



PONY TRACKS

Newsletter of the Northwest Montana Westerners

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ABOUT THE PRESENTATION



Plenty of Montana's exciting history is visible from its highways, points out this month's speaker, Jon Axline.

And he should know. Not only does he work for the Montana Highway Division, which erects the roadside historical signs, but he has authored or co-authored eight books on the state's history.

In his presentation, *Montana Highway Tales*, Axline will tell the stories of just a few of those places and some of their unusual characters.

Over the past forty years, the Montana Department of Transportation has recorded and photographed hundreds of archaeological sites and historic properties. Many are rather mundane, but many more have fascinating stories to tell about the state's colorful past, he says.

OCTOBER MEETING

Monday, October 21, 2024

**"Montana Highway Tales -
Curious Characters and
Peculiar Attractions"**

Presenter: Jon Axline of Helena

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 will be available.
Axline will sign and sell his books before and after his 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.

Some, like the stone chimney south of Havre and the concrete structure built into the hillside between Logan and Three Forks, have been the subject of speculation by motorists for decades.

Axline will delve into the histories of the Bozeman Trail, the famed Smith Mine near Bearcreek, Montana's cold war radar stations, historically significant roads and bridges in the state, and giant grasshoppers among other subjects.

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And he promises to tell the story of “Curious Characters” like Leonard Christler. The Episcopal minister was killed in 1922 in Havre by a woman member of the church who had become infatuated with the married Christler. Or is there more to the story?



Leonard Christler

Montana history is much more than vigilantes, the Battle of the Little Bighorn, and copper kings, Axline notes. His presentation will hopefully widen our appreciation for the state’s varied and lively history.

About the Presenter

Jon Axline is the long-time historian and interpretive marker coordinator at the Montana Department of Transportation.



He graduated from Montana State University with a masters in American history.

Jon has published a number of articles and books on Montana history, with subjects ranging from dinosaur raptors to the cold war sky watchers.

Along with his books on historic roads and bridges, he co-authored *Hidden History of Helena* and *Speaking Ill of the Dead: Jerks in Montana History*.

Jon lives in Helena with his wife, Lisa, three Corgis, an Australian Shepherd, and a very spoiled dachshund.



FROM THE SADDLEBAG

By Edward “Eddy” Byrne

As we are enjoying the Fall and the above average temperatures, we are still able to enjoy being outdoors or in my case catching up on the outside projects that I have procrastinated on this year. On a lighter note, the incredible Northern Lights (aurora borealis) have been spectacular over the past week.

Along the lines of the Northwest Montana Westerners, I have been on Montana Talks with Aaron Flint and this week on KGEZ with John and Robin in the Morning discussing our 10th anniversary and our history group in general.

Being a part of the Westerners history group as a member and now as the President, has been both enjoyable and an honor.

But now I will be temporarily stepping aside for several months to fulfill other commitments. In the interim Jacob Thomas will be stepping in as acting President until I return next May.

I am confident Jacob, and the entire Board will sustain and undoubtedly improve on our programs. I would be remiss to not recognize our Board and those volunteers that make our group a success – thank you one and all for all you do.

And a special shout out to our editor, Rick Hull, who not only researches, prepares and writes the *Pony Tracks* and *Pony Tracks Express*, he also has designed the new web page and writes the announcements for the *Inter Lake*.

Rick’s dedication combined with his wealth of knowledge and attention to detail is truly a treasure to us all.

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 offer 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.

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

By Rick Hull

My wife and I have returned from a 6,000 mile trip to see her childhood home in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The Northeast is part of the country we had not checked off our bucket list.

It was interesting to see how much of the country is rural, such as upstate New York, and that there are plenty of areas, like upper Michigan, where a Montanan could feel at home.

Pennsylvania is packed with rolling, wooded hills without the flat valleys and distinctive passes that mark the Rockies.

Even North Dakota is surprisingly fertile, especially when compared to the dry grasslands of eastern Montana. Minnesota has a lake I had never heard of, Mille Lacs, that is bigger than Flathead Lake, and it is not even the state's largest. However Ohio, Illinois and Iowa are largely treeless, windy and uninteresting.

A lesson of the trip is hauling a 30-foot trailer in a rush across 13 states and one province is not the way to see local sights. We did get to Boston to tour the U.S. Constitution, the War of 1812 frigate that a namesake of mine had commanded.

The other lesson is that maps are essentially worthless, except for the big picture. GPS turn-by-turn instructions are the only way to a destination. In one case, my wife escaped a traffic jam on the Interstate to head through downtown Columbus, Ohio. The GPS lady successfully guided us back to the highway.

In Westerners news, we still have not nailed down a speaker for November's meeting, and it is almost time to organize the schedule for 2025. Stay tuned for updates. Again, we are open to suggestions.

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.

Axline's books will be on sale before and after the meeting.

Historic books are raffled off as a fund raiser. Soft drinks, beer and wine will be on sale by museum staff.

JOKES OF THE MONTH

By Tim Christenson

Wolf Point Wisdom: If you see a turtle on a fence post, he prob'ly didn't get there by hisself.

Uncle Torvald claims that at a recent Lenten Fish & Chips dinner to raise money for Montana's new monastery, a wise-cracking parishioner asked the brother in the serving line, "So, are you the fish friar?"

"No," he replied. "I'm the chip monk."

A Montana veteran serving overseas was distraught when he got a big package from his North Dakota girlfriend containing a radiator green housing and a yellow hub cap, with a promise of more to follow.

"What's the matter?" his sergeant asked.

"It's my girl," replied. "She says someone told her that before she can break-up with me, she has to send me a John Deere."

FROM THE BOOK SHELF

We've all heard of Bigfoot, and several sightings have occurred in Montana. But did you know that there has been a persistent legend of Little People. Local tribes had numerous stories about the mysterious race, said to be two to three feet tall, and a 14-inch mummy was discovered in Wyoming in 1932, and had been part of traveling sideshows for years.

The story is just one chapter in *Montana Myths & Legends*. Originally authored by Ed Lawrence, the 2007 edition was updated in 2016 by Westerners' member **Michael Ober**.

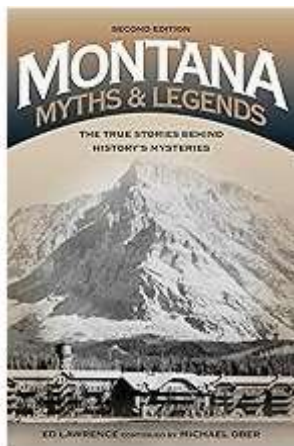
Bigfoot is also covered, with a 1995 sighting near Evaro and 2004 near St. Regis.

Another out-of-this-world mystery is the rash of cattle mutilations reported near Great Falls in 1975. The book authors wonder if they were related to UFO sightings, in particular the flying saucers photographed over Malmstrom Air Force Base in 1950.

More traditional mysteries are included, such as the disappearance of the Whitehead brothers in Glacier National Park in 1924. Sixty searchers spent two months scouring the area between Granite Park Chalet and Lake McDonald without result. Rewards totaling \$1,700 spurred interest in the vanishing for years.

Other chapters look at what happened to Lewis and Clark's iron boat, whether Lewis's dog, Seaman, was left behind in the mad dash from the Marias River to escape vengeful Blackfeet, and how Territorial Governor Thomas Meagher vanished from a Missouri River steamboat.

Likely suspects are named in the 1917 lynching of labor activist Frank Little in Butte, and in the gruesome murder of the owners of the Paradise



Lodge on McGregor Lake resort in 1963.

Finally there is the story of Shep, the faithful dog who met every arriving train in Fort Benton for six years, waiting for his master to return. The story is well documented. The only mystery is who was the shepherd or cowboy whose coffin had been loaded on a departing train, never to return.

Paperback, 154 pages. \$16.95.

TRIVA QUESTION OF THE MONTH

Barbara Boorman had the answer about Montana cities not in their namesake counties.

The specific question asked was which mismatch is connected to a contemporary of Jesuit missionary DeSmet.

The answer is Father Ravalli, who gave his name to both Ravalli County and the once-booming railroad town in Lake County.

The bonus question about which geographic crossover couldn't even agree on the spelling. That is Choteau, the county seat of Teton County, and Chouteau County.

Barbara even listed one I had missed – Lincoln and Lincoln County. Deer Lodge is the other.

This Month's Trivia Question

There is a question for us old timers. Kalispell used to have grass medians on the blocks south of the Courthouse. The medians were for U-turns, and aided "cruising the drag" on Friday nights.

A cannon from the Civil War era that used to be outside the old City Hall was mounted on a carriage and moved to the median. Surprisingly, it took only a few weeks before someone loaded it with gunpowder and blew away a street sign.

The question is: What other historic item was on the median and where it is now?

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

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HOW WE ALL GOT FOOLED

The Valley's First Doctor?

The following story is by George Stannard, who was one of the Flathead Valley's earliest residents. This article appeared in the 1923 Kalispell Water Department Report. The annual reports, by department superintendent W.H. Lawrence, were full of miscellaneous photos and articles about the Valley.

Our earliest experiences with the medical profession in the Flathead Valley should be of interest to the present generation, and should be a matter of record with the Flathead County Medical Association, if we have such an animal, for it shows the rapid development of our population, morally as well as physically, in the past 35 years.

When the writer arrived at the "boat landing," at the head of navigation of the upper Flathead River in 1888, which the spot was, that year, named Demersville, after Telesphore J. Demers, a Canadian-Frenchman. Demers resided at and came from Frenchtown, near Missoula, and started a general merchandise store and a hotel at what he considered the natural location for the city of the valley, it being the center of gravity, at the confluence of five streams and where the first shallow water commenced, which made it impractical for steamers to go further up the river.

There was no doctor in the valley and everyone seemed to be healthy (there was no cemetery). A Mrs. Van Dyke had died in 1887 and was buried on a ranch about six miles northwest of where Kalispell now stands. I think this was the first natural death in the valley.

In the fall of 1888 a very nice looking, clean cut, young French-Canadian, about 30 years old, arrived on the steamer and stopped at the hotel and informed us that his name was Dr. Pouillet, and that he had heard of this wonderful country and was looking over the valley with a view to locating and practicing medicine.

The writer, who talks French, naturally became interested in him and did everything to make it pleasant for him and drove him around the country, and finally induced him to locate at Demersville, and as the writer was employed in the store as bookkeeper for T. J. Demers, he was in a position to give him a cottage, rent free, as an inducement to have a doctor locate there.

At this time the town was building up and had two carpenters working for them, brothers by the name of St. Peter, Archie and Peter, also French-Canadians. They also boarded at the hotel, where they all took their meals. They, however, seldom talked to the doctor, as they only saw him at meal time. Of course, the news soon spread all over the valley that a doctor had located at Demersville, and naturally the old folks began to imagine there was something wrong with themselves, and Johnny and Maggie were told that they were ill and the families would have to come and consult the doctor.

Now the doctor had a small room fixed up as an office, with two diplomas, signed with numerous unreadable signatures, framed in gold frames, hanging on this wall—but no drugs; but fortunately Jack Demers kept a full line of Chamberlain's patent medicines, which would cure anything from shortness of breath to contraction of your diabolical system and which was sold for 50 cents per bottle.

These he used freely when prescribing for his patients. If a person came in with a bad cold or cough, he would run out of his office through the back door and into the back door of the store, and grab a bottle of Chamberlain's cough medicine and put half of it into his bottle, label it, sell it for \$2.50 and get \$5.00 for the consultation. All diseases were conquered by the back-door route at 500% profit.

Of course everybody recovered after a little while, which they might have done sooner if given the fresh air cure; however, no deaths occurred and Dr. Pouillet's fame was broadcasted far and near, and he was coining money. People came from the Reservation and from Tobacco Plains, 100 miles over rough trails and poor roads, and the next year the Good Fathers at St. Ignatius Mission heard of this wonderful doctor and being a French-Canadian and of their faith, he was just the man they needed, so they stole him from us and he left Demersville and located at St. Ignatius Mission, where he was properly introduced to all the rich half-breeds and Indians and recommended highly, and thoroughly advertised.

As said before, he was a bright young man and soon sized up the situation. He got a fast horse and a nice buggy and drove all over the country making contracts with the people to attend to their ailments and disabilities for a year, for so many head of cattle. He got some Indian boys to herd his bunch of cattle, all of which he duly branded, and he had about 300 head in the bunch in the fall of 1889. Of course, he attended to the sick and I suppose got his medicines from Alec Demers, who had a store at the Mission, and everything was running smoothly.

Missoula was then the county seat of this part of the state, which was a part of Missoula County, and Missoula was the nearest city to the Mission, so the brave doctor visited the county seat occasionally and one last trip sold all of his cattle to the butchers in Missoula, pocketed the money and skipped the country, and has never been heard of since. Of course, after a little while, we in Demersville heard about the doctor disappearing and the sale of the cattle, and it was the talk of the country.

One evening, about that time, Peter St. Peter and I were talking about it, and he said, "My brodder he is pretty slick man," and I said "Who do you mean?" He said, "My brodder, the docteur," and I said, "Your brodder?" He said, "Yes, he'es my young brodder." Why, I said, "You never spoke to him very much," and he said, "No, not often; but he'es my brodder all de same." I said, "His name is Pouillet," and he said, "No, St. Pierre. He'es bad man, steal diploma, serve time in Canadian penitentiary, run away, come here to hide." It turned out that he had assumed the name on the diplomas that he had stolen.

Thus ended our first lesson.

Our second lesson. One of the best educated and highly graduated doctors that has ever located in the valley, was Dr. E. F. Cunyngham, who left here on account of Indian troubles and who went to South Africa and was there associated with Dr. Jameson of Jameson raid fame, which was the cause of the Boer war with Great Britain. After him came Dr. J. W. Sanders, a splendid surgeon, who unfortunately would not present himself for the state medical examination, and who had to leave the state, much to the regret of those who knew him.

—GEORGE F. STANNARD.

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