



# PONY TRACKS

Newsletter of the Northwest Montana Westerners

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## SEPTEMBER MEETING

Monday, September 15, 2025

### “The Swan Valley Massacre”

**Presenter:** Rick Hull of 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.

The presentation will describe the events leading up to the incident and the missteps that turned the showdown deadly. And it will look at the Tribe's push for justice, while others defended the game warden's actions.

There is also the underlying issue of treaty



This historic sign on Hwy. 83 describes the 1908 shooting that killed four tribal members.

## ABOUT THE PRESENTATION

A historical mass shooting that still reverberates is the subject of this month's presentation.

It is the story of the 1908 Swan Valley Massacre, when game warden Charles Peyton attempted to arrest a hunting party from the Flathead Reservation near Holland Lake.

The confrontation went terribly wrong and the resulting gun battle left the warden and four Flathead Reservation tribal members dead.

rights allowing off-reservation hunting, and how those were eroded. At the time, tribal members could not even leave the reservation without written permission.

The incident began October 17, 1908, when Peyton checked the Indian camp and found evidence that the Indians had killed more deer than allowed under state law. And an elderly member of the party, through a misunderstanding, didn't have a hunting license. An armed standoff

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nearly erupted, and Peyton vowed to return the next morning to arrest two of the Indians.

The Indians were packing to leave when Peyton arrived at daybreak. There are different versions of what led to the fatal gunfight, with actions on both sides misinterpreted.

In the aftermath, the tribe pushed repeatedly for action, including charges against Peyton's deputy warden.

The Missoula County Attorney eventually declared the investigative files had been lost.

But the issue would not die, and in 2001 the Tribe succeeded in getting Peyton's name excised from the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington DC.

A highway sign giving the Tribe's side now stands near the site of the killings, and a memorial in 2008 was attended by nearly 100 people.

### *About the Presenter*

**R**ick Hull is a former newspaper reporter who has researched the incident for 50 years. He made earlier presentations to the Westerners on the Demersville lynchings and the local Japanese Americans.

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## **FROM THE SADDLEBAG**

**By Edward "Eddy" Byrne, President**



**A**fter our August's speaker, John Shontz's enticing presentation, "Stranger Than Fiction--the Bair Family of Martinsdale" encompassing Charles M. Bair and the family home and museum, we decided to take a road trip over and tour the grounds.

On September 7th we departed the Flathead for a smokey drive to the Bair estate and see for ourselves what this treasure in the middle of nowhere is all about. Our route took us down the Swan Valley, across to Helena and lunch in Townsend before heading towards Martinsdale to the Bair Museum and home.

The bottom line is the home is incredible with all the original family furniture, silver, rugs and reproduction of artwork (original artwork is displayed in the museum). The home is filled with an eclectic flair that Charles' daughters collected from New York, England, Germany, Italy, and elsewhere. The rugs are a mix of heavy wool rugs made with Bair wool and Persian rugs. The silver is almost exclusively English.

The museum is another story. Yes, it is nicely designed and covers the family, some incredible pieces of Western, Indian, and European art. However, if you want to focus on native American artwork, then head down the missions to the Ninepipes Museum of Early Montana that is the gold standard for its collection of artifacts, clothing and art.

If you want western artwork, then you can't go wrong with heading to Great Falls and the Charles M. Russell Museum or down to Helena and the new Montana Heritage Center. The Heritage Center opens on December 2nd this year and will celebrate a grand opening June 25-28 next summer right before America celebrates our 250th birthday on the 4th of July.

With that said, I encourage everyone to visit the Bair Home and museum. It is a national treasure

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filled with stories of an incredible life that Mr. Bair had, and the remarkable feats the daughters had in collecting, staging, and their efforts and foresight to establish the trusts to ensure the art and ranch are on display to the people of Montana and America.

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](mailto:edwardjbyrne860@gmail.com).

## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

By Rick Hull

The revised timber room at the Northwest Montana History Museum still features an actual portable sawmill. But the new centerpiece is a model railroad replica of the former Somers Tie Plant. The display runs the length of the room, and includes a running Empire Builder passenger train.



**Model of the railroad docks at Somers.**

The models are the product of patient assembly by the late Ken Ross of Helena, and some heavy lifting by the museum staff.

Ross grew up in Somers and Polebridge, and gradually created a model railroad domain that filled his basement. When he passed away, his wife Pat offered it to the museum.



**The display features a replica of Somers Tie Plant.**

Bill Dakin and Grant Munteer drove to Helena to take a look. The entire setup was more than the museum had space for, and much of it wasn't local to northwest Montana, said Dakin.

But they were very interested in the railroad tie plant, which operated between 1901 and 1986. Railroad ties were cut from logs rafted across Flathead Lake and saturated in creosote preservative in pressurized vats.



**Central School model was 3-D printed.**

Munteer, a modeler himself, helped choose the buildings and the historic locomotives. The remainder of the layout went to the Western Montana Railroad Historical Association in Helena.

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## TRIVA QUESTION

Last month's question dragged a red herring across the trail. It was about an American steel manufacturer who donated casts of a fossil dinosaur to museums around the world.

The real question was - what did this have to do with Kalispell?

Scott Tanner, Barbara Boorman and Sally Stueben knew the charitable individual was Andrew Carnegie. Determined to give away his fortune, he financed numerous projects, including the name-sake musical auditorium in New York City.

But he is better know for funding 2,509 libraries, including one in Kalispell. He gave \$10,000 for the building on the corner of 2rd Ave. and 3rd St. East, and an equal amount for maintenance.

It opened in 1904, and served as the city library until 1969. It is now the Glacier Art Museum, previously known as the Hockaday Center.

### *This Month's Trivia Question*

Attendees of past presentations will know this one. What news event of national importance occurred on Elbow Lake, just a few miles from the site of the Swan Valley Massacre?

Submit your answers to the editor at [richardahull@charter.net](mailto: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 the number posted on the door.

## FUTURE PROGRAMS

- **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



- **September 13 and 27**  
Black Powder Range Days continue at Fort Connah from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. The historic Hudson Bay's Company fort is north of St. Ignatius on Hwy. 93. \$5 admission. Call 406-381-3872 or 406-210-9824 for more information.
- **September 30**  
Opening of the exhibit on the the Fiftieth anniversary of the ALERT medical Northwest Montana History Museum. Museum hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

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