



PONY TRACKS

Newsletter of the Northwest Montana Westerners

Vol. 12, No. 10

Kalispell, Montana

November 12, 2025

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

NOVEMBER MEETING

Monday, November 17, 2025

"Black Robes Enter Coyote's World"

Presenter: Sally Thompson of Missoula

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 missing chapter on how the Jesuit missionaries came to Northwest Montana, and their relation with the Flathead Indians will be revealed in this month's presentation, "Black Robes Enter Coyote's World".

Using sources uncovered in Europe, historian and author Sally Thompson will tell how Belgian-born Pierre-Jean DeSmet came to America in

1821, determined to be a missionary.

But more importantly, she has assembled details of the four trips by the Flatheads to Missouri in search of Catholic priests.



Painting at St. Mary's Mission of DeSmet's Arrival.

Iroquois converts, brought to western Montana by the fur trade, had convinced the Flathead Indians that their only chance of survival in the on-going war with Blackfeet, was to tap the "Good Medicine" of the Black Robes.

Most of the Flathead delegations were killed enroute, or returning. But the quest succeeded and DeSmet established St. Mary's Mission near present Stevensville in 1841.

Through tribal accounts, Thompson will describe the cultural clash between the

Visit our website: nwmtwesterners.com

missionaries' efforts to create a static farming community in contrast to the Flathead's seasonal nomadic cycle that involved traveling to bull trout spawning runs, buffalo country and meadows with bitterroot tubers.

She also will look at the clash of replacing tribal tales with biblical accounts, and cultural conflicts, especially the Indians' love of gambling. And how the conflicts with the Blackfeet were soon exchanged for waves of settlers moving onto the tribe's traditional lands.

DeSmet didn't stay long in Montana, but traveled throughout the West, visiting tribe after tribe. His journeys covered an estimated 180,000 miles, including six trips to Europe.

About the Presenter

SallyThompson earned her Ph.D. at the University of Colorado in 1980. That same year she moved to Missoula, and has been connected with the University of Montana ever since.

She has worked as an archaeologist, ethnohistorian, and tribal consultant and collaborator, and also filmmaker.

Thompson has published numerous articles in professional journals. and in *Montana, the Magazine of Western History*.

She has a particular interest in collaborating with tribes to implement unique cultural preservation strategies particular to each tribe or region.

This is her second appearance before the Westerners. In September 2024 Thompson presented "Sleeping Buffalo -- 23 Unexpected Stories that Awaken Montana's Past."



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

By Rick Hull

The Westerners celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2025, and a year-end accounting shows a continuing success. The bank account remains healthy and attendance is steady.

Sometimes it seems like the organization is a fragile shell that a misstep could shatter. But the group survived COVID, and the move away from dinners at the Red Lion.

We are not a national organization operating from a big city. Ours is a small committee of volunteers. They prove the adage that the world is run by those who show up. However, in my experience, this also includes those who send timely emails.

Our big struggle is lining up speakers for the monthly meeting. At times it has been nick and tuck, with a last-minute save. That is one place we can use your help.

Montana's history is unique. The state is not the scene of bloody battles. (Though that premise will be challenged this June, when the topic is the 150th anniversary of Custer's last stand.) The stories are often surprising, like this month's tale of how the Flathead Indians sought out help from Catholicism.

So, do you know of subjects we can tackle, and knowledgeable speakers that can we can enlist? Authors are a prime target, and we offer an opportunity to sell their books at the meeting.

Potential topics raised at a recent meeting include bear maulings, mountain plane crashes and tribal legends.

I also need help with content for the Pony Tracks newsletter. Is your local museum sponsoring an event that needs to be publicized? Can you write a review of a new history book? Do you have something for the Calendar?

We also want to continue our productive relationship with the NW Montana History Museum. Consider a membership or volunteering.

Visit our website: nwmtwesterners.com

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 PROGRAMS

- **February 17, 2026:** "When the Train Left Kalispell" by Jacob Thomas of Kalispell.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS



- **December 3**
History Book Club discusses *A Decent Orderly Lynching* about the vigilantes, at 2 pm. in the Northwest Montana History Museum.

TRIVIA ANSWER The Story Behind Thompson Park

Trish Walsh and Sally Stueben knew the answer to last month's trivia question about Thompson Park, and why it is related to a national October tradition.

The park, located near Cornelius Hedges Elementary School in Kalispell, is named after Gus Thompson, a Kalispell resident who pitched in the first World Series in 1903. It was briefly renamed Eastside Park in 2015 before the City Council was alerted to the name's historic significance.

It is named after Gus Thompson, a Kalispell resident who pitched in the first World Series.

John Gus Thompson started his career as an attorney. Born in Iowa in 1877, he pitched in the school team while attending the University of Iowa. Romance led to his decision to move to Montana.

"I was sweet on a girl back there at Iowa, and she came from this country," he told the Inter Lake sports reporter. "His name was Edna Knapp." He followed her to Kalispell, where they were married in 1902.

In 1902 he practiced law in Helena with U.S. Senator Thomas Carter. One day Carter took him aside, noted he had tried only two cases, and said, "This isn't the game for you, you'll never make any money as a lawyer," according to Thompson. "I gave up law right then and there," he said, and took up professional baseball.

He first pitched for the Helena team in the Northwestern League in 1902 and 1903. At \$140 a month, "I was the highest paid player in the league," he said.

The Pittsburgh Pirates recruited him in August of 1903. That year the first World Series between the American League and the National League, with the Pirates up against the Boston Americans, later the Red Sox.

Boston suffered a three-game deficit early in the series, but its luck changed in the second half.

In the third inning of the seventh game, Thompson stepped in to relieve pitcher Sam Leever.



1910 team

Kalispell's 1910 professional baseball team. Pitcher Gus Thompson is reportedly the only Kalispell player ever to participate in a World Series.

This is the only photo of Gus Thompson in the NW MT History Museum archives. The unanswered question is which one is Thompson.

"The Red Sox had a 6-0 lead and there were some men on the bases," Thompson recalled. "One run scored before I got them out, but they didn't get any more runs the rest of the game. We scored three runs and lost the ball game 7-3."

Boston's success continued, and it won the last four games to cinch the title.

Thompson moved back to the Flathead Valley after the series and homesteaded west of Tally Lake. However the next year he returned to baseball, pitching for the Pirates and St. Louis Cardinals. In 1907 he played for the Omaha in the Western League, with Aberdeen, Washington in 1908, and then with Seattle, winning 32 games out of 39. His salary was \$2,700 for the season.

The Detroit American League recruited him in the winter of 1910. "They sent me a contract for \$1,800," he said. "I sent it back and they sent me

another one for \$2,400 saying it was their final offer. I sent it back to them and wrote on it, 'This is my final word, too -- no'," said Thompson, and he quit professional baseball, .

Back in Kalispell, he ran a cigar store and billiards hall on Main Street. He started in the Montana Hotel building. In he 1925 moved his business to the former Heller Saloon at 140 Main, adding a lunch counter in the rear. During the Great Depression, he employed approximately 50 men in a logging camp near Tally Lake.

In 1953, on the 50th anniversary of the first World Series, Baseball Commissioners invited all the living participants to attend the games. They missed Thompson.

"I'd like to know why they can't find me," the 78-year-old told the Inter Lake. "I've been living here in Kalispell for a good many years."

Thompson died in 1958 at age 80. He was survived by daughter Iola Thompson and and son B.F. Thompson, four grand children and two great grand children.

This issue of Pony Tracks is
Volume 12, Number 10.

The Pony Tracks is published monthly except
December and January by the

NORTHWEST MONTANA WESTERNERS

Authors of articles hold the
copyright to their contributions.
All other content is copyrighted 2025 by the
Northwest Montana Posse of Westerners,
P.O. Box 2803,
Kalispell, MT 59903

The next edition of Pony Tracks will be issued
February 10, 2026 (or thereabouts).

richardahull@charter.net