



PONY TRACKS

Newsletter of the Northwest Montana Westerners

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Kalispell, Montana

August 13, 2025

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AUGUST MEETING

Monday, August 18, 2025

“Stranger Than Fiction – The Bair Family of Martinsdale.”

Presenter: John Shontz, of Helena

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

A Montanan family you never heard of, from a town equally obscure, will be the subject of this month's presentation.

Charley Bair made his first fortune in the gold fields of the Klondike, his second in the sheep business in Montana, and his third in real estate in Los Angeles.

His daughters followed in his footsteps by

buying tens of millions of dollars of art. The art was brought to the family home in Martinsdale, Montana, where it remains on display.

Martinsdale, an unincorporated town located 36 miles east of White Sulphur Springs, has a 2020 Census population of 43 people.

John Shontz will talk about this wealthy and eccentric family. Mr. Bair was a pal of Will Rogers, and spent most winters in the movie community in Los Angeles.



Charley Bair



Bair Family Ranch Home in Martinsdale

Shontz knew both of Charley's daughters and their frugal nature. The youngest daughter married the ranch foreman to, as in Charley's words, avoid paying him a high salary.

It is a tale where the truth is more amazing than fiction, Shontz notes. Being multi millionaires did

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not stop the daughters from picking up beer and pop bottles along area highways well into their 70s and turning them into the Mint Bar in Martinsdale for the deposit money.

The Bair fortune remains intact, and funds art, health and educational efforts in Montana.

This presentation was originally scheduled for February, but was canceled when a winter storm blocked Shontz's drive from Helena.

About the Presenter

Helena native John Shontz has written extensively about railroads and transportation in Montana.



Shontz grew up in a newspaper family and his mother was a judge. He attended Carroll College, in Helena, and received an undergraduate degree in television management from St. Cloud State University in Minnesota and a law degree from Seattle University.

Shontz served on the staff of governors David Hall and David Boren in Oklahoma,

and ran a marketing and advertising agency with national clients like Safeway and McDonalds.

He then practiced natural resource, copyright, transportation and open government law for 20 years in Helena and was a member of the Montana House of Representatives.

Shontz is also coordinator of the *Orphan Train Project*, about the 1854-1929 movement to relocate abandoned children from the East Coast.

He is author of *Taft – America's Wickedest City*, and his presentation to the Westerners on the former railroad town in April 2024 was well received.

FROM THE SADDLEBAG

By Edward “Eddy” Byrne, President



This week the Northwest Montana Fair returns for its 123rd year, dating back to 1902.

And although it remains in the same location, the evolution of the grounds continues to improve – be it adding the covered grandstands in the 1930’s or the new enlarged north bleachers this year. Although horse racing is only a distant memory, the concerts and PRCA Rodeo are the highlights of the arena.

Speaking to the rodeo, this year the Legislature passed House Bill 190 that established the American Rodeo as the official state sport of Montana. The Governor signed this legislation into law April 7th. Since then it has been celebrated at rodeos across the state.

Looking back over the history of Montana and the influence of the “cowboy” where the roots of rodeo evolved, the American rodeo truly personifies Montanans. It stretches across the state and is celebrated in virtually every county.

During HB 190’s testimony in Helena there was overwhelming support and testimony from world champion cowboys, ranchers, business representatives, Native Americans, among many others. All were unified over this action.

With that, I hope to see everyone out at the Fair and especially at the Rodeo that runs through Saturday evening, the 16th .

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 edwardjbyrne860@gmail.com.

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

By Rick Hull

We recently made a short vacation trip to South Dakota's Black Hills. The trip overlapped with the annual Sturgis bike rally, and there were motorcycles everywhere.



A promenade lined with state flags greets visitors.

Of course we took in Mount Rushmore. But we were advised to see another monument, and that was Crazy Horse.

There is a problem grasping the scale of Mount Rushmore and the stone faces can seem just to occupy a small portion of the mountainside. However Crazy Horse fills the entire mountain.



Only Crazy Horse's face and finger are done.

The monument has been under construction longer than I have been alive. Only Crazy Horse's

face and his pointing finger have been completed. But a hole under the eventual outstretched arm has been punched through the mountainside. It is possible to see how the arm and finger will be nestled in the horse's mane, with the horse's face turned inward. Both keep the sculpture compact and will capture the power of a galloping steed.

For historical buffs, there is a large museum. It is full of photographs and artifacts that stress the Native American side of Black Hills history.



The Needles are hidden on a back, narrow road.

While in the Black Hills, you can tour two large caves and visit grasslands supporting a herd of buffalo.

We also stumbled on an interior road to the "needles". These are spires that developed sharp points as they cracked and eroded. There are other dramatic formations that rival Bryce Canyon, but in granite instead of sandstone.

A highlight of the back road is the eight-foot-wide tunnels. An F-150 can just slip through without losing its side mirrors.

On the north end of the Black Hills, the historic mining towns of Deadwood and Lead are squeezed in the narrowest canyon to ever hold streets.

And just to the east is the Badlands National Park, where the grass-covered plains suddenly turn to radically eroded landscape with frightening vertical drops.

TRIVA QUESTION

Last month's trivia question revolved around the cleanup of the former Burlington Northern railroad's tie plant in Somers in the 1980s. It had a tenuous connection to the presentation on Glacier Park's red buses.

The question was why the Montana Dept. of Environmental Quality, in order to pressure the railroad on the cleanup, had mistakenly sued a park concessionaire based in Arizona.

Barbara Boorman and Pat Walsh knew the short answer -- confusing lodge operators Glacier Park Inc. with the railroad's Glacier Park Company.

But Scott Tanner had the full story. When the Great Northern Railway pushed development of tourist facilities during Glacier Park's early days, it created the Glacier Park Hotel Company to manage them. That eventually became the Glacier Park Company, he noted.

In 1960, Tucson, Arizona mayor Don Hummel bought the facilities and began operating under the name Glacier Park Inc.

Glacier Park Company was retained as the railroad's real estate subsidiary. Among other properties, it owned the Somers tie plant and local timber lands. I remember being told about families paying for their mountain lake cabin leases at the tie plant.

According to Tanner, Glacier Park, Inc. was sold to Greyhound Food Management in 1981, and became a division of the Dial Corporation in Arizona in 1985.

I had a chance to appraise Glacier Park, Inc.'s building in Columbia Falls, and asked the manager about the lawsuit. She said she wasn't surprised, since the company was constantly getting mail and calls for other businesses with "Glacier Park" in their name.

This Month's Trivia Question

This month's question is a slam dunk.

In the late 1800s, an American steel manufacturer sent his agents around the world

offering casts of a fossil dinosaur. This widely duplicated sauropod, with its massive bone rib cage, has become a staple of cartoons ever since.

The question is – what does this charitable individual have to do with Kalispell?

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

There is a handicap entrance with direct access to the elevator on the north side of the Museum. Ring the doorbell and the front-desk manager will come open the door.

To prevent strangers from wandering in, the Museum front door will be locked once the presentation starts. Those arriving late can call 406-309-0938 to be let in.

FUTURE PROGRAMS

- **September 15:** "The Swan Valley Massacre by Rick Hull of Kalispell.
- **October 20:** "Fifty years of the Alert Helicopter" by Bob Sandman of Kalispell.
- **November 17:** "Why the Railroad Left Kalispell" by Jacob Thomas of Kalispell.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS



- **August 26**

Movie Night at the Museum features *The Big Trail*. This 1930 movie was the first to star John Wayne, and was made in Montana.

Admission is free and the movie introduction

starts at 7 p.m. Beer, wine and pop will be available for purchase.

- **September 3**

The History Book Club will take suggestions for the books for 2026, followed by discussion of *The Day the World Came to Town* by Jim DeFede. The gathering is 2 p.m. in the Northwest Montana History Museum.

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Copy intended for this newsletter should be sent to the Editor at the email address below.
Copy must be in the Editor's in-box to make that month's issue.

The next edition of Pony Tracks will be issued September 10, 2025 (or thereabouts).

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