

August 14, 2014

Ravalli County Commissioners
215 South 4th Street
Hamilton, MT 59840



Greetings! Summer in the Bitter Root Valley is a treasure for those of us who live here - sunny days (although sometimes smoky), cool nights, beautiful mountains, fun in the outdoors, and vacation visits from family and friends. This valley sheltered between two mountain ranges offers beautiful scenery, wildlife, and historic small town environments.

Over the years, the Bitter Root has been the home of many diverse and changing cultures from the Salish to homesteaders to apple growers and loggers. Its rich history is chronicled, preserved, and interpreted at the Ravalli County Museum & Historical Society. With rotating main exhibits featuring topics of current interest and permanent exhibits that explore the lifestyles of the past, the Museum presents a wide range of programming, activities, and events to engage inquiring minds of all ages. Every season is a great time to visit the Museum and enjoy the cultural heritage of our area. Enclosed is a pocket exhibit guide and information about our upcoming events to give you an idea of the treasures that can be discovered here.

The Museum is located in the county-owned A.J. Gibson Old Courthouse built in 1900. The small mill levy that appears on property tax statements only maintains the building and grounds. The Ravalli County Museum & Historical Society receives no county or governmental funding for its operations. All of the Museum's staff, events, and programming are made possible through the generosity of the community.



Are we asking for your support? Yes!

NOT to build a brand new facility or to bring in high paid consultants. NOT to fix the whole world's problems or fund political action, but rather to have a sustainable, relevant local museum. This IS your Museum – artifacts and collections that have been gathered throughout the Bitter Root Valley since 1955, stories and exhibits about life here in Montana, and programming that reflect the interests of our area.

There are many attics or old boxes that have treasures from the past hidden away, but a museum's role is much more – not just storing old relics but preserving, interpreting, making the richness of the past available and relevant in today's world. Our modern, fast paced lives are full of high-tech images on cell phones, internet, and television. A museum adds the otherwise missing sensory dimension: real objects, photographs, and artifacts - illuminating how our valley was transformed by the resourcefulness and ingenuity of our ancestors and providing a deeper understanding of times and lifestyles that are different than ours.

Our recent presentation on the lives of Montana homesteaders showed not the romanticized movie version but rather the determination, courage, and unending hard work that took to haul water in a barrel from miles away and farm here. Those early adventurers wanted more than just survival. They built schools, opera houses, churches, and towns knowing the value that knowledge and culture could bring to their lives. At the Museum, we continue that heritage by connecting people to narratives and interpreting historical artifacts in a cultural context that fosters a sense of pride and belonging.



History is an introduction to more interesting people than we can possibly meet in our own lives; let us not neglect the opportunity. ~ Dexter Perkins

What does it take have to a sustainable, high-quality museum? How does a rural museum excel in today's economy? We do this by crafting exhibits in-house from our collections and archives, by acquiring affordable traveling exhibits that open up observations of the outside world, by partnering with other organizations, and by fashioning original educational programming to augment our activities. In doing so, we generate shared interaction, discourse, and a social experience enables us to fulfill our role as a heritage and educational organization.

All of our programming is designed with our community and the valley in mind. We focus and continually test our ideas against a matrix of criteria:

- Is it relevant to present values, ages, and audience interest?
- Does it align with our mission to preserve and interpret?
- Can we enhance it with objects in our collections?
- Is it cost effective and be completed with available resources?
- Are there other organizations to partner with?
- Does it build substance for the future?
- Is it engaging and informative?
- Does encourage interaction and dialog?



Sheep driven treadmill in the Walk thru the Bitter Root Exhibit

Horse powered treadmills used to run saw blade c.1900

Our organization, like this Valley, is part of a dynamic and unfolding change process as we build our capacity. This summer we are **updating our logo** with a new look that emphasizes our role as a museum and historical society. Through funding, in part, from the Montana Arts Council and the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation, the Museum offers **free admission on Thursdays and Saturdays** and is open on Thursday evenings until 8pm. We are continuing to catalog and convert our archives to newer technology with the support of the Annie Maclay Leffingwell Foundation. We are expanding our school-age children's programming and including fun activities such as Wax Museums and History Fairs. The Spectra UM is partnering with us to present a featured exhibit in the Main Courtroom Gallery.



New this summer! The award of a two-year grant by the Jane S. Heman Foundation has given us the opportunity to begin a comprehensive initiative to assess and organize our collections, improve their storage, build exhibit capability, and design additional educational programming.

Grantsdale Elementary Bell Tower is coming to the Museum – Memorial bricks are available to help preserve the bell and memories of the school. And... Apple Day, the biggest bake sale under the Big Sky, now has a new event – **Apple Night Hard Cider Festival!**

All of these successes would not be possible without the ongoing support of people who care. Membership in the Ravalli County Museum & Historical Society is available for all budget levels. We invite you to join and share in our activities and in the satisfaction of bringing history to life. We want the Museum to be a fun place to visit, with things to learn about, interact with and enjoy - not somewhere that you visited once in sixth grade and forgot about – rather a place where you explore the things that you treasure about the Bitter Root.

With your help, the Ravalli County Museum can continue to be a GREAT, local museum!

Please tear off and return

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Your contributions make a difference!

- \$100 \$ 500
- \$ 75 \$ 250
- \$ 50 \$ 200
- \$ 25 \$ 150
- \$ _____ other amount

Membership Levels

- \$ 25 Individual Senior/Student
- \$ 40 Individual \$ 50 Family
- \$100 Bitterroot \$100+ Business Member
- \$250 Ponderosa \$500 Sapphire
- \$1000 Trapper Peak

If you are not already a member, we invite you to join the Ravalli County Museum & Historical Society

Monthly Pledges are a great way to increase your gift! I wish give \$ _____ for _____ months.

I wish to pay by credit card: # _____ Exp Date _____ Sec Code _____
(If you would rather provide credit card specifics by telephone, please call (406) 363-3338. All information is strictly confidential.)

Signature _____ Date _____ Phone or email _____

