



MONTANA
GHOST TOWN
PRESERVATION SOCIETY

preserving history for the next generation

Volume 55

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2025



Bannack, Montana

Photo by Terry Halden

The Masonic Lodge (upstairs) / schoolhouse (downstairs)



MONTANA GHOST TOWN QUARTERLY

The **Montana Ghost Town Quarterly** is published four times a year by the Montana Ghost Town Preservation Society.

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Founded in 1970, the Montana Ghost Town Preservation Society is a 501c3 non-profit organization dedicated to educating the public about the benefits of preserving the historic buildings, sites, and artifacts that make up the living history of Montana.

Opinions expressed in the bylined articles are the authors' and do not necessarily represent the views of the MGTPS.

SPRING 2025

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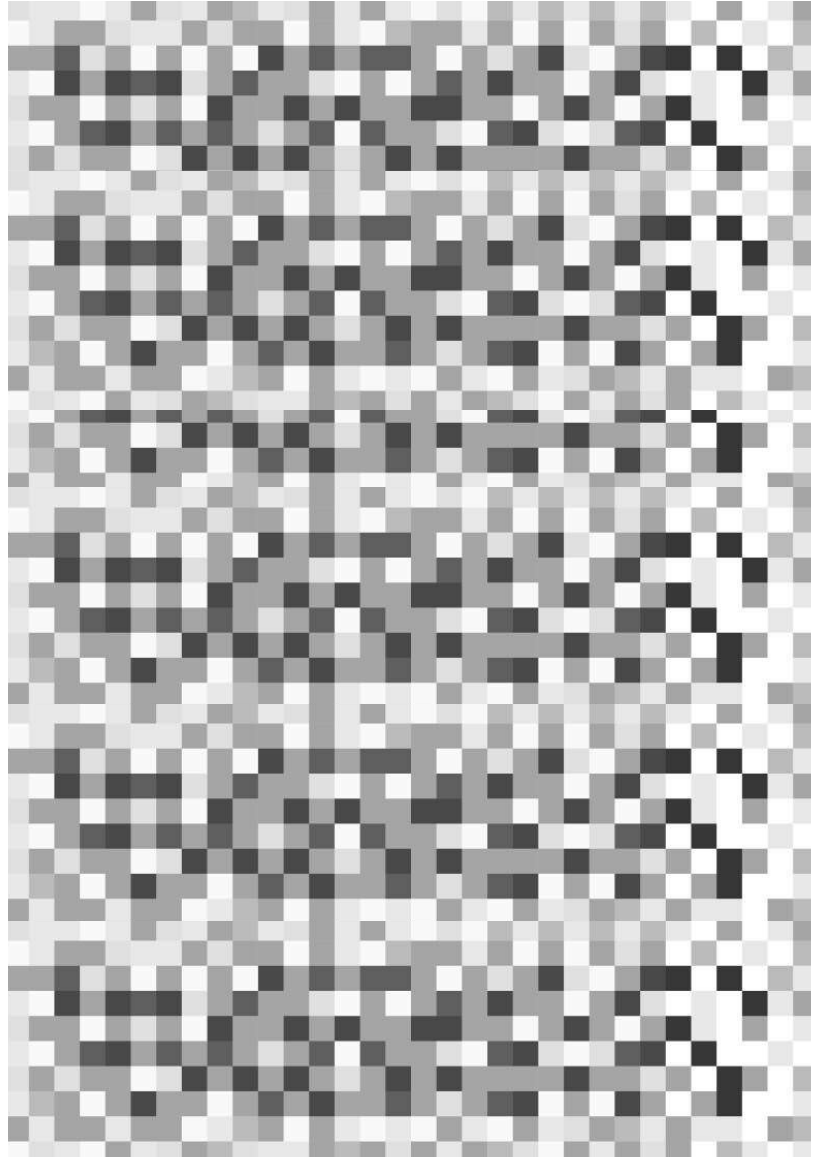
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Directors: Brad O'Grosky, Terry Halden, Tammy Steindorf, David Steindorf

Immediate Past President: Brad O'Grosky

The Prez Sez...

LINDA DUTCHER



Introducing... Me!

Hello there!

The **MGTPS** Newsletter has a new editor, and this is the *first* newsletter I've taken the lead on. I would like to thank the one and only **Mr. Terry Halden** for all the phenomenal work he has done with the newsletters over the years. I can only hope to fill his shoes and produce the quality, informative, and entertaining newsletters you've come to expect. But don't worry—you haven't seen (or read?) the last of Terry. He continues to serve as one of our directors, and I plan to include articles and photos provided by the man himself (such as in this very newsletter).

If you have any questions, comments, concerns, or pieces of history you'd like to share, please feel free to e-mail me (Paige) at paiger_15@yahoo.com

Thank you for continuing to support our society, and I hope to meet you all one day!

From the Editor's Chair

NEW MEMBERS

Membership Chairperson reports the following New Members have joined our association since the last newsletter.

Please make them feel welcome!

Glenn & Doris Wile - Belgrade,, MT

Kelsey Elizabeth Kilian - Bozeman, MT

The HISTORY of the “CURLEW” MINE in RAVALLI COUNTY

The Curlew Mining District is located on the Eastern slopes of the Bitterroot Mountains about five miles northeast of the town of Victor and primarily consists of three claims: the “Elizabeth,” the “Curlew,” and the “Whippoorwill.”

In 1880, George Orr, one of the early prospectors in the Alder Gulch area, and others first discovered silver/lead deposits in the region and named their find the “Elizabeth.” As the “Curlew” is located close to the “Elizabeth,” it is reasonable to assume the same partnership also discovered the “Curlew.” This brought a minor stampede to the location and a host of unimportant claims were filed, except for the “Whippoorwill” discovered by George H. Buck. It also brought local money men from Ravalli County, eager to buy up any claim the prospectors wanted to sell. By the summer of 1881, the “Elizabeth” and the “Curlew” claims were owned by the partnership of A. S. Blake, Frank Tudor, Joseph Clark, E. S. Hackett, J. A. Landrum, Frank Ess, and H. B. Bell.

A June 18th, 1881 clipping from the Independent Review of Helena informed its readers: “*The ‘Elizabeth,’ the big find, is turning out some very fine ore, assaying from \$36 to \$700 per ton of silver. Only one wall of the ore has been found and experts believe that the vein is 90 feet wide.*” However, by August 5th, 1881, the Missourian—although agreeing with the Independent Review about the best mine in the district being the “Elizabeth”—wrote: “*The ‘Elizabeth’ is the best-defined ledge in the camp, and will, in our judgement, produce more ore than any other two ledges, but we were informed that the ore is of low grade, or inferior class.*”

Two years later the Bass Brothers erected a smelter near Stevensville, to the south, and the owners of the “Elizabeth”/“Curlew” took advantage and had some of their ores processed. The result was a silver bar weighing 110 pounds being displayed in a Missoula bank window. But the owners could not agree on how to develop the two mines, as Frank Tudor stated in 1885 “*When one is getting old, he don’t feel like putting all his money into a hole in the ground: they want to keep enough to die on.*” As a result, in April 1886, Blake and Hackett took a one-year lease on the property with the option of buying it for \$10,000 at the end of their lease. The two were exploring four small tunnels with a shaft down forty feet, producing lead and silver assaying at 200 ounces per ton. By year end the two partners had sent a carload of ore to smelters in Wicks, Montana with “*most gratifying results.*”

With the end of the lease imminent, with a new discovery of ruby silver in the “Curlew,” in March 1887 it was announced that Blake and Hackett of Victor, had taken on two partners, S.T. Hauser and A.M. Holter of Helena, formed the Helena

by Terry Halden

and Victor Mining Company and had purchased the property. This provided the needed cash funds from Hauser’s First National Bank of Helena. Also, that year, a rich strike was made in the “Whippoorwill,” although, Amos Buck, one of the four Buck brothers working the mine, commented, “*I think that we have the same vein leading from the ‘Curlew.’*”

As a helping hand for the mine owners in the district, just before the end of the year, the first train of the Bitterroot Railroad pulled into Victor to great fanfare and rejoicing. By the end of the decade there was a concentrator, at a cost of





Samuel T. Hauser (left)

Image from the Internet.

Hauser has been accused of making his millions by using his bank’s money.


Anton M Holter (right)

Image from the Internet.

Holter was Hauser’s partner in several mine investments.



\$6,000, installed at the “Curlew” and regular shipments of concentrated ore were being made via the nearby railroad facilities. Low-grade ore was averaging a profit of \$2,500 and high-grade ore \$9,600 a carload. The high-grade was shipped every three weeks whilst the low-grade ore was shipped as much as twice a week.

With all the mining activity, along with the ranching carried out in the area, the town of Victor was evolving as a supply center. In an 1891 newspaper report, the town had a public school, two churches, a doctor who operated a drug store, two general stores, two hotels, two saloons, a blacksmith, a station master/telegraph operator, and a post office.

In the same report, it indicated the “Curlew” had a shaft down 300 feet with the intention of going down to the 500-foot mark. New hoisting equipment was already on the site awaiting installation. In June that year, stockholders had a

dividend of \$10,000 divided amongst them with a similar bonus for July.

In the 1892 Montana Mine Inspector’s Report, a warning of possible danger was hinted: *“Connections have been made from the 400-foot level to the surface by up-rises, and the air is good where men are at work. The ground is heavy and of a swelling character, and unless the stopes are bulkheaded or filled with waste it is hard to hold the ground. Unless well secured, it would only be a question of time when the stopes and drifts would close, regardless of the strength of the timbers.”*

At the “Whippoorwill,” the mine was leased to George Strobel who discovered a small outcrop of ore on the surface and on pursuing it to a depth of forty feet, found the ore seam was five feet wide.

With the silver devaluation of 1893 both the “Whippoorwill” and the “Curlew” were affected. At the “Whippoorwill”



“Curlew” mine buildings (above)

Photo copywrite Jeff & Pat Close, from the Internet.

Date unknown

everything came to a halt, whilst the “Curlew” struggled on but was finally forced to close in early 1894 due to the fact it was running at a loss.

In late 1895, the “Whippoorwill” owners voted to renew the lease on their mine with George Strobel to sink a shaft 200 feet, with the owners providing the equipment, he the labor; any ore he took out was his profit. At the “Curlew,” A. M. Holter—one of the four owners of the Helena and Victor Company—visited the mine that summer, he indicated that the Company’s indebtedness might be paid off and work resumed at the mine. On December 11th, 1895, the whistle at


the mine was heard for the first time as work to construct a new two compartment shaft was started estimated to reach the ore seam at a depth of forty feet and to continue to the 500-foot mark. Work started in earnest, but with large bodies of ore in sight, work came to a grinding halt a month later. The First National Bank called its loan, and the company went into receivership. For that month, the men had not been paid. Holter and Hauser, who held the controlling shares with the approval of Judge Woody, appointed H.P. Kennett as receiver on January 15th. He was the stepson of Hauser and the son-in-law of Holter. How close can you get to retaining control!

Work resumed, and with the first profits, Judge Woody dictated the workers' current salaries to be paid, along with any excess monies going to the First National Bank's indebtedness. The miners protested, wanting their salaries from December paid but were told that was an "unsecured loss" and if they didn't want to continue working, there were plenty of other unemployed men who would fill their positions. Despite a short work stoppage, the men reluctantly returned to work.

This system continued for the year, but as the Missoulian reported on January 29th 1897: "*Many think that the money was used to plug up holes in the rotten First National Bank, while others think it is part of a game by which smaller stockholders may be frozen out.*" Both may have been right. The Annual Report of the Helena & Victor Mining Company, filed in September 1897, showed an existing debt of \$51,078.77, and the paid-up capital stock total of \$200,000.

As 1898 progressed, the miners at the "Curlew" lost the seam of ore. This often occurs in mining if a major fault in the rock structure is encountered. In July, it was reported in the Ravalli Republican that the ore being mined at the "Curlew" was "*pockety,*" which resulted in wages only being barely paid. This continued for a year, but in the following spring the decision was made to let the company go into complete receivership and the assets be auctioned off. In a Sheriff's sale in June 1899, there were two bidders: S. Blake of Victor bid \$8,000 and A.M. Holter of Helena bid \$10,000. Immediately, Holter employed twenty men to remove the hoisting equipment from the old shaft and begin digging a new shaft with the hope of relocating the seam at forty feet and to follow it down again.

The new century brought the sad news that Percy Kennett, the new manager of the "Curlew," had died in a freak accident in his home. Apparently in opening his bureau, his revolver fell out and being loaded, discharged when it hit the floor. The bullet struck Kennett in his neck, severing his jugular vein. With no more close family input into the mine, Holter lost interest and decided to lease the mine. A long-time miner, Tom Cowan, took a lease on the property the following year.

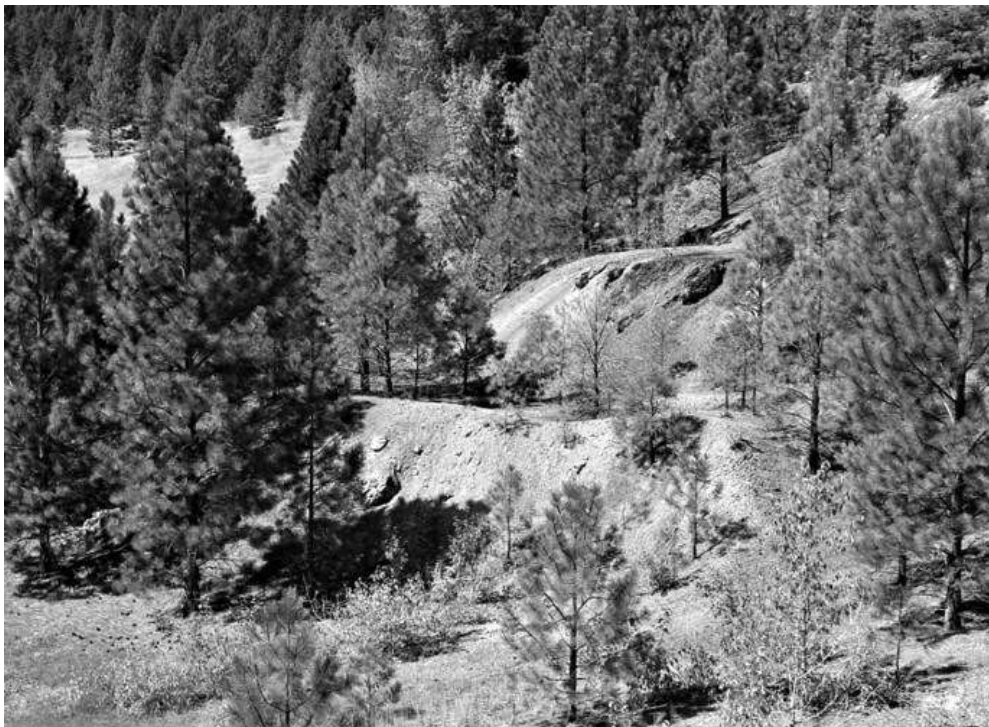
Obviously, Cowan made money because he was still listed as being in charge in February 1906 when traces of copper ore were discovered at the forty foot depth. However, the copper proved to be low grade and the excitement quickly died down. After that, various owners and/or lessees had the mine reopened for short periods as late as 1926, when the mine closed down for good. 



The "Curlew" mine property (below)

Today!

Photo from the Internet



Just as the town clings to the continental divide, Butte is hanging on to its boisterous past...and grasping for its future. Is it still as fascinating to visitors as an up-and-coming city as it was as a mining camp?

Save the date for the
**53rd MGTPS
Convention**



September 12th-14th, 2025



We are still planning the convention, but potential activities could include:

- Historic Tours Riding in Side-by-Sides by Butte Mule Historic Tours
- Gallus Frames and Neighborhood tour
- Mai Wah Society Museum
- Elkhorn Ghost Town
- Historic Clark Chateau
- World Museum of Mining
- Dumas Brothel tour
- Trolley tour
- Copper King Mansion tour
- Dellinger Walking Tour
- Butte Underground tour

Please let us know if any of these sound particularly interesting, and we will do our best to include them in the convention.

We hope to see you there!



Comet, MT (above)

Photo by Terry Halden

The mill from the porch of a cabin (2017)



Bannack, MT (above)

Photo by Terry Halden

The Masonic Lodge (upstairs) / schoolhouse (downstairs) (2010)



MONSANA GHOST TOWNS

TODAY



Garnet, MT (below)

Photo by Terry Halden

J.K. Wells hotel from the window of the 'Newly weds' cabin (2016)



Castle, MT (below)

Photo by Terry Halden

Looking through the breezeway of a cabin (2009)



Editor's Note: Our secretary, Rita Reichman, came across an article about the **Historic Canton Church** in Townsend, Montana, written by **Ryan Hall**, editor of the *Rural Montana Electric Cooperatives Magazine*. The article came from the magazine's February 2025 issue, and it's so wonderfully written and aligned with our mission that we just *had* to include it in our Spring Newsletter! With Ryan Hall's permission, we've included it for your enjoyment. You may also read the rest of the issue (with more images, in color!) on their website at www.mtco-ops.com.

Please enjoy, and a big thank you to Ryan and the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association (MECA)!

CANTON CHURCH THRIVING as SUMMER EVENT CENTER

Historic building was part of now flooded town

Story by Ryan Hall

Rural Montana Editor

St. Joseph's Catholic Mission Church of Canton could easily be under Canyon Ferry Lake with the rest of the former town, not on a hill overlooking it. But thanks to local community members it now sits on a knoll outside of Townsend, restored to the condition of its glory days.

The church—the seventh one built in Montana and the second-oldest church building still in use in the state—was constructed in 1875 as a community center with a steeple added on later to make it a church. The building was moved two miles from its original site in 1954, when an expansion of Canyon Ferry Reservoir put most of the townsite under water.

“The church was used, although infrequently, until the mid-'80s,” said Victor Sample, a board member of the Canton Church Restoration, a 501(c)3 that restored and has since maintained the church as a museum and community center.

The Catholic Dioceses of Helena abandoned the church, and removed its relic. It now leases the former church building to Canton Church Restoration “for something like a dollar a year,” Sample said, adding that no religious services can be performed there.

The church has been restored to its original condition, which presents some challenges as it did not have electricity or heat. The church site has power from Vigilante Electric Cooperative, but the outlet is located outside the building.

BRINGING HISTORY BACK TO LIFE

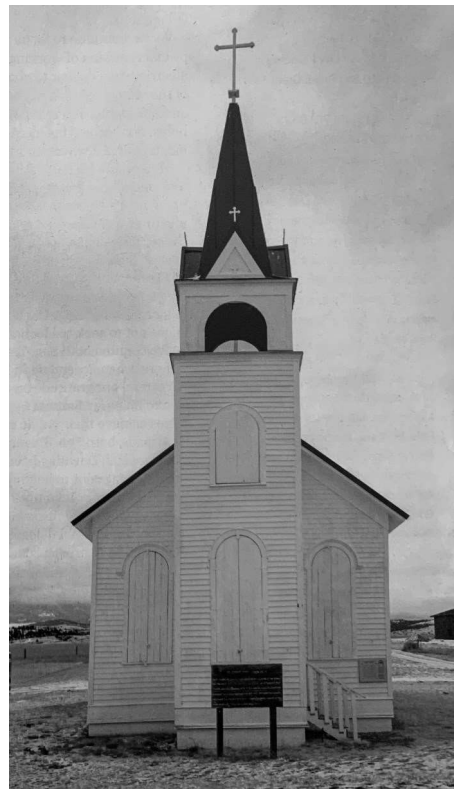
Sample said that in the 1990s, local farmer Fred Meyers asked his wife Joy what she would like for her birthday.

“She said she would like to see that [Canton] church restored,” Sample said. “It was looking pretty rough.”

Fred and Joy started the effort, and other community members quickly joined.

“After several years of successful fundraising, we had raised \$15,000 out of the \$100,000 that was needed,” Sample said with a laugh.

He said the local community members donated time and



Historic Canton Church (right)

Townsend, MT

Photo courtesy of Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association and Ryan Hall



materials in order to get the work done.

And, amazingly, once the church building began getting restored, items that had been stolen or missing started showing back up, including the church's original organ. It turns out the items weren't stolen but rather removed and saved before vandals or thieves could damage or steal them.

“After we started restoring the church, a lot of that stuff came back,” Sample said. “[Now,] it's pretty much the way it was.”

The only noticeable differences from its original condition are that the preservation group was forced to add an alarm system a few years ago after a break-in occurred at the building and a metal roof was recently put on, replacing the cedar shingles.

A NEW PURPOSE

Though the former church can't host religious services, it has found a new purpose. Sample said each year, six free events are held at the church at 5 pm on a Friday night in the summer (SEE BOX BELOW). Most events are musical concerts, while a few are historic presentations.

"We want everyone to come out and enjoy the events," Sample said, noting that the pews have been filled for some concerts, with more than 80 people in attendance. "The acoustics in the church are wonderful."

MOVING FORWARD

Sample said the church is supported by grants from Humanities Montana, the Montana Community Foundation and donations collected at the events held each year. The donations are enough to cover event costs, Sample said. The grants, gifts through wills and other donations go toward the operating budget or are held by the Montana Community Foundation for larger future projects, such as the recent roof replacement.

To donate to the former Canton Church, send donations to:

Canton Church Restoration
PO Box 493
Townsend MT 59644

Sample asked that donors please indicate if their donation should go toward the operating funds or to the Community Foundation to be held for Canton Church Restoration. 🏠



Inside the Historic Canton Church (above)

The church looks much like it would have in its heyday, with pews lining both sides. The altar is not original to the church, but it is from a church in the area that no longer exists.

Photo courtesy of Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association (MECA) and Ryan Hall



EVENT DATES (2025)

WHERE? The former St. Joseph's Catholic Church outside of Townsend

WHEN? June 13 and 27, July 11 and 25, and August 8 and 22

Check out the following website for more information!

www.canton-church.org



🏠 The RUFFATTO SCHOOL RESTORATION

MGTPS has contributed **\$5000** towards the restoration of the roof of the **Ruffatto School** building, led by the **Friends of School House District 71**. The process will be underway starting this spring, along with other restorations. Unfortunately, 2024 was a bust, as it took the Friends most of the summer **waiting for the government** to approve their non-profit organization.

This spring, they will purchase all the necessary materials; volunteers will help strip the tin roof—along with the old wood shingles—and install plywood under the roof (which the building didn't have before). They will waterproof it and install new wood shingles. (As of the society's most recent meeting, the Friends and volunteers have finished cleaning out the school.)

(cont. on page 11)



Ruffatto School (above)

Photo belongs to the Montana Historic Preservation's National Register, titled "Ruffatto School In Richland County, Listed!" (January 2nd, 2024)



The Friends, using the \$5000 we donated, purchased **CeDUR** product fake shakes to re-roof the school. CeDUR is a synthetic roofing supply store based in Aurora, Colorado, known for their “desirable cedar shake look with the latest in design and technology” (CeDUR.com). Their polyurethane-based synthetic roofing closely resembles the natural look of hand-split wood and is **fire-resistant**. The roofing the Friends bought has a **50-year warranty!** So the school will look similar to what the roof was originally made of, but it will last a lot longer.

We hope these efforts will help protect the school from natural forces, people, and time, allowing it to stand for a hundred years to come. 🏠

Paige Ringelberg

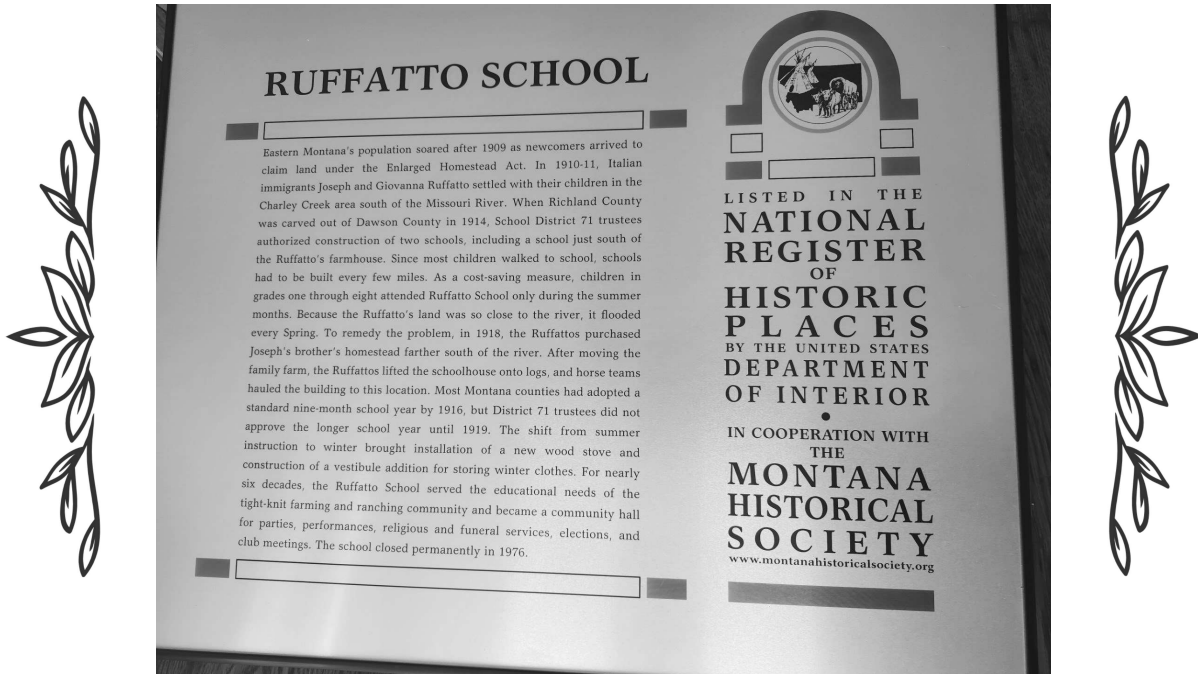
Newsletter Editor

Rita Reichman

Secretary

Terry Halden

Director



The National Register of Historic Places' official plaque for the Ruffatto School (above)

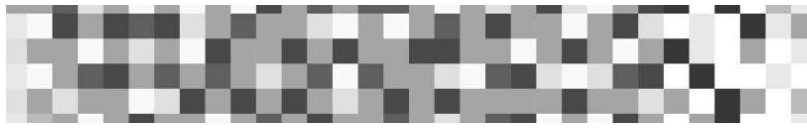
Photo by Terry Halden

“
My favorite state has not yet been invented. It will be called Montana and it will be perfect.

- PRESIDENT ABRAHAM LINCOLN



preserving history for the next generation



Calling All Members!

MGTPS members are surrounded by a rich history and ancestry, particularly (though not exclusively) **Montana history**. We are asking you to please take a little bit of time to think about subjects drawn from your experience or interest, possibly supplemented from the wealth of information available online these days and **share one with the rest of us in the Newsletter**.

Please don't allow the Newsletter to become like the philosophical donkey who starved, despite being surrounded by haystacks, because he couldn't decide where to begin! ☺

You can send photos and articles to the Newsletter Editor, Paige Ringelberg, at **paiger_15@yahoo.com** or via mail at the address listed directly above.

We look forward to reading the stories you have to share!

*The photos on Page 6 were taken by our president, Linda Dutcher, back in 2017 at an old mine in Butte that was left untouched when open-pit mining took place (which is why the mine is in a depression surrounded by soil from the pit).