



PONY TRACKS

Newsletter of the Northwest Montana Westerners

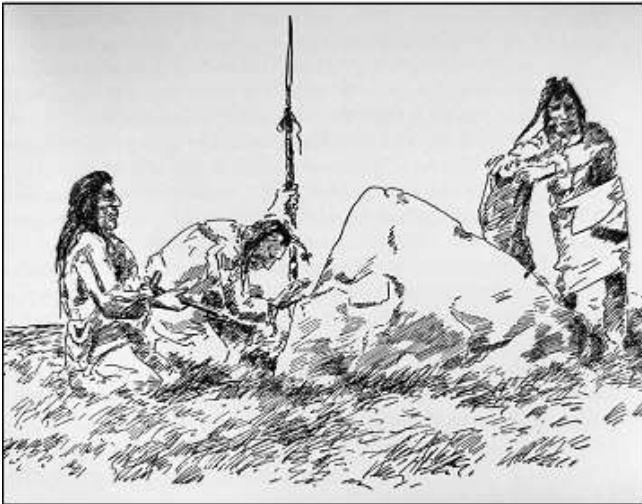
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Rick Hull, Editor, e-mail: richardahull@charter.net

ABOUT THE PRESENTATION



Tribes dependent on bison hunting stopped to pay homage to the rock known as the Sleeping Buffalo.

This month's speaker, Sally Thompson, will take historic tales from Northwest Montana, and use them to explore how we tell our stories.

The tales are from her new book, *Disturbing the Sleeping Buffalo*, which is subtitled "23 Unexpected Stories that Awaken Montana's Past."

Thompson is an University of Montana anthropologist who has worked with local tribes on historical projects. Her previous book, *People Before the Park*, explored the Kootenai and Blackfeet heritage in Glacier National Park.

She looks at different sides of more well-known stories, such as the "moccasin telegraph" that tracked Lewis & Clark. Thompson also unearthed stories of early explorers that may or may not be fables.

A true story that rivals Sacagewea is the epic of Marie Dorion who traveled throughout the

SEPTEMBER MEETING

Monday, Sept. 16, 2024

"23 Unexpected Stories that Awaken Montana's Past"

Presenter: Sally Thompson of Missoula.

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

Time: Gab 'n' Greet, raffle sales start at 6:00 p.m. Soft drinks, beer and wine available.

Thompson will sign and sell her books before and after her talk.

Presentation: Program begins at 7:00 p.m.

No reservations are required, but seating will be limited; so come early. Call (406)-309-0938 with any questions.

Northwest with her trapper husband. Her courage and wilderness skills were put to the test when she spent the winter taking her two children to safety after her husband was killed.

Thompson tracks the journey of Jesuit missionary De Smet as he headed up the Kootenai River to the adjoining headwaters of the Columbia River. There she discovers the remains of a cross dating from his 1845 trip.

She then follows up with the story of the 57-year old De Smet's 1858 journey up the Clark Fork River to escort area chiefs to a peace conference in western Washington. None proved

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to be at war with settlers.

Thompson's personal quests include the search for a hill in Lewis & Clark Pass with the mysterious name of Shishequaw, and an archaeological dig of a 5,000-year old site on the outskirts of Great Falls. She also talked to an eyewitness to a close call for Andrew Garcia, author of the classic *Tough Trip Through Paradise*.

The Sleeping Buffalo is a rock near Malta that opens a discussion of other medicine rocks and Ice Age geology. She also wonders if Kootenai mythology reaches back more than 12,000 years to Glacial Lake Missoula.

Topics include more modern stories, such as a 1,200-pound hybrid buffalo named Jumbo.

Thompson's career has spanned more than four decades, and includes documenting the tribal significance of the Badger-Two Medicine area, with its controversial oil leases.

About the Presenter

Sally Thompson earned her Ph.D. at the University of Colorado in 1980. That same year she moved to Missoula, and has been connected with the University of Montana ever since.

She has worked as an archaeologist, ethnohistorian, and tribal consultant and collaborator, and filmmaker.

Thompson published numerous articles in professional journals. and in Montana, the Magazine of Western History.

She has a particular interest in working with tribes to implement unique cultural preservation strategies particular to each tribe or region.



FROM THE SADDLEBAG

By Edward "Eddy" Byrne



Labor Day weekend has come and gone, schools are back in session and the tourists are finally thinning out. Even Glacier Park is now open without needing a reservation for daily access through the west entrance. However, with this comes the services in and around the park beginning to wind down with the majority closed/suspended by October 1st.

Bottom line: We have a short window to get out and enjoy the park and all its grandeur before it closes and or the maintenance of roads and bridges will significantly affect access. I recommend checking Glacier Park's web page before day trips into the park.

With school back in session I invite all middle school and high school students to attend our monthly presentations free of charge. Home school students and some private and public-school social studies/history teachers offer credit for attending. I encourage all of you to invite students and their families to our final three meetings this year.

On a separate note, we are entering the final two months of an extremely partisan and toxic Presidential election year, I encourage each one of you, regardless of party affiliation, to fulfill your civic duty by familiarizing yourselves with the candidates and issues and then vote either by absentee or in person.

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 with the group is encouraged to show up early and volunteer your time and services.

Once again, to volunteer or if you have any questions, recommendations or concerns, please get in touch with me at 406-871-6001 or Email to edwardjbyrne860@gmail.com.

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

By Rick Hull

My wife and I are on an extended RV trip, so this is an experiment to see if I can prepare the Pony Tracks remotely.

We are trying to get to the East Coast, which means putting 300-400 miles behind us each day.

Interstate highways speed you along, but you no longer get to thread your way through historic towns. At most you see the the terrain change from the dry high plains to more farm-friendly country. But by the time you get past Minnesota, a wall of trees constricts even that view.

It is disappointing to see historical sites vanish in the rear view mirror. The idea of wrestling a 30-foot RV downtown also puts a damper on casual stops.

One consolation is checking off the places we'd like to explore more. Surprisingly, that includes North Dakota.

One interesting discovery is the ongoing dispute between me with my maps, and my wife's GPS turn-by-turn instructions. Typically GPS is the winner.

Here at home, filling up both the Pony Tracks and the speaker schedule continues to be a struggle.

Tim Christenson has kindly submitted a new western jokes section for the Pony Tracks, and has been sending out feelers and suggestions for upcoming presentations. This month's speaker, Sally Thompson, is his doing.

We are still short a November speaker and have next year to fill up. Anyone is welcome to submit their ideas. The criteria is broad – historical with a Montana connection.

Baring getting sucked permanently away by wanderlust, I will be back with more trivia and odd stories next month.

FUTURE PROGRAMS

- **Oct. 21:** “Montana Highway Tales – Curious Characters and Peculiar Attractions” by Jon Axline of Helena.

GENERAL MEETING INFORMATION

Northwest Montana Westerners' meetings are held on the third Monday of the month, except the months of December and January, at the Northwest Montana History Museum at 124 Second Avenue East, Kalispell, Montana.

Meetings begin with a Gab 'n' Greet session from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. for a chance to get acquainted.

The 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. Soft drinks, beer and wine will be on sale by museum staff.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS



- **Oct. 2:** History Book Club discusses *The Secret Life of Cowboys* by Tom Groneberg, 2 p.m. at Northwest Montana History Museum.
- **Oct. 26:** “Montana Antiques Appraisal Fair,” 9 a.m.-5 p.m. at the Northwest Montana History Museum. Bring in your historic item to be appraised. \$10 per item. Spectators free.

JOKE OF THE MONTH

By Tim Christenson

According to Uncle Torvald, Conrad “Montana Cattle King” Kohrs and his half-brother John “Big Circle” Bielenberg were riding into Deer Lodge from their Grant-Kohrs Ranch on Cottonwood Creek.

As they passed the Territorial Prison, John saw a midget sliding down the wall on a rope made from tied sheets.

When he pointed it out to his brother, Conrad replied, “Oh, that’s a little con descending.”

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TRIVA QUESTION OF THE MONTH



Scott Tanner, Trish Walsh and Janet Bones all had the answer to last month's trivia about the

Kootenais. The question was: What was unique about their canoes?

The answer was the canoe's pointed "sturgeon noses" which added stability and eased traveling through bulrushes.

This Month's Trivia Question

This one should be easy. Montana has several counties where the namesake town is not in the county at all. One example is Deer Lodge.

This month question is: What contemporary of Father De Smet is linked to the most extreme of this paradox, in terms of distance?

A bonus question: Which of these geographic mismatches couldn't even get the spelling right?

Submit your answer to the editor at richardahull@charter.net and we will print the names of all those who get it right.

BOOK REVIEW **The Conley Boys of Montana**



Sometimes fact is stranger than fiction. Local author Jim Blodgett has proved that with his book, *The Conley Boys of Montana*. Frank, Jack and Jim Conley had more twists and turns in their lives than a movie.

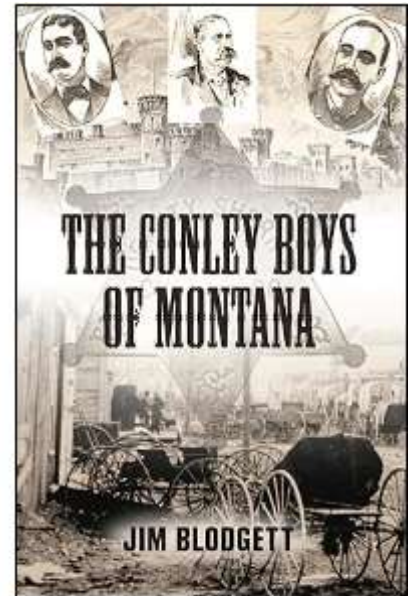
At first it was just frontier history. Jack was a mule skinner for the U.S. Army. He was with General George Crook at the Battle of Rosebud in 1876. The battle doomed Custer at the Little Bighorn. Jack was also a packer at Fort Keogh in Miles City, and Frank hired on with a Yellowstone Park survey.

All three became deputy sheriffs in the cattle town of Miles City in the early 1870s. Then things took a strange turn.

The county clerk, Lucious Stephen Taylor, fled after being implicated in a missing \$200,000. Working off a tip, Jim went to El Paso, Texas, located Taylor's wife, and followed her to a farm house in New Mexico. With Taylor in custody, he traveled by train to St. Paul, Minn. and met Frank and another deputy.

But Taylor had friends, and after an armed standoff, the three deputies were arrested and hauled before St. Paul authorities and threatened with a \$5,000 fine. The legal shenanigans ended when Taylor surprisingly agreed to return to Miles City.

Then there was a downtown lynching of a local murderer, and unsuccessful robbery of an Army payroll shipment.



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Even stranger was when Maurice Sullivan got involved in a dispute between two women in a house of ill repute, and shot a man. Jim and Frank tracked him to an isolated cabin. Sullivan seemed ready to surrender, and then pulled out his revolver.

A gun battle erupted, and a Dr. Carlin and his 3-year-old son were killed in the crossfire. A trial is held in Billings, at which Sullivan is not only found not guilty, but suspicion is cast on the Conley brothers as being responsible for the doctor and boy's death.

The story now centers on the 22-year-old Frank. He delivers a prisoner to the state prison in Deer Lodge, and is offered a job as a guard. It turns out that Montana is broke, and can't afford to run the prison. Frank and Thomas McTagre get the contract at 75 cents per prisoner per day. Using prisoner labor, a new rock wall is quickly constructed around the building.

Now officially the warden, Frank gets married. Enters Benton Hatcher, an early mayor of Kalispell who later embezzled \$90,000 from a Great Falls bank and ends up at Deer Lodge. Hatcher works as a trustee at Frank's residence, and became involved with Frank's wife.

The result is a divorce, and when Hatcher finishes his five-year sentence, he and Frank's former wife marry.

Several convicted murderers were hung at the prison. Then, in 1908, Frank is hearing prisoners' grievances in his office, and a trio attempt an escape, slitting the throat of Frank's assistant. A new round of trials and hangings results.

The state took over management of the prison, and in 1920 there is a change in governors and Frank is dismissed as warden after 35 years in the job.

During his career, Frank and his partner had managed to purchase 24,000 acres of ranch land. Frank also owned the water company that served the prison, the electric company, the brick yard, and a hotel. In addition, he had also been elected mayor of Deer Lodge.

A state investigation was launched, and a trial held, with Frank being sued for \$330,000. But he was able to prove every purchase had been approved by the prison commission – with the exception of a disputed \$65.12. The court concluded Montana actually owed Frank \$558.

Frank had built his financial empire on prisoner labor. Few saw that as a problem. The prisoners had expanded and modernized the prison, built the asylums at Warm Springs and



The former Montana state prison is now a museum.



Frank Conley

Galen, and constructed 500 miles of roads around the state, including the east shore of Flathead Lake. The prison was also self supporting when it came to food.

Frank's success with prisoner-built roads resulted in him becoming head of the state Highway Commission after losing his job as warden.

He believed in the rehabilitation of prisoners. Prisoners worked in camps with just a few guards, and Frank was one of the first wardens in the nation to not require the workers to wear striped prison uniforms. More than a third of prisoners worked outside of the prison walls.

Jim finished his law-enforcement career as a detective for the Montana Stockgrowers Association. Jack invested wisely while sheriff, and was employed in security for a smelter.

The book is very readable, but a bit long because of the complex events. There is also a lot of constructed dialog, which some historical writers see as taboo.

Available on Amazon. Paperback \$24.95, Hardback \$32.79. 432 pages.

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month's issue. Copy received after that date will be held over until the subsequent issue.

The next edition of Pony Tracks will be issued October 16, 2024 (or thereabouts).

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