuse the public.

Legislative Update: Molly provided an update on the legislature – specifically the Interim Education Budget Committee’s study. Several new proposals to the funding came from the Governor’s Office. MTHS will know what gets into the governor’s budget in November. Molly gave a brief of the seven items: Development Program Support, Marketing the Montana Heritage Center, Museum Operations and Management Software, Preservation and Access for Digital Records, MT250 Community Re grants, NAGPRA Compliance, and National Historic Preservation Act Compliance.

Bill Whitsitt thanked the staff for working at full capacity. As we move into a legislative season, he’s heard from other agencies that they are under a lot of pressure. As trustees, he asked if there are other areas to increase efficiency and communicate MTHS funding.

Membership-Development Report – Ginny Sullivan

Ginny noted membership is dropping due to the closure; however, in the last quarter MTHS has received 49 new subscribers and members. Every state but West Virginia is represented. Every county in Montana is represented, and nine countries. Staff are integrating subscribers into the membership office to improve efficiencies and customer service for members and subscribers. Membership staff are considering changing some benefits. These new levels and benefits will be presented to the board at the October board meeting.

Motion: Candi moved add “Subscriber” as a membership level. Rachel seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Ginny shared the Montana Heritage Center Capital Campaign results. \$58,249,280 has been raised for the Heritage Center project. A few more donations are trickling in. Norm Asbjornson, the second largest donor, made his final payment, which MTHS is grateful for. In June, MTHS received a surprise donation in the form of two stock shares totaling more than \$1.2 million. This will be split between the Heritage Center and the Education Endowment. Sletten, the contractor, has also committed to donating, which Ginny will share more about at the October meeting. Thomas Nygard, a past trustee, had donated 326 acres of land in Three Forks to benefit the construction project. In May, MTHS received approval to proceed with the sale of this land for more than \$1 million. It will go to public auction at the Jefferson County Courthouse on September 19.

Ginny presented information on the People and Lands of Montana art installation last quarter. The goal was to raise \$1 million and receive 200 sponsorships. So far, 79 photos are sponsored, so MTHS is almost halfway to its goal.

The donor recognition wall is under review. Ginny is working with Sovrn to make sure everyone gets the recognition they deserve.

The Montana History and Civics Education Endowment (MHCEE)'s goal is to raise \$10 million. MTHS has raised \$2.5 million to date, with the goal of \$3 million by the end of 2024.

Public Relations Report – Eve Byron

Eve presented on the current media engagements. MTHS has had a lot of good news this quarter, from Ellen Crain's Heritage Keeper Award, Students Archaeology Day, and the Centennial Farm and Ranch Program. MTHS's social media is also receiving a lot of interaction with the public. Staff are looking at ways to get more contact from the younger generations. Eve is working with other tourism groups to network and find ways to bring more people to Helena and the Montana Heritage Center. Eve has been busy giving tours and sharing the project with the public. Eve submitted the interactions with our tribal partners to the governor's office.

BREAK: Tim called for a break at 10:36 a.m. The meeting reconvened at 10:48 a.m.

Program Reports:

Centralized Services Division – Emily McKeever

Emily explained that the state closes its financial books on June 30 every year. Staff are finalizing the Fiscal Year End statements, so she will not present them at this meeting. MTHS has a good financial standing and Tami Gunlock has been a great addition to the team as the Fiscal Analyst.

Emily has been busy hiring and fulfilling the staffing needs of MTHS. Sue in IT, and Randa as the HR Generalist have been prominent hires who will increase efficiency and keep things moving smoothly on the administrative side. Twelve more positions will be added this fiscal year.

The guards have been busy while undertaking new training to keep the staff, museum, and artifacts safe. Proper OSHA safety training is under way. They are rotating security presence at three locations: 225 N. Roberts, 910 Helena Ave., and at the Museum Store on Last Chance Gulch.

Emily praised Sue's efforts in IT.

Aly Arnold is the new store manager and is looking at offering a more diverse range of products. Emily asks that if trustees or staff see any artwork or crafts that they think would be a good fit in the store, to contact Emily or Aly. They are especially interested in Montanan Native American Crafts.

Norma asked what kind of income is coming in for the store. Emily stated that it has been unsteady, but revenue is topping around \$10,000 to \$12,000/month. Norma asked about the most popular items, which Emily said are books, along with wooden wall décor.

Library & Archives – Roberta Gebhardt

Dan Karalus has created a newspaper index to make it easier to know where to locate newspapers (online or in person) based on the publication year. Lindsey Mick is creating a finding aid, known as “One Aid to Rule them All” for locating records easier.

The film scanner has been received but since the collections are wrapped and staff are working in a construction zone, they haven’t been able to use it. They will open it next week and train on how to use it before packing it up until staff can move into the new space.

Motion: Jude moved to approve the quarterly deaccession. Bill Jones seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Museum Program – Jennifer Bottomly-O’looney

Jennifer noted that staff are working in interesting conditions in a construction zone, with noise and temperature fluctuations making work a bit more challenging than normal. Staff are awaiting a move-in date for the addition. Amanda Trum and Aaron Genton are the leads on the Homeland Gallery, which has 10 zones from pre-history to present day. Those zones include a special zone for the Sovereign Nations and a children’s gallery. Jennifer shared photos of the zone introductory panels, area panels, and section introductory panels. She also shared the graphic layouts that will go into the panels.

Outreach & Education – Christine Brown

Christine acknowledged the new employees and thanked them for joining the O&E team. O&E continues to diversify and expand programming. They held a live Clue game at the Governor’s Mansion, a Historic Stamp Mill demonstration, a Juneteenth celebration, and many more programs this quarter. For the first time since Covid, MTHS was able to host the popular Archaeology Day in partnership with Montana Wild. Teacher workshops were held in both Missoula and Helena. The Montana 250 Commission met in Missoula this quarter and launched its new website.

Christine passed out Montana History Conference programs. O&E has purchased new software to help register attendees, which has been very helpful. This system helps track people easily, change their registration if needed, apply discounts, and increase efficiency. The conference will be held in Great Falls, with many programs and tours to choose from. Christine is grateful for the partnerships from Great Falls museums, libraries, and genealogical society. Norma added that she was excited to welcome everyone to Great Falls for the conference.

Publications – Jeff Bartos

Jeff thanked the BOT for accepting his promotion to program manager. Jeff passed on Diana's gratitude and support to the publications program prior to her departure. Jeff started his position on July 15, so he is three days on the job. He shared the summer magazine and outlined some of the articles in the issue, encouraging the board to read through it when they have a chance. The manuscript folder is full for future issues. They produced a limited-edition issue on Great Falls that will be available only at the History Conference. A long-time editorial board member, Sherry Smith, resigned from her position. Mark Johnson has been invited to join the board (author of the *Middle Kingdom Under the Big Sky*). Publications is working closely with Membership and Development on the reorganization and integration of subscribers into membership. Pubs has more than 15,000 followers on its Facebook page. Two book projects are coming out this fall: Doug MacDonald's *Land of Beginnings: The Archaeology of Montana's First Peoples* and a collaboration with the Montana's Arts Council. In collaboration with O&E, *101 Places* is on the way, possibly by next fall. More book projects are in the works.

Kim asked if anyone is considering creating a "best of Ellen Baumler" compilation. Jeff answered that he will bring that to his team.

Bill Whitsitt asked about the vision for article content that is Montana specific moving forward. Jeff answered that the publications department loves Montana content and prioritizes it, but they don't have a "set" number of articles that need to be on Montana. Most issues have at least half the articles about Montana, but Jeff values the quality of the contribution of Western History and how Montana fits into that so it's open ended.

Lorna asked if there would be a souvenir publication for the grand opening. Jeff answered *101 Places* will coincide with the opening.

SHPO – Pete Brown

Pete presented efficiencies in what they're doing. SHPO has begun a paperless consultation system, which was four years in the making but eliminates the snail mail aspect. This is much faster than the previous paper-heavy system. Both SHPO and other agencies appreciate this new system, which eliminates a lot of data entry, sorting, etc.; the portal they're using now sorts all of that automatically. This has been tested, with only a few bugs associated with the update.

Kate Hampton received another grant from the Park Service for just under \$500,000 for Union Bethel AME church in Great Falls. They will now begin project implementation. Pete encouraged the board to check it out when they go to Great Falls for the History Conference.

SHPO has an intern compiling case studies on previous tax credits. Pete asked for Bill Whitsitt's critique moving forward.

The Youth Archaeological Survey Program is kicking off its second year. This gets high school students into the field learning how to do archaeological surveys.

National Register listings: MSU Northern Campus Northern Girl's Residence Hall; 100 E Broadway, Butte; Crystal Ice and Fuel Company, Billings.

Ken thanked Pete for mentioning the Union Bethel grants and applauded Kate's efforts being instrumental in those efforts.

Rachel gave major kudos to Damon for his work on the portal.

Break for Lunch Tim broke for lunch at 11:55 a.m. Tim called the meeting back to order at 12:43 p.m.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Update on theft of Library & Archives materials: Molly updated the board on the continued legal proceeding for Brian D'Ambrosio who stole items from Library & Archives. He pleaded guilty to the most serious charge against him and agreed to pay restitution for all of the thefts. Sentencing will be in November. MTHS will work with the US Attorney's office to create a victim statement to present at pre-sentencing. Bill Whitsitt added that he feels it's important that MTHS deters others from following Mr. D'Ambrosio's example, and he hopes the sentence isn't lenient. Bill considered making a motion that the trustees approve communication to the US Attorney's office, the court, and the probation office, to remind the court that the sentence needs to provide appropriate deterrence in the future. Bill's hope was that Tim would draft the letter with Molly and MTHS staff. The Executive Committee discussed whether to have the trustees submit a request and/or be present for the sentencing hearing. Tim also suggested approving the letter from MTHS staff via email prior to submitting it.

Jude asked if the perpetrator was wearing an ankle bracelet. Tim doubted he would be as he wasn't a flight risk.

Tim will speak with the prosecutor's office about possibly banning Brian D'Ambrosio from stepping foot into MTHS or other similar facilities. Tim will also speak with him about whether it would be helpful to have someone at the hearing.

Ken asked if staff know exactly which items he took, and if, MTHS could ask him to provide a list of everything he stole as part of the plea deal. Molly stated that he did return some items of his own accord, but MTHS has not received them back from the FBI yet. Mary asked if MTHS reached out to eBay to know what had been listed. Roberta confirmed that yes, that list has been complete. Some of those items have been returned, and some have not.

Tim wants to speak with the prosecutor to ask what MTHS can seek.

Kim asked if there was correlation to the items he took and his books. Roberta was unsure. One of the things he was working on was a history of Law and Order in Montana so there were some items associated with past law enforcement.

Pete stated it was more important that he doesn't have access to anything versus a harsh sentence. Tim agreed that identification and return of stolen items, restitution, and prohibition from MTHS facilities are the top priorities.

Eve added that there is a ripple effect of his actions, as he was a freelance writer and media establishments are no longer willing to hire him.

Rachel wondered if MTHS couldn't, at bare minimum, ask to have him banned from state establishments if it's not possible to get him out of federal establishments.

Motion: Bill moved that the trustees provide input to the US Attorney's office and district court on the need for adequate and appropriate deterrence in any sentence of Mr. Brian D'Ambrosio as a result of his plea of guilty to the theft of items from the Montana Historical Society. Norma seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Discussion on the motion: Rachel added that she's in favor of a letter as well as someone attending in person.

Update on Administrative Rules: By Friday, the process will be complete to finalize the revisions to the Administrative Rules. The public hearing was held, and no one attended the public hearing nor added any public comment. The ARM rules will go out July 19 so they are final.

Montana Heritage Keeper Award Criteria: Molly summarized the new Heritage Keeper Award criteria. The board received an outline of what was already agreed to by the board – two awards possible, with one able to be the Heritage Guardian. They also added that it's for Montana History and Indigenous Nation History. They have added bullet points as criteria for the award. Examples will be provided. The evaluation criteria will be updated. Two significant changes made with Bill's input: current MTHS staff and trustees are not eligible, major donors (\$25,000 and more) cannot be eligible for three years from their gift. Trustees are not eligible to nominate.

Steve congratulated everyone on putting their minds to work to streamline and give the award some prestige. "Way to go you guys."

Ken agreed that it's a good plan.

Candi thanked Ken for representing Ralph's award in Billings.

Motion: Ken moved to approve the new Heritage Keeper Award Criteria. Rachel seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

Discussion on forming a committee to begin planning the Heritage Center dedication: Tim requested a discussion on forming a committee to plan the Heritage Center Grand Opening and Dedication. Molly advised him that staff have already started an internal committee and have started work on planning grand opening events. Tim suggested that the trustees could be involved. Ginny outlined some of the things the team is thinking of regarding the grand opening. MTHS wants to honor the donors, members, volunteers, government officials, and staff who have supported the

Heritage Center throughout the years. The fall isn't conducive to outdoor activities, so there will be a few grand opening events leading up to the opening, and a huge celebration after "soft opening" events. May-July 2025: Sneak Peak Tours for members. November 2025: Staff & Board preview, Opening Day Event, Private Donor Event, Volunteer Appreciation, Press Event, and a series of patron events from November 2025 to May 2026. Summer History Celebration: Tentative for June 2026 as a two- or three-day event with live music, curated tours, events for children, speakers, film screenings, evening reception, tribal event at the arbor, swag, and more. MTHS would like to partner with the tourism industry, local and regional cultural and heritage organizations, businesses, schools, and community nonprofits. Board members will have opportunities to play a role in the celebration.

Kim asked if it would be in conjunction with the MT250 Celebration. Ginny stated that Devon, the administrator for the 250 Commission, is on the committee and if she can find a way to tie the two together, she will.

Tim asked to what extent any of this must be approved by the board. Molly stated that the similar events we have are the History Conference and Exhibit openings – historically, the board does not need to approve these events although they are welcome to participate. Molly suggested updates on the plans.

Bill Whitsitt cautioned the board to not "gum up" the work of the staff. He added that some board members have corporate experience, so as internal consultants, the board could participate quietly. Molly suggested that if a trustee is interested in providing expertise to reach out to Ginny Sullivan and she will plug them into some of the meetings. Tim added that he hoped all trustees could make it in person on opening day. He would like to be stationed as a greeter or the like and mingle with the public.

Lorna liked the idea of having an oversight committee that includes board members. Tim said it's an ongoing conversation. Staff will keep trustees advised and will identify some areas or make personal invitations to trustees who might be helpful and want to be involved. As opening day gets closer, there will be opportunities for inclusion. Candi added that the plan was brilliant.

Public Comment: Bill Whitsitt gave a shout out to Jeff Bartos and Diana Di Stefano and his excitement about a writer's workshop at the History Conference.

ADJOURNMENT:

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

Tim Fox adjourned the meeting at 1:48 p.m.