



PONY TRACKS

Newsletter of the Northwest Montana Westerners

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Kalispell, Montana

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

APRIL MEETING

Monday, April 21, 2025

“Espionage, Sediton and the Montana Ves Hall Case”

Presenter: Doug Ammons of Missoula

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

Time: Gab 'n' Greet, raffle sales and book sales and signing 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

Missoula author Doug Ammons returns this month with a presentation on an unsung Montana hero who played a major role during one of the nation's most divisive times.

Ammons entertained the Westerners previously with his “then and now” photographs of Montana, and his description of a 1917 mining disaster in Butte.

This time he will tell the story of attorney Matt Canning, who won a major freedom of speech case during World War I.

Ammons uses Canning to put a human face on a fractious time in Montana.

America had just entered the war to make the world “Safe for Democracy” and patriotic fevers ran high. The teaching of German language in schools was dropped, and those who refused to buy war bonds were publicly shamed and forced to kiss the flag.

And under the newly passed federal Espionage Act, anyone speaking out against the war could be imprisoned.

One of those arrested was Ves Hall, a farmer from Ashland in southeast Montana. According to witnesses, in the summer and fall of 1917, not only did Hall vocally oppose the war, but he called President Woodrow Wilson a “British tool” and the “crookedest SOB that ever sat in the President's chair.”

Hall was represented by Canning, an Irish immigrant who started his career in the Butte mines. Ammons describes him as a “Clint Eastwood” character in the saga.



Matt Canning

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Ironically, Canning was up against his former apprentice Burton K. Wheeler, who had his own qualms about the case.

In a three-day trial in January 1918, Canning won a directed acquittal.

Federal Judge George Bourquin said Hall's comments in a village of 60 people, with none of the armies with hundreds of miles, could hardly be construed as interfering with the war effort.

The fallout was immediate. Canning was physically attacked. Then the Rosebud County District Attorney pulled a gun on a state judge, which hit the Helena newspaper under the headline, "Gunplay at Montana Capital "

In fury at Hall's acquittal, the Montana Legislature called a special session and unanimously passed a Sedition Act. The maximum penalty was a \$20,000 fine and up to 20 years in prison. A salesman visiting Red Lodge received a 7 to 20 year sentence for saying wartime food rationing was a joke.

With the change of two words, the the United States Congress passed the same law, making it a federal offense.

About the Presenter

Doug Ammons attended the University of Montana for degrees in mathematics and physics, and a PhD in experimental psychology, and has pursued many other interests such as geology and history.

Ammons is an award winning author, Emmy Award winning cinematographer and scientific editor.

But he is most known for his kayaking adventures, chronicled in *Whitewater Philosophy*, *The Laugh of the Water Nymph*, *Bolivia: Andes to Amazon* and *Jungle Kayakers*.

He is also author of *A Darkness Lit by Heroes* about the mine disaster.



FROM THE SADDLEBAG

By Jacob Thomas,
Acting President

I won't go into it too much in this column, but I recently found it necessary to purchase a new car in the Flathead Valley. This experience got me thinking about automobile history in Kalispell and the surrounding era.

As with the railroad, Kalispell's remote location meant that the automobile arrived later than most other places in the country. The first automobile in Kalispell was a Maxwell Runabout, delivered to Hugh Thibodeau on April 15, 1905. It was apparently a big deal, because a local newspaper felt the need to do a follow-up story five years after the purchase.

In 1907, Flathead County Treasurer J.W. Walker became a salesman for the REO Motor Company. He sold a number of vehicles and kept a one-cylinder Runabout for himself. It was on this Runabout that his 11-year-old daughter Phyllis could often be seen zooming around Kalispell. The few restrictions that did exist were either too lax or ignored altogether.

In the fall of 1908, many Flathead residents turned out at the county fairgrounds to see an auto race between a Runabout Reo, a Lambert with a friction drive, and a Pope-Toledo which had been dubbed "The Red Devil." It was an exciting race, reaching speeds of up to 28 miles an hour.

Shortly after this, the Conrad family also got in on the fun, purchasing a brand-new Peirce Arrow, which instantly became the talk of the town.

By 1919, Kalispell was home to Hudson, Essex, Studebaker, Overland, Republic, Dodge, and International Motors dealerships.

Of course, the young city was already putting the (motor) cart before the horse (power), as the first service station in town did not open until 1920. Before that, any repairs fell to the best efforts of blacksmiths and wainwrights.

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As the main line of the Great Northern moved north in 1904, the automobile industry slowly but surely followed. Thankfully, notable historic preservation efforts around town (with the buildings housing present-day Sweet Peaks and Bias Brewery as good examples) have kept the automobile industry in high gear in the Kalispell city center.

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

By Rick Hull

Spring is in the air, and that means several northwest Montana's historic museums are opening for the season

The Ninepipes Museum of Early Montana, located between Ronan and St. Ignatius, opened April 3rd. The museum is stuffed with Native American and pioneer artifacts, western art, and historic photographs, and includes a wildlife diorama with an authentic Indian camp. If you pick up the handheld audio tour, you can also hear personal reminiscences about each exhibit.

Just down Highway 93 is Fort Connah. The former Hudson's Bay Company trading post is tied for the oldest existing building in Montana. Preparation for the June 12-15 Annual Rendezvous starts with a cleanup day Saturday, April 26 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

And the historic site is hosting bi-weekly Black Powder Range Day for muzzle loaders. Dates are April 26, May 10 and 24. Spectators are welcome.

The Polson Flathead Museum on 708 Main Street opens May 15. This quiet museum has a surprising spread of historical items, from early outboard boat motors to horse-drawn carriages. An there is an opportunity to see the controversial Flathead Lake monster.

Just southeast of town is the Miracle of American Museum, with more exhibits than you can see in a week. Of special interest are the historic motorcycles and snowmobiles. And, of course, there are the jet planes, helicopters and a Flathead Lake tugboat.

Prepare to spend a day at the Heritage Museum in Libby. Opening May 11, its interior and exterior exhibits cover Lincoln County's mining, logging and farming history. And there are bonuses, like a quilt gallery and research center.

The Stumptown Historical Society museum in Whitefish is open Tuesdays through Saturday from 11 am to 3 pm. You can also sign up for its monthly newsletter of local historic stories.

The Tobacco Valley Historical Village in Eureka opens Memorial Day. But on a warm spring afternoon, take a walk on the adjoining paved river trail, and check out the displays that describe the community's boom-and-bust past.

TRIVA QUESTION OF THE MONTH

Tim Christenson, who made the presentation last month on Montana Territorial Governor Thomas Meagher, knew the answer to the obtuse question about the prominent waterfall in the Mission Mountains, just east of St. Ignatius.

Meagher, on a trip through Montana with his wife in 1866, was visiting the Jesuit Mission at St. Ignatius. In a casual decision, he announced that he was naming the waterfall after his wife, Elizabeth. He also named two peaks "The Twin Sisters."

Elizabeth Falls remains its official name, though locals generally call it Horsetail Falls because of its spread-out shape. There are a couple Twin Sisters in Montana, but Google says there are none in Mission Range.

This Month's Trivia Question

In keeping with Jacob's history of early automobiles in Kalispell, where was the Anderson-Reddick service station described in the histories further on in this newsletter?

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

MARK YOUR CALENDARS



● May 7

The History Book Club discusses *Historic Tales of Flathead Lake* by Butch Lorcombe. Wednesday 2 p.m. at the Northwest Montana History Museum.

FUTURE PROGRAMS

- **May 19:** "Bootlegging Adventures in Northwest Montana" by Darris Flanagan.

DUES REMINDER

It is time for the annual renewal for members. Please support our organization and its goals by paying at the April meeting. A membership application is available on our website at nwmtwesterners.com.

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 speakers often 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.



KALISPELL'S EARLY DEALERSHIPS AND SERVICE STATIONS

In keeping with Jacob's article on the first automobiles in Kalispell, here are descriptions of the early dealerships and service stations in town. These buildings are from a time when dealerships were located downtown, with the latest automobile model on display in oversized windows. The Bias Brewing building is one of the few examples remaining.



Flathead Motor Sales Co. Garage.

(Marion Rizzo, Architect)

All these articles are from the annual Kalispell Water Department Reports, in which Water superintendent W. H. Lawrence would report on the latest improvements in town. Special attention was given to his favorite project – Lawrence Park.

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THE KALISPELL GARAGE (1920)

The phenomenal growth of the automobile business has exceeded the prediction of the most ardent supporter. We have in our city eight large modern garages representing the leading manufacturers, all doing a thriving business.

We regret that space in this report does not permit a display and write-up of each individual firm.

Kalispell has every reason to feel pride in possessing such an edifice as The Kalispell Garage. This building was completed April 1st, 1920, and is owned by The Flathead Motor Sales Co. of Kalispell. Competent judges have pronounced this new building the equal of any of its kind in the entire northwest. The structure is 75 by 142 feet, covering three city lots. It was designed by Marion B. Riffo, Architect of Kalispell, and erected by Geo. F. Simmonds and G. Frank Grey, contractors of Kalispell.

That Kalispell and Flathead County hold opportunities for progressive business men is demonstrated by the rather remarkable success of The Flathead Motor Sales Co. during the past three years. Starting in 1917, with a rather modest bank account, they rented a little 25-foot building on Main Street, took on the, Maxwell car agency and proceeded to get busy. Selling over two hundred Maxwells in two years was some achievement, for the territory, but not enough for The Flathead Motor Sales Co. So they reached out and gathered in the Buick and Dodge Brothers lines and dropped the Maxwell. With the strength of the new lines behind them they stepped out again the same year and built a home worthy of the cars they sell. Today their business is the largest of its kind in Western Montana and one of the largest in the state.

When asked to what they attributed their success one of the officer said "We had faith in ourselves, faith in our line and most of all we had faith in Kalispell and Flathead County, then it was only a case of lots of plugging with a little head work thrown in."

This outline of the progress made by one of our local business houses shows what this section of Montana has to offer. While the automobile business throughout the state has been at a very low ebb for several months the people of Flathead County have been buying cars much as usual, according to the records of the Flathead Motor Sales Co. This condition bears evidence that the people of our valley are prosperous and are less affected by the present financial stress than are those in many other sections of the country.

There is another reason why Kalispell people buy automobiles. It's because nowhere under the sun is there a country that offers more to the motorist than does our own Flathead County. Our matchless mountains, lakes and valleys with their abundance of fish and game offer to the lover of outdoors a treat to be had nowhere else, and Kalispell is the very center of all this loveliness

CLACK SERVICE STATION (1928)

On the corner of First Avenue West and Second Street, the H. Earl Clack Co. has erected a super service station that is a credit to the owner and a charming addition to the city. It occupies the site of an old frame building which had burned and has since been removed. Mr. Clack contemplates further improvements on this plot, which comprises 75 feet by 142 feet.

The service station is L-shaped in plan, with overall dimensions 66 feet by 62-6. A double service driveway extending across the front is provided with four gasoline pumps. The salesroom, 18x25, is located to face the driveway and connects with a tire and storage room in the rear. Car washing and

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greasing rooms, accessible through overhead rolling doors from the driveway, occupy the west half of the building. In connection with the station there is also a ladies' rest room and a barber shop.

ANDERSON-REDDICK SERVICE STATION (1930)

The new service station for Anderson & Reddick is scheduled for completion early in 1931. It represents a radical departure from the usual plan, in that all departments of automobile service are included. For that reason, it is characterized as the "one-stop" type.

The very first consideration in the planning of this building was the item of traffic flow. Since the site is on a corner lot, it was found most practical to use two traffic lanes and to provide for easy access to greasing, washing and repair departments, by using exterior paved approaches over fifty per cent of the plot. This simplifies the coming and going from and to both streets, and with the pump islands between the traffic lanes, two attendants may work simultaneously without interference.

Architecturally, the building is unique, in that it embodies a style which may be truthfully regarded as "pure American." It is designed along the lines of the set-back skyscrapers and depends for its effect upon the interesting silhouette of the lower contrasted with the horizontal treatment of the base. The purpose of the tower, crowned by red beacon lights, is to provide an effective background for night illumination and its value is measured mostly in terms of advertising to motor patrons. The entire building and the tower will be illuminated with various colored Neon lights and a vertical Neon sign on the tower will advertise the nationally known brand of gasoline dispensed at the pumps.

Cream colored stucco, with a blue concrete base, will be used to cover the structure. Modernistic band courses in variegated colors will adorn the parapet of the tower and also the wings of the side buttresses. An interesting monument, showing an automobile running at high speed, will be placed on the grounds at the intersection of the sidewalks. The plan has been carefully worked out to provide for the utmost convenience to motorists. There is an attractive rest room and lobby for ladies. The office is so located as to permit clear observation of the driveways by the attendant in charge. Vulcanizing rooms, greasing pit, hydraulic hoist and car washing rooms are all readily accessible and are all heated and enclosed. Space is also given over to display of merchandise, and the basement houses the heating plant and tire storage rooms.

The building is 112 feet long and 26 feet wide. All service department floors and outside pavements are of reinforced concrete. Steel ceiling is used throughout and all inside and outside walls are covered with metal lath and stucco. Forced hot air under pressure, with saw dust burner, are included in the heating equipment. Automatic electric pumps will be installed and all modern electrical devices for car washing, greasing and vulcanizing.

Altogether this is the most modern plant of its kind in the city, and with the increase in motor travel, due to the gradual completion of the two federal highways which traverse the city, this attractive station is bound to receive a most profitable patronage.

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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 edition of Pony Tracks will be issued May 11, 2025 (or thereabouts).

richardahull@charter.net

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