



PONY TRACKS

Newsletter of the Northwest Montana Westerners

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MARCH MEETING

Monday, March 17, 2025

“Sentenced to Be Hung and Quartered -- The Saga of Montana's Thomas Meagher”

Presenter: Tim Christenson, Kalispell

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

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

Historic 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.

ABOUT THE PRESENTATION

The Northwest Montana Westerners celebrates St. Patrick's Day with a look at Montana's Territorial Governor and Civil War General, Thomas Meagher.

Presenter Tim Christenson, a retired Colonel, said Meagher is still talked about in the military.

A dynamic speaker during the Irish Famine, the young Meagher was sentenced to be hanged and

quartered after an abortive rebellion in 1848. Instead he was exiled to Australia.

He escaped, and fled to the United States.

Settling in New York in 1852, he founded a newspaper, the *Irish News*.

When the Civil War broke out, he fought at Bull Run and then returned to New York to raise the “Irish Brigade” from fellow immigrants, and became its general.

A total of 150,000 Irish joined the Union army, playing a major role in the Federal victory.

But it came at a cost, and Meagher resigned



Thomas Meagher



Statue of Thomas Meagher at the Montana State Capitol.

Visit our website: nwmwesterners.com

after his Irish Brigade was whittled down to just a few hundred men in battle after battle.

After the war, Meagher was appointed Secretary of Montana Territory. He became acting Governor a few days after arriving when Montana's first acting Governor abruptly left.

Meagher found himself dealing with vigilantes, hostile Indians and launching the Legislature and calling a constitutional convention. He vanished mysteriously in 1867, presumed to have fallen from a steamboat tied up at Fort Benton on the Missouri River. His body was never recovered and tales of murder persist.

Along with statues in Helena and Ireland, Meagher has a Montana county named after him.

About the Presenter

A preacher's kid, Tim was born and raised in Los Angeles. He spent a lot of time at church, delivered the San Pedro News Pilot around the neighborhood on his Schwinn Stingray bicycle, learned to drive in a Volkswagen bus, and surfed at Hermosa Beach.



Tim Christenson

After college he joined the Marine Corps and served as an infantry officer. He earned a masters degree at Harvard and a Fullbright Scholarship, and worked for a Senator in Washington D.C. and later for the Department of Defense on arms control talks in Europe.

In 2019 he moved to his wife's childhood home in Montana. Tim is an ordained minister and serves at the St. Peter Lutheran Church in Whitefish.

A long-time Westerners' member, Tim gave a presentation on Montana humor in May of 2024. He promises to sprinkle his talk with Irish lore and perhaps a song.



FROM THE SADDLEBAG

By Jacob Thomas,
Acting President

What's in a Name?

Recently, our little corner of Big Sky Country was hit with some minor shockwaves, particularly in art and history circles.

The *Hockaday Museum of Art*, which had carried the “Hockaday” namesake in one way or another since 1969, made the difficult decision to rebrand.

The new *Glacier Art Museum* will carry over the same mission and purpose as the Hockaday (and retain the collection), but with a greater emphasis on Glacier National Park.

I have been a part of a similar undertaking not once, but twice. In 2019, after years of planning and preparation, the former *Museum at Central School* rebranded to the *Northwest Montana History Museum* (and currently serves as the home of the Northwest Montana Westerners).

Central School had not held classes since 1991, and even then, it was as part of the first campus of FVCC.

As the years went by and fewer local residents recognized Central School, and it became increasingly difficult to forge connections to a school that few had attended as students. The name change brought stronger regional ties – expanding beyond the walls of a 131-year-old building and into the larger Northwest Montana cultural footprint.

Now, more residents and visitors alike are able to find the Museum, and the story of Central School is more visible in the Museum galleries than ever before. I expect the *Glacier Art Museum* is trying to accomplish something similar – I, for one, wish them luck; Hugh Hockaday’s legacy does not need to be tied to a sign on a building, and more visitors will be grateful for it.

Even our own *Northwest Montana Westerners*

have gotten in on the action, recently dropping the “Posse” moniker from our title while maintaining our affiliation with Westerners International.

Who knows – maybe there were some perspective members out there who were leery of a group of gun-toting historic preservationists willing to save the past by “any means necessary.”

So to answer my own question – names certainly carry a lot of meaning. But names are only one part of an organization; instead, we should view groups not by what they are called, but by their worthwhile missions and their commitment to history and the arts.



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

By Rick Hull

Recently the Westerners' board sat down with director Margaret Davis to formalize relations with the Northwest Montana History Museum.

It turns out that we were not officially on the schedule for 2025, and the announcement of February's presentation had caught her by surprise.

And not only had we been using two room for the price of one, but that price was well below the book price for other organizations.

Everything turned out well. We are back on the schedule at an equitable, but still bargain price. However we will be only using one room, and the admission table will move into the hallway.

And a Westerner member will also be staffing the downstairs front desk before the meeting, which relieves the Museum of committing someone from an already limited volunteer staff.

This does mean that the main-level doors will be exit-only once the presentation starts. There has been a problem with the homeless being attracted by an open door, and using the restroom for a paper-towel bath or worse.

If you have to leave after the meeting starts, ask for an escort downstairs. This policy is already in place for the monthly movie night at the Museum.

A related issue is the importance of paying your 2025 dues. For the first time we are sending out the renewal forms by email. They are also available on the website.

Along with room rental, there are the payments to the speakers, including motel rooms for some, national dues and more.

Also consider volunteering. Having spent the last two years lining up speakers, I realize how fragile the organization can be. One person can be the difference.

And finally, consider joining the Museum and possibly volunteering. The dual synergy will show we are more of an asset than other renters.



TRIVA QUESTION OF THE MONTH

Scott Tanner had the answer about the historic names of several obscure or vanished towns.

Garry was a railway station in Marias Pass, six miles southeast of Nyack. **Athens** was along the old Great Northern Railway main line in Smith Valley. It is near **Sedan**, which is the former name of Kila.

Skookum is still a neighborhood in Lakeside. Udora is a misspelling. It is actually **Eudora**, located 12 miles west of Dayton.

This Month's Trivia Question

Horsetail Falls is the prominent fan-shaped falls in the Mission Canyon behind St. Ignatius. It is especially visible when coming down the Bison Range hill on U.S. 93.

The waterfall is officially Elizabeth Falls. The question is: How did it get its name?

Trust me, the question is relevant.

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

GENERAL MEETING INFORMATION

NWMTW 's 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 presenter or local history authors may have their books for sale.

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

● Wednesday, April 2

The History Book Club discusses *Brave Hearted: The Women of the American West 1836–1880* by Kate Hickman. Wednesday 2 p.m. at the Northwest Montana History Museum.

DUES REMINDER

It is time for our annual members renewal and new member drive. Statements have been emailed to all current members.

We ask that your dues be mailed promptly to the address on the dues' statement or brought to the March meeting.

Do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or comments.