



PONY TRACKS

Newsletter of the Northwest Montana Posse of Westerners

Vol. 10, No. 10

Kalispell, Montana

November 15, 2023

Richard A. Hull, Ye Editor, e-mail: richardahull@charter.net

NOVEMBER MEETING

Monday, November 20, 2023



Topic: "Inside the NW Montana History Museum"

Presenter: Jacob Thomas of Kalispell,
Former museum director

Where: Second floor of the Northwest
Montana History Museum,
124 2nd Ave. East, Kalispell

Time: General membership meeting at 6 p.m.,
followed by Greet 'n' Gab, book raffle
and book signings.

Beer, wine and soft drinks available
for purchase from museum staff.

Historic Presentation: Program begins at 7:00
p.m. No reservations are required, but
seating will be limited; so come early.

Posse members may join the program through
Zoom at the following address:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83938998081?
pwd=K2h6TnhYejZrWEhTRUMwS2QyRDJL
QT09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83938998081?pwd=K2h6TnhYejZrWEhTRUMwS2QyRDJLQT09)

Meeting ID: : 839 3899 8081

Passcode: 74586

E-mail Tim Christenson at
tim.chris@yahoo.com for more help.

ABOUT THE PRESENTATION



An unexpected conflict resulted in Butte expert and popular presenter Doug Ammons pulling out of his scheduled presentation for November's meeting.

Fortunately Jacob Thomas, the former Northwest Montana History Museum director, was able to step in and will offer an intimate look at the museum and its own history.

The event includes a tour of the museum, which is normally \$7-\$9 by itself.

Thomas will describe the struggle to preserve the 1892 Kalispell Central School building, which is where the museum is now housed. Saving the building from being demolished hinged on a single vote in the City Council.

He will also talk about the business of running the museum, and the activities that go on behind the scenes.

A cadre of volunteers stay busy organizing, cataloging and securing the museum's many items and documents.

Visit our website: nwmtwesterners.com

They are also instrumental in preparing the exhibits, such as the rotating “Ten Things” that greets visitors near the front door.

Located on the top floor is the “Attic”, where shelves of historic artifacts are stored. There are also file cabinets and boxes filled with family histories and other historic documents. An effort by the local Latter Day Saints church and the museum to digitize the documents is underway.

The giftstore has a rotating stock of historic books, along with postcards, unique blankets and other souvenirs.

The museum also has a replica historic classroom, where children from local schools get to experience first hand what education was like in 1895.

And its rooms and grounds are available for local events, including meetings and weddings.

The museum is owned by the city, but otherwise self supporting. It is staffed almost entirely by volunteers.

About the Presenter

Originally from near Detroit, Michigan, Jacob Thomas has a masters degree in museum studies. He started his career at the famed Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation.



Thomas then worked at the Stark Museum of Art in Orange, Texas, and then at the Charlevoix Historical Society in Michigan.

He was director at the Northwest Montana History Museum for five years. Deciding to take a break from spending his nights worrying about the museum's fussy mechanical system and periodic disasters, he resigned earlier this year. He now works for Applied Materials in Kalispell. His wife, Brit, is director of the Conrad Mansion.

Thomas has agreed to take over leadership of the Westerners in 2024.



FROM THE SHERIFF'S SADDLEBAG

By Edward "Eddy" Byrne

As we close out our ninth year with our November Program it is time to reflect on 2023 and finalize our programs for 2024 that will kick off in February.

This year has seen our membership grow as we emerged from COVID and various shutdowns. Through marketing and advertising our guest membership has also significantly increased this year.

We are also rewriting our by-laws and have reorganized our organization and Board positions. The new common (short) title is “Northwest Montana Westerners” while our long name remains “Northwest Montana Posse of Westerners”.

We will use the new title for all local correspondence and marketing. The long name will be reserved for corresponding with our parent organization, Westerner’s International, along with legal documents and banking. When referring to the Northwest Montana Westerners we will include the descriptive “a local history group” for clarity. The new webpage looks great and continues to evolve. The address is <https://nwmwesterners.com>.

For all the changes and to maintain the day-to-day operations of the group it takes many hours behind the scenes every month. I would be remiss if I did not recognize the team that makes this all possible.

First and foremost Rick Hull is our primary writer, editor, marketer, and web page designer. Rick is a true professional and his contributions are greatly appreciated. The rest of the team that works behind the scenes this year includes Kathy “Kat” Britton who is best described as the director/orchestrator of the club. Our Treasurer, Malinda Shafman keeps the books balanced and works hand in hand with Kat with a myriad of

Visit our website: nwmwesterners.com

tasks. Ed Rothfus, our Trustee, brings a wealth of knowledge and balance to the group.

And finally, Grant Munteer who runs the book raffle and is always willing to pitch in during presentations. You all have my gratitude and a heartfelt thank you.

We will have the 2024 schedule and list of presentations out in January and post it to our website. Enjoy the upcoming holiday season and I look forward to seeing you in February.

The Board meets from 6:00-6:30 p.m. before the 7 p.m. presentation at the museum. All members are welcome to attend to observe the meeting.

Also, anyone interested in becoming more involved in the Posse can attend and volunteer. Once again to volunteer or if you have any questions, recommendations, or concerns, please get in touch with me at 406-871-6001 or edwardjbyrne860@gmail.com.

GENERAL MEETING INFORMATION

NMPW 's meetings are held on the third Monday of the month, except the months of December and January.

Sessions begin with a board and general membership meeting at 6 p.m., followed by a Greet 'n' Gab for a chance to get acquainted. Historical attire is encouraged, but not required.

Local history authors will have their books for sale, and will be available for signing.

The historic presentation starts at 7 p.m. and is free for members and youths 16 and under. Non-members pay \$5.

Historic books are raffled off as a fund raiser.

Contact Kathy at kbrittonrn@gmail.com with any questions.



NEW MEMBERS

The following have recently joined the Posse:

Mary-Anne Miller and Carol Buchanan,
both of Kalispell

FROM YE EDITOR'S DESK

By Rick Hull



Jim Atkinson

Though at times the Northwest Montana History Museum can seem empty, with only a handful of visitors touring the exhibits, deep in the basement there is a hive of activity. Among hand-hewed rock walls, is the acquisitions department.



Jane Renfrow

There a cadre of volunteers are steadily cataloging donated photographs, documents and historic items. All are given an acquisition number, tied to an official donor form, and then entered into a computer database specifically designed for museums.

Visit our website: nwmtwesterners.com

It is also where historical questions are answered. For a fee, volunteers like Jim Atkinson will research a building or print a copy of an archived photograph. Among other tasks, Jane Renfrow is collecting oral histories and having them transcribed.

A vault contains shelf after shelf of historic photographs.

Two recent donations are major discoveries. The rumored diary of Rev. George Fisher, his ledger book and other documents have surfaced. Fisher was intimately tied to the early history of the Flathead Valley, and much of westside Kalispell sits on his former farm.

And the family of pioneer Matt Eccles has turned over his collection of photographs, including a never-seen-before photo of Demersville. A professional photographer, he also kept a diary.

The museum is always in need of help. Most volunteers are retired, and individuals age out regularly. The gift shop currently has an opening, after the volunteer's health issues advanced until he could no longer sit for the afternoon shift. The demand on time is relatively minor – typically three to four hours a week.

TRIVIA QUESTION OF THE MONTH

Last month's question was based on the presentation about Indian trails, and asked what grave, important to the Kootenai tribe, is connected to Graves Creek, near Fortine?

Pat Walsh hunted down a copy of speaker Darris Flanagan's book, *Indian Trails of the Northern Rockies*, and found the reference I used. An infant had died on the trail, and the Kootenais had a memorial at the grave, leaving bead offerings on a nearby tree.

But Pat's wife, Trish, had the story that gave the creek its name. In 1864 a group of prospectors, on their way to the gold fields in British Columbia, were stymied by the high spring runoff on the creek.

One riding a laden pack horse, swore he would cross the creek even if it killed him. The horse lost its footing and the man drowned.

His companions recovered the body and a crude wooden cross marked the grave site.

A cross also marked the location on early maps of the route north.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS




- **November 25:** Ninepipes Museum, located between Ronan and St. Ignatius, holds a gathering to thank the community for its support. The day includes stories, live music, authors and artists, and refreshments. Bring a non-perishable food item for the Ronan Bread Basket and receive a 50% discount on admission to the museum.
- **November 30:** Open House from 4 to 7 p.m. at the Northwest Montana History Museum. Refreshments, music and goodies. Free admission.
- **December 6:** History Book Club discusses *The Wager, a Tale of Shipwreck, Mutiny and Murder* by David Grann. 2 p.m. at the Northwest Montana History Museum.

Members aware of events are encouraged to contact Ye Editor with the particulars at richardahull@charter.net

PARKLAND BOOKS

GENERAL OUT-OF-PRINT BOOKS
AND PAPER WITH EMPHASIS
ON WESTERN AMERICANA &
NATIONAL PARKS

850 LAKE BLAINE ROAD KALISPELL, MONTANA 59901
(One mile east of junction of Hwys. 35 and 206)

MARGE & ED ROTHFUSS, OWNERS
Open Sundays only, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Ph. (406) 309-2851

E-mail: parklandbk@aol.com

Visit our website: nwmtwesterners.com

The First Public School in Flathead Valley

Dec. 31, 1927

By: Eugene McCarthy

In the fall of 1884 the few ranchers that then lived here decided that we should have a public school, as there was then in the neighborhood of 20 children of school age within the valley. The question of location was decided at or close to where Ball's Crossing now is.

The board of trustees selected was the writer's father, Eugene McCarthy, Sr., George Brocken and Chris Finlayson, with A.W. Swaney as clerk.

This was School District No. 5 of Missoula County, which at the time embraced all the territory which now comprises the counties of Ravalli, Granite, Mineral, Sanders, Flathead, Lincoln, Lake and a great portion of Powell, so Missoula County was at that time an empire within itself, taking in most of all the territory west of the Rocky Mountains, in what was then the Territory of Montana. However, you will readily realize how meager its public educational institutions were, when this was the fifth school district in all of the above mentioned territory.



Eugene McCarthy and the first school building.

The trustees found that by the small apportionment of school money allowed the district, they could have three months of school that year, providing the teacher could board with the parents of the pupils, each family to board the teacher in proportion to the number of children they had attending school.

The late D.J. Lambert had filed on his homestead that year, and had a log house 16 x18 feet. This he offered the district as a school house. This was accepted, as his home was located in about the center of population, so this became the first public school in Flathead valley. The logs were chinked and plastered with mud; the roof was covered first with split rails, over which a covering of hay was laid, and this was topped with about four inches of dirt.

There was a door at the north end of the building and two small windows on each side furnished the light. As I was the largest boy in the school, it was my duty every morning after a snow to sweep off the roof. If this was not done, when the sun came out and the house got warm inside the snow would melt and leak through into the room.

The trustees hired a man named Hank Robinson as teacher. At least that was the name he went by, but we found out afterward that was not his true name, but that did not much concern us in those days, as then there were plenty of men out in the wilds of the frontier whom officers were searching for in the east, and who used assumed names as a matter of self-protection.

I met Hank in the spring of 1884. One day as I was fishing in the Flathead River, I noticed the smoke of a camp fire in a bunch of willows, and upon investigation found the campers were Hank, Long Jeff, Ed Boyle, and a man who went by the name of MacDonald.

They asked me if I had seen a boat loaded with hides floating down the river, and then told me their

hard luck story. They had been trapping in the mountains all the winter before, and had started to come out with two boats. In one of them they had \$1,700 worth of beaver, otter and marten hides, all their past winters catch. In making the portage the boat loaded with the hides had got away from them, and they had searched the river to Flathead Lake but had found no trace of it.

I have talked with Ed Boyle and Long Jeff several times since about the boat, and they never found any trace of it. Boyle and Long Jeff (whose name was Thomas Jefferson) both lived the balance of their lives here; MacDonald was hanged by the Vigilantes, near Choteau, the following year for horse stealing, and Hank left for parts unknowns shortly after his term of teaching expired.

Wherever he went or whatever became of him, I will always have a kindly remembrance of him, for it was he who instilled in me a desire for an education. While boarding with us we bunked together, and became quite good friends. Whenever a problem came up which I was unable to solve, he would explain it in a way that I could easily understand.

Each pupil in the school had to furnish his own books, and what a collection. There were books of all descriptions, and no two alike, each pupil bringing whatever he could get. There were 11 pupils from three families, the Stackhouse, Brocken and McCarthy households. As contribution to the textbooks, I had a Bancroft's History of the United States and a Ray's third arithmetic. This was all, but at that I was much better provided than others of the school.

Our teacher the first day formed his classes as primary, first, second, third and fourth grades. Our blackboard was the smooth side of a drygoods box nailed to the wall, our desks and benches were made of rough lumber, and nailed together in the crudest form.

I don't doubt that our children now would be amused if they could just see the inside of that school as I saw it in the fall of 1884. But to us it was all a very serious matter, from the smallest to the largest pupil. We were there to learn, and our teacher did his very best to assist us.

Two years ago, in company with Mr. & Mrs. E. E. Day and Mrs. Ingalls, we visited Mr. Lambert's place to get a picture of the first school house, from which the accompanying illustration was made. The only change in the old building is that the dirt roof has been replaced by one of boards.

At that time Mr. Lambert offered to give the old building to School Dist. No. 5. He has since passed on, but if his offer could be renewed by his heirs, I should very much like to see the old building preserved as a relic. It would also serve to illustrate to the school children of today the wonderful advance which has been made in education, and to impress upon them the great advantages they now enjoy under the modern system of schools.

This issue of Pony Tracks is Volume 10, Number 10

The Pony Tracks is published monthly except December and January by the

NORTHWEST MONTANA WESTERNERS

Authors of articles hold the copyright to their contributions. All other

content is © 2023 by Northwest Montana Posse of Westerns

c/o Clerk of the Posse, P.O. Box 2803, Kalispell, MT 59903

Notice to Contributors

Copy intended for this newsletter should be sent to the Editor at the e-mail address below. Copy must be in the Editor's in-box on or before the first of the month in order to make that month's issue. Copy received after that date will be held over until the subsequent issue.

The next issue of Pony Tracks will be issued February 14, 2024 (or thereabouts)

richardahull@charter.net

Visit our website: nwmtwesterners.com