



PONY TRACKS

Newsletter of the Northwest Montana Westerners

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Kalispell, Montana

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OCTOBER MEETING

Monday, October 20, 2025

“ALERT - 50 years of Service”

Presenter: Bob Sandman of Whitefish

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 pm. Soft drinks, beer and wine will be available.

Historic Presentation: Program begins at 7:00 pm.

No reservations are required, but seating will be limited; so come early. Call (406)-309-0938 with any questions.

as collateral to lease a helicopter. The helicopter was originally on standby at the Kalispell airport. But in 1977 the operation was moved to a hangar at Kalispell Regional Hospital.

Named ALERT as the acronym "Advanced Life support and Emergency Rescue Team", it was the second hospital-based helicopter rescue system in the nation, and the first of its kind outside of a metropolitan area.



Photo by Skip Robinson

ABOUT THE PRESENTATION

Just over 50 years ago, a 27-year-old working near Hungry Horse Reservoir was severely injured in a logging accident. A rescue involving a Forest Service helicopter in the area was cobbled together, but unfortunately the logger died before he could get to the hospital.

The tragedy was the impetus for a dedicated air-ambulance. Clyde Smith, co-founder of the Montana Logging Association, used his business

Bob Sandman will describe how the helicopter air-rescue service has grown. Not only plucks accidents victims out of northwest Montana's remote areas, put it regularly speeds critically ill infants, complex cardiac and trauma patients to specialize facilities around the country.

Windsocks wave at isolated communities around the valley as testimony to dependence on the air ambulance.

And flights go the opposite direction, bringing medical providers to outreach clinics.

In the 50 years there have more than 21,000

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medical flights, including 39 rescues of victims of bear attacks. A total of 2,935 lives have been saved through the combined aerial and ground responses.

Sandman will not only talk about the air-ambulance's half-century of aerial search and rescue, he will also link ALERT to advances in healthcare and emergency services across the nation.

About the Presenter

Bob Sandman has served on the ALERT board for 20 years, and is the outgoing chair.

He has an extensive background in forestry and forest fire incident commands.

Sandman managed an evacuation center in Texas during the 2005 Katrina and Rita hurricanes.



He was head of the northwest Montana State Lands office, and retired in 2011.

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The next edition of Pony Tracks will be
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(or there a bouts).

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

By Rick Hull



The Columbia Falls Museum has moved. Formerly located in a business complex off Nucleus Avenue, it is now on Highway 2 just west of the Dairy Queen.

Operated by the Columbia Falls Historical Society, it has the same displays presenting the history of the town and area.



This wall describes the area's forestry history.

One section covers the former Anaconda Aluminum Plant and includes a model of the pot line.

There is a large display of the area's forestry industry, with photographs and paintings. Next to it is the section on Glacier National Park with mannequin wearing a Park Ranger uniform.

One corner is dedicated to Pulitzer Prize winner

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Mel Ruder and his newspaper, the Hungry Horse News. A complete archive of the paper back to 1946 is available for research.

Run entirely by volunteers, the museum is open from 10 am. to 4 pm. Wednesday through Friday.

The society is still hoping it can eventually move its operation to a permanent location in the 1896 "Old Main" building at the Columbia Falls Montana Veterans' Home.

TRIVA QUESTION

Pat Walsh, Sally Stueben and Pat Walsh knew what happened on Elbow Lake, near the site of last month's Swan Valley presentation.

Charles Linbergh stayed there after his 1927 flight across the Atlantic. As a result, the lake was renamed after the aviator.

Lindbergh's connection with Montana was the subject of the April 2023 presentation before the Westerners.

This Month's Trivia Question

Kalispell's Thompson Park, near Cornelius Hedges Elementary School, was renamed a more generic name several years ago.

But it reverted to its former name when residents pointed out that Thompson was a figure of note.

This month's question is: who was Thompson?

Hint: He has a connection to an annual October event.

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 pm. 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 ROGRAMS

- **November 17:** "Black Robes Enter Coyote's World" by Sally Thompson of Missoula.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS



- **October 25**

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.

- **November 1**

Fall gathering at the Ninepipes Museum from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Live music, refreshments, history chat and door prizes. Located halfway between Ronan and St. Ignatius. Ph. 406-644-3435.

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Sisters of Mercy Hospital

History of Kalispell's First General Hospital

Kalispell had a number of other hospitals before the Kalispell General Hospital on Fifth Ave. East was completed in 1912.

In 1895 Ella R. Webber built the city's first hospital, located on the southwest corner of Center Street and 4th Avenue East. In 1900 she had a much larger facility built just to the south that was added to in 1905. Since the Great Northern Railway had just moved its division point to Whitefish, however, this hospital proved to be too large, and it was soon converted to what became the Fernwell Apartments.

Next, a group of physicians organized the Northwestern Hospital Association and established a hospital in the building that was later the Rosebrier Inn on 2nd Avenue West. The doctors then moved in 1909 to the Bose house at 4th Avenue East and 3rd Street, which they leased and remodeled to accommodate 30 patients. Dr. Macdonald then established a hospital at 19 3rd Avenue East for a short time.

The physicians continued to advocate the construction of a new hospital to serve Kalispell. By February of 1910, the physicians and twelve Kalispell residents had formed a Kalispell General Hospital Board to promote and plan for a new hospital.

The group negotiated first with the Deaconesses of the Methodist Episcopal church to be the managers of the Kalispell hospital. After negotiations with the Deaconesses failed, the group negotiated a contract, with the help of Bishop John Patrick Carroll of Helena, with a Cedar Rapids, Iowa, corporation, the Sisters of Mercy.

In September of 1910 the Sisters of Mercy took over the management of the former hospital at 4th Avenue East (the belongings of the newly-arrived Sisters were carried in wheelbarrows from the railroad depot to the temporary hospital at 4th Avenue East).

The first patient under the care of the Sisters was Danish cooper Thomas Neilson, who was suffering from typhoid fever.

In the spring of 1911 the building first used by the Sisters, located on property owned by James Conlon, was moved to the new hospital site at 5th Avenue East and 8th Street East. The hospital building committee advertised in the spring of 1910 in "numerous cities" for architects' plans and specs for the proposed building. Eight architects applied, and the building committee chose Kalispell architect Marion B. Rizzo after examining all the proposed plans.

Rizzo made a few changes in his original plans based on suggestions by the Sisters. B. B. Gilliland was awarded the contract for the new hospital. He bid \$36,000, which was \$11,000 less than any other bidder. The concrete work was done by Kalispell contractor W. A. Powers.³⁵³

One of the two nurses who joined Sister Mary Agatha in Kalispell in 1910 was Sister Mary Philomena. She was born in Iowa in 1859 and began her career as a registered nurse in Cedar Rapids in 1894. She worked at the Kalispell General Hospital until she retired in 1933, and she passed away in 1940. According to Dr. Malcolm Burns, "The Sisters worked prodigiously hard. They scrubbed the floors and practically cut their own wood...The Sisters were indefatigable. I don't know when they slept."

The funds for the hospital were raised through a variety of sources. After the Sisters of Mercy arrived in Kalispell in 1910, they raised \$20,000 for the hospital with the understanding that the home organization would contribute an equal amount. The Sisters of Mercy paid for half the cost of the ground and construction and the entire cost of the furniture and equipment (the total cost was approximately \$60,000).

A building committee was formed to raise the money from the community. The president was lumberman Harry Miller, and the vice president was Dr. W. H. Campbell.

In April of 1911, a YMCA building committee raised \$50,000 by subscription in six days for the construction of Kalispell's YMCA (demolished in 1991). After accomplishing this feat, and realizing that some felt the YMCA fundraising effort might have had an adverse effect on the subscription drive for the hospital, the YMCA solicitors switched purposes and helped raise the remaining \$7,500 needed to begin construction of the hospital.

As the *Kalispell Bee* commented in urging residents to support the hospital drive, "Don't worry why a black hen lays a white egg, but get the egg."

The teams got to work, and the balance was secured within a week from pledges by Kalispell residents and businesses, plus a \$1,000 pledge from James J. Hill of the Great Northern Railway.

Construction began on the new hospital on July 3, 1911, and it opened for use on May 8, 1912.

Taken from the 1992 Historic Architectural Inventory of Kalispell by Kathy McKay

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