The Challenge of Living Through History
Renewed Faith in Our Mission and Facing COVID-19 Together

In Montana, the tradition of caring for our neighbors is strong. We have been humbled by the bravery of those on the front lines of this pandemic, and we are thankful to those who have helped the Montana Preservation Alliance (MPA) during this difficult time. Our small but mighty staff is committed to using our abilities and the resources in our preservation toolbox to help those most in need during and after the COVID-19 outbreak. In service our state, and the many partners we have always worked alongside, we hope to help Montana recover its local economies and sustain its communities.

Reflecting on Our Mission
Joining together with other Montanans to preserve historic places, traditional landscapes, and cultural heritage is at the very core of the MPA mission. We have long served our beloved state with special attention to significant endangered places and communities most in need of our resources — the rural, remote, underrepresented, and underserved. Our mission spans the arc of time and the experience of all people, from places of great antiquity to places of the recent past. It is incredibly difficult to imagine a world where history would be lost because life had been put on hold. And so, in response to a pandemic of global proportion, our focus is simple: Recovery and Sustainability. As businesses and communities everywhere struggle in this unprecedented age, we bring to the table vital skills that will help with job training, economic development, and grant seeking. Our approach has always been to pull people together, harness the energies of many, and use preservation as a long-term strategy of renewal, educating as many people as we can along the way.

We are taking a clear-eyed view, as humans and as Montanans, knowing that everyone is unsure of how to approach the challenge of living through history. However, we want stress the fact that the historic preservation is about reflection and identity. Our past is a powerful thing. It tells us where we have been and helps us decide who we want to be, and in times of great change, looking back can inspire us as we try to create the “new normal.”

We believe that the value of our work is not diminished by recent events, but strengthened. There is no better way to engage with history than to be present in the places where it happened, and with your support we will continue to protect those special places wherever we can. For now, we hope that you can be healthy, sane, and brave, and we look forward to seeing you again soon.

Yours,
The MPA Team
Butte's Ethnic Heritage Get a Digital Twist

The All Nations Project, Coming Soon to Your Shelter-In-Place . . .

Whether you are a first generation American or your ancestors predated the Mayflower, there is something profound about reaching into the past to connect with one's culture. Being able to share experiences and traditions with people who share your story is a powerful way to forge new friendships, strengthen ethnic ties, and preserve priceless heritage.

Since 2011, the Butte Silver-Bow Public Archives (BSB Archives) has been celebrating the rich cultural diversity of the Mining City through their All Nations Project, highlighting 17 distinct ethnic groups through a series of gorgeous public exhibits in their galleries.

The MPA partnered with the BSB Archives last year to help host workshops with the last four groups: the Finnish, German, Mexican, and Jewish communities of Butte. Folks of each ethnic background shared stories, family photos, treasured objects, and oral histories over the course of two days at the BSB Archives. Each workshop included scholars who set the stage for people to share what they had brought and recount their family histories. Exhibits were drawn from these gatherings, and the results have been powerful. The beauty of handmade objects, the recipes cooked for loved ones by grandmothers, the stories of hardship, and the promise of a new life in America all resonate with us across the sweep of time.

It will come as no surprise that the ten-week exhibit featuring the German community scheduled for May has been placed on hold due to coronavirus restrictions. But, as they say, necessity is the mother of invention and this unexpected change has brought new opportunities. To serve the mission of the wider project, the MPA and BSB Archives team are translating this real-world exhibit into one that can be experienced online. This gives access to everyone – the many Montanans who are sheltered in place, and people around the world -- to hear the stories of these colorful and courageous families.

Stars and Smelters

East Helena’s Past Becomes the Crowning Jewel for It’s Future

Even old-timers may not realize that East Helena was home to one of the largest lead smelters in the world for more a century. The demolition of the American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO) Smelter in August of 2009 pushed this small town into a new post-industrial era and forced locals to consider their historic identity while trying to develop a new economic plan. Coping with the loss of the main employer and a lack of Main Street businesses, the City of East Helena hosted two years of visioning sessions. From 2017 to 2019, the East Helena Food & Culture Hub project, the Myrna Loy, East Helena Schools, and the MPA helped locals to focus on what mattered most to them. Ultimately, locals decided on renovating the historic Volunteer Fireman’s Hall to again serve as an anchor, a project that the MPA has been involved with since 2018.

In addition to supporting this effort, the MPA will help to honor the industrial past of East Helena with a special, new restoration effort. Two beautiful windows in the shape of the Star of David were salvaged before the ASARCO Smelter was demolished in 2009. Hand-crafted in 1901, this stunning pair of artifacts tell of the forgotten history of the ASARCO Smelter, once controlled by William Rockefeller and the Guggenheim family. Ashkenazi Jews, the Guggenheims added the windows to their offices as a reflection of their Jewish heritage. The City has gained ownership of the windows, and a grant from the Montana History Foundation has made it possible for our team to restore the windows as lasting symbols of community history and resilience.
In response to COVID-19 and to empower preservation projects across Montana, our Restoration Director is working to compile brand new window restoration kits that will be publicly available for check-out in towns across the state. Included in the kit will be all the tools necessary to completely restore historic wood windows, and we are excited! But we cannot accomplish this without you. If you feel able to contribute a sander, paint scraper, or even a glazing tool, we encourage you to visit our website and help supply tools for this new MPA effort.

Interpreting Montana’s First Dude Ranch In An All New Way

For anyone who didn’t grow up immersed in the culture of the American West, the term “dude ranch” might seem like outdated surfer slang from the 1970s. But the phrase actually refers to a tourism experience traditionally aimed at wealthy city-dwelling families, dating back to the turn of the 20th century, that holds a special place in Big Sky history.

The OTO Ranch was established by James Norris “Dick” and Dora Randall, who began hosting guests at their cattle ranch located just 10 miles north of Yellowstone National Park in 1912. Between 1914 and 1920, they built an expansive rustic-style lodge, which was completed in fall of 1920, just in time for the wedding of Bess Randall, Dick and Dora’s daughter. With rustic facilities for visitors and the latchstring out to all, the OTO became the first official dude ranch in the state of Montana. Now owned by the U.S. Forest Service, it retains much of the vibrant character that brought visitors from far and wide, even today.

After helping to complete extensive repairs, artifact cleaning, and inventory work in 2012, the MPA staff laid out a feasible plan for preservation of the property in partnership with the Custer-Gallatin National Forest. Since then, the MPA has created a walking tour and interpretive signs to relate the rich history of the OTO to locals and travelers alike.

Now, in the face of an uncertain summer, our team is compiling all that we have learned about the OTO into a one-of-a-kind digital storytelling experience for this incredible heritage site. This digital exhibit will include a history of “dude ranching” in Montana and the West, a special photo exhibit of the property, and behind-the-scenes stories of restoration and maintenance. Look for OTORanch.org, coming soon!

Changes On the Way

In world that seems short on good news, we have been working on a surprise for our dedicated friends, members, and partners! For the last eighteen months the MPA board and staff have been reflecting on our mission and our goals, trying to strengthen our sense of identity as a nonprofit that serves Montana through historic preservation. The process has been fun, it’s been challenging, and above all, it’s helped us define where we are headed during this crisis and during decade that will follow. Returning to the fundamental components of our organization has helped us fortify the original MPA mission . . . and it has also led us to make one very big change.

However, we aren’t quite ready to share it with you yet. Initially, our hope was to make a big announcement at this year’s Road Show in White Sulphur Springs, but when everyone’s situation changed due to COVID-19, we had to rethink things a bit. So, for now, we are asking everyone to keep their ears to the ground and their eyes open. We’ve got big news coming, and we cannot wait to bring a little bit of joy to all of the incredible people who make protecting Montana’s place-based history possible, even in the middle of a pandemic!

HELP NEEDED

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Not a member yet? Click on the green envelope to subscribe to all the latest MPA news and statewide preservation projects or visit: www.PreserveMontana.org
**Gratitude in the Age of COVID-19**

We thank our Governor Steve Bullock and the Corona Virus Relief Fund Task Force for their extraordinary efforts in acting to address our state’s needs in the current health and economic emergency. Our governor’s decisive actions have limited the spread of the corona virus in Montana and protected the health of our citizens. We also thank Liz Moore and the Montana Non-Profit Association for extraordinary leadership on behalf of so many. It has been a hard time for everyone, and we are grateful for the actions of all Montanans to care for friends and neighbors.

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**Community Recovery Through Preservation**

Our efforts now are focused on the ways that historic preservation can be part of the solution in state and national recovery efforts. At the state level, MPA sent a letter with over 80 co-signers proposing to dedicate 3% of Montana’s coronavirus relief funds to boost the economy through lasting investments in cities and towns, business districts and primary tourism attractions, and workforce development for the unemployed (read here). Our program emphasizes the redeeming value of preserving heritage throughout Montana, and the economic stimulus of brick-and-mortar preservation work for communities, businesses and programs hard hit by impacts of COVID-19.

In addition to funding shovel ready projects at state-owned heritage properties, preservation grants and grants for cultural and heritage programming through existing agencies, we offered a legacy project — historic preservation crews led by the MPA, Montana Conservation Corps and Habitat for Humanity.

We are inspired by the lasting contributions of the Works Progress Administration and Civilian Conservation Corps of the Great Depression. Those visionary programs put people to work on projects that were good for all – parks, schools, armories and roads. Beyond bricks and mortar, there were also cultural projects. In Montana these included Copper Camp writings about Butte from the WPA Writers Project, archeological excavations at Pictograph Caves, and post office murals by talented artists of the day.

At the federal level, the National Trust for Historic Preservation led a coalition in a sign-on letter to Congress, proposing provisions for future stimulus packages that would also harness preservation to help the recovery. A total of 379 organizations and businesses joined the National Trust on this letter, which included: $420 million for the Historic Preservation Fund including rehabilitation grants; improvements to the historic tax credit; additional funding for NEA, NEH, and the IMLS; and more.

There are concrete ways we all can be part of the solution. Through our network of partners we have broad expertise to help shape the stimulus package to be successful and have a lasting impact. Not only do historic places define our communities, they are integral to our local economies. You can help by asking Congress to activate the power of preservation.

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Contact Senator
Steve Daines

[Click Here](#)

Contact Senator
Jon Tester

[Click Here](#)

Contact Congressman
Greg Gianforte

[Click Here](#)
Congratulations Carl!

We are excited to announce that MPA board member Carl Davis has recently received the Popular Book Award from the Society for American Archaeology. His publication, *Six Hundred Generations: An Archaeological History of Montana*, presents deeply complex archeological evidence of Montana’s long Indigenous human history in a way that is both intriguing and accessible to all. We are proud to call him a member of the MPA team and wish to congratulate him whole-heartedly on this incredible achievement!

![Six Hundred Generations](image)

Give Today

Receive a one-year subscription to our Preserve Montana newsletter, notices of upcoming events, updates on statewide preservation issues, and "Member-Only" discounts on admission to the Montana Preservation Road Show, tours, and workshops throughout the year.

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Visit us online today to learn about all the ways you can contribute to MPA programs and preservation projects or go to www.PreserveMontana.org/donate

For the time being, due to COVID-19 and limited printing capabilities, we are publishing this edition of the Preserve Montana newsletter online only. If you would like to receive a hard copy of this newsletter once we are able to print them again, please contact our Outreach Director!

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We are funded in part by coal severance taxes paid based upon coal mined in Montana and deposited in Montana’s Cultural and Aesthetic Projects Trust Fund.