



PONY TRACKS

Newsletter of the Northwest Montana Westerners

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Kalispell, Montana

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ABOUT THE PRESENTATION

Burton K. Wheeler, one of Montana's most powerful and outspoken politicians, is the subject of this month's presentation.



Burton K. Wheeler

Bob Brown, a Flathead Valley native with his own background in Montana politics and government, has numerous anecdotes about this influential Senator.

Wheeler, a U.S. Senator from 1923 to 1947, played a key role in major issues over that quarter century. In 1940 he was featured on the

cover of Time magazine as the likely Democratic candidate if President Franklin Roosevelt didn't seek a third term.

About 52 years ago Brown was able to have a lengthy conversation with the retired Senator.

"Wheeler was captivating and congenial, but in his raspy voice, wreathed in cigar smoke, I sensed he could be tough as nails," recalls Brown.

Born in Massachusetts, Wheeler was a new law school graduate on his way to Seattle in 1905 when he lost everything in a poker game in Butte. He set up practice there, and was elected to the state Legislature in 1910. As a U.S. Attorney he refused to prosecute sedition cases during World War I and eventually was forced to resign.

A run for Governor in 1920 failed, but he was

NOVEMBER MEETING

Monday, November 18, 2024

"Bob Brown's Insights into
Burton K. Wheeler"

Presenter: Bob Brown, Kalispell

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.

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.

elected to the Senate in 1922 as a Democrat. He led hearings on the President Harding administration's Teapot Dome corruption scandal and the 1939 movie, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, was loosely based on his early career.

Though Wheeler supported Roosevelt's New Deal during the Great Depression, he eventually broke with the President over the attempted packing of the Supreme Court.

Wheeler also challenged much of the President's foreign policy. In particular, he was against intervention in the expanding war in Europe and led the opposition to the Lend Lease program in Congress.

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Wheeler supported the isolationist American First Committee, and his wife was on its national committee. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor left him on the wrong side of history.

At the end of the war he opposed entry into the United Nations, and was defeated in the 1946 Democratic primary largely because of his early anti-war views.

Wheeler stayed in Washington D.C. as an attorney, though he had a summer home on Lake McDonald. He died in 1975 at age 92.

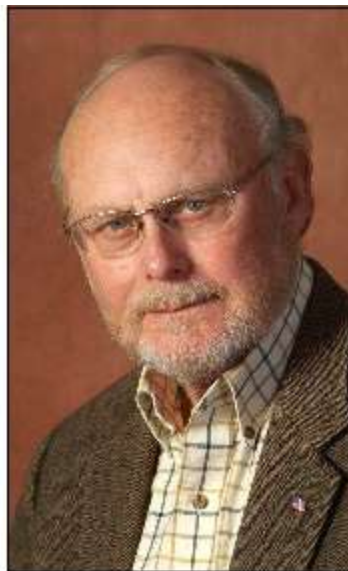
About the Presenter

Bob Brown was raised on a farm northwest of Kalispell and is a Flathead High School graduate.

He served 26 years in the Montana legislature, ending as President of the Senate. During 2000-2004 he was Montana Secretary of State and was the Republican nominee for Governor in 2004.

From 1996-2002 Bob was an advisor for the US Agency for International Development and conducted workshops for public officials in Angola, Indonesia, Cambodia, China and Russia.

He also was a University of Montana exchange instructor at Nankai University, Tianjin, China.



As a senior fellow at both the Mansfield Center and the Center for the Rocky Mountain West, Brown initiated the Montana Oral History Project (archived in the UM Mansfield Library), conducting interviews of more than 95 influential Montana historical figures. He also writes a monthly column for Montana's newspapers.

He previously served on the Board of the Wheeler Center.



FROM THE SADDLEBAG

By Jacob Thomas, Acting President

Despite how different places might appear on the surface, there are certain patterns in the historic record that seem to repeat ad nauseum.

A short time ago, I found myself in Santa Cruz, California, on a work trip, and as I roamed the boardwalk, I was struck by how similar it was to my old stomping grounds in Northern Michigan, despite the immediate obvious differences.

Both communities came of age during the late 19th century and were founded largely as playgrounds for urban upper classes (San Francisco in the former, Detroit and Chicago in the latter). Both Santa Cruz and Charlevoix, Michigan, boasted private vacation clubs, beachside amusements, upscale supper clubs, seasonal festivals, boat shows, aquatic competitions, and numerous other oddly comparable events and infrastructure.

The two communities even had heated indoor pools – at beachside towns! The geographic location and climate did not matter – both communities were founded to be retreats from city life, and the built environment is evidence of that pattern.

I recently returned to Montana from a New England vacation, where my wife and I spent an enjoyable week on the coastline, visiting one small, idyllic town after another. Despite being on different sides of the country, I was struck by how similar they were to our own neck of the woods in Montana – in both cases, these towns were largely created by the railroad to take advantage of natural resources (mainly lumber), but have all largely transitioned to tourism.

In both cases, in Northwest Montana and in New England, historic preservation is largely an accessory to the outdoor recreation in both areas. Whether it was city folk venturing to the woods to suck the marrow of life, or early adventurers agreeing to See America First, the built

environment has been adapted for a more recreational use in the Twentieth Century.

Seeing these rather obvious similarities, it is easy to paint history with a broad brush, to say that patterns are predictable and that history does indeed repeat itself.

But while the stories of two places may indeed be similar, as the old saying goes, the devil is in the details. The men and women who wrote these stories in the first place are entirely different, with separate lives and personalities and families and ideals.

And that's where the real passion of history lies – not in the built environment, but in the lives of the builders. I am incredibly glad that there are groups like the Northwest Montana Westerners to keep these stories (and storytellers) alive.

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. Local authors may have books on sale before and after the presentation.

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.

We'll be having our
10th anniversary
celebration at the meeting.
Come early at 6 p.m. and enjoy
appetizers and visiting with members.

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

By Rick Hull

The Westerners will be undergoing changes as we take our annual hiatus of December and January. Jacob Thomas will become the interim President as Ed Byrne heads off to the Legislature.

Jacob, the former director of the Northwest Montana History Museum, volunteers as bartender at our monthly meetings. He has helped with the Westerners seamless transition to meeting at the Museum, creating a synergy that benefits both.

This year is the 10th Anniversary of the Westerners (formerly the Posse), and you are all invited to come early, snack on finger food and reminisce with other members. There are many interesting backgrounds among the gray-headed crowd that attends each month.

We are one of the largest chapters in the Westerners International. Based in Texas, the organization has over 60 chapters in the United States, and 20 abroad. You can find out more at Westerners-International.org.

Presentations are now being capture on video, so you can catch speakers you missed, The videos are available on YouTube, with a link on our website, NwMtWesterners.com.

Our main goal during the two-month lapse is lining up speakers for the coming year. Some prospects are circling the hook, but none have been landed yet. If you know of someone with an interesting tale of Montana history, contact us.

As an added incentive to our \$75 stipend and lodging for out-of-town speaker, we offer a chance for authors to pitch their latest book, and sell copies before and after the meeting.

As always, we are soliciting volunteers. Check our website for a list of positions. And we would like to hear about topics you would like to see explored. There are a number of hidden, but significant local stories that rival those in other western states.

See you Monday, and again in the new year.

JOKES OF THE MONTH

By Tim Christenson

When I commented on the length of October's Whitefish Trail Blazer 50K, Uncle Torvald said, "Dat's nutting. Ven I verkt for da lumber company, dey tried to sign me up for a 401K!"

The feed salesman told Uncle Torvald that "Those pigs of yours'd be ready for market in half the time if you fed them some of my concentrates."

"Jah, I 'spose," he replied, "but vat's time to a hog."

An irate young wife came storming into the kitchen at the barn dance and told Aunt Ingeborg, "I caught my husband flirting!"

"Jah," said Aunt Ingeborg, "dat's how I caught mine too."

TRIVA QUESTION OF THE MONTH

Bill Lundgren, Patrick Walsh, and Barbara Boorman had the correction answer about the historic item that once occupied the center grass median on Kalispell's Main Street between 5th and 6th Street, and where it is now.

They knew it was the "Doughboy" statue, and that it is now in the cemetery at the Montana Veteran's Home in Columbia Falls.

But they also had more information about statue, and the cannon that once occupied the same medians.

The statue was dedicated exactly 10 years after the end of World War I in an elaborate community ceremony. The crowd was estimated at 3,000.

The American Legion organized the fund raiser for the statue, and the Great Northern Railway paid for the transportation.

The statue has its own history. It was designed by E. M Viquesney, and mass produced for memorials around the country. More than 150 copies have been documented, including at the Courthouse in Missoula. Standing about six feet

wide, the statue depicts a American soldier walking through shattered posts strung with barbed wire, rifle in hand, and his right hand held high gripping a hand grenade.

There are conflicting memories about the cannon that later joined the statue on the grass median.

The medians themselves were historic features that facilitated U-turns at the Courthouse end of town, and were later removed to make a four-lane street. Whitefish still has its medians on the south end of Central Avenue.

The cannon in question dated from the Civil War era, and once sat on a pedestal at City. A pyramid of cannon balls accompanied the cannon, but they were pilfered one by one over the years.



Dedication of the Doughboy statue Nov. 11, 1928

Pat Walsh recalls the cannon being loaded with gunpowder by a local ne'er-do-well, and the resulting blast blowing out the windows of the cafe across the street.

I remember a perhaps later incident, when the cannon had been mounted on a carriage and moved to Main Street. Again it was loaded with scrap iron and powder, and the explosion pulverized a street sign. The cannon was fully plugged with concrete and later moved to its present location at the Woodland Park entrance.

Pat also said the copper Doughboy statue suffered extensive corrosion and had to be repaired before its installation in Columbia Falls.

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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 February 12, 2025 (or thereabouts)

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