Above: LPM Board Director, RJ Lara is the Executive Director of the Historic Stanley Home in Estes Park, Colorado. Here he stands at the grand staircase, inviting all of us to come visit this newly restored and vibrant slice of Estes history. Below is the view of the Rockies from the F.O. Stanley’s veranda, at which RJ offers a refreshing libation when we come for a visit and tour.
264 guests attended 3 Teas, May, June, July. Attendance was limited as we allowed for social distancing, but the lovely events were still beautifully done with special programs from the curatorial historians.

725 folks visited Arts & Crafts vendors on the Ivinson grounds for the July Art Fest. Robin’s Treats provided delicious foods for all vendors and guests, and our terrific ANB Bank friends gave away snow cones!

19 Junior Docents stepped up to lead tours & do chores for 2,296 hours of service to the Museum. With school rules tight, we did not do our usual recruitment, so a select group of teachers at Snow Range Academy, the Middle and Lab Schools helped us by recommending top notch history students to docent.

36 Weddings and/or wedding receptions were held at LPM facilities from March through September

146% budget increase in Museum memberships this year! Dedicated friends have given in good faith to our continued preservation and celebration of Albany County history, in spite of COVID!

159 friends attended The Evening, especially when activities and foods were in the open air of the stunning LPM gardens. We had music everywhere—Alice Freeman on harp in the Mansion; Danno outside near the auctions; and the fabulous Cox Family strings giving us our first taste of how we will bring the beauty of stringed instruments to the Ivinson lawn in the summertime. We’re working out the sound-to-the-grounds kinks!

2093 visitors toured the Ivinson Mansion May through August. With the variant surge in our county, we required guests to wear masks in the mansion because of mixed groups and narrow hallways. We readily offered masks if needed and most visitors were very willing.

The Museum landscape was amazing thanks to Laramie Garden Club members raking, watering, pulling, transplanting, deadheading, hauling, and shing spcies to keep critics away from the beautiful flower beds of the Ivinson property.

John Nutter has been active in our Museum world since the early 2000s. At that time, it was administrative assistant, Mary Mountain, who saw John’s kind heart and smart coordinations as he orchestrated use of the much smaller Alice Hardie Steven Center space for welcoming and orienting new students to the University of Wyoming. After some regular visits to the office, Mary asked if John would consider being on our Board of Directors, and his legacy of helpful hands and bright insight to finances and solutions began and has never faltered. At this year’s August 21, 2021 Evening at the Ivinsons’, we couldn’t resist finally recognizing the many and varied ways John has given to the betterment of the Laramie Plains Museum and the historic Ivinson Mansion. John Nutter was bestowed the Edward Ivinson Award with a reading of the many “whereases” that we came up with to illustrate his dedicated giving. The Edward Ivinson Award is especially and only given occasionally when the Board and/or Evening Committee see that such recognition has certainly been earned. Since John is a Board Director and Secretary, keeping this award a surprise was tricky, but we did it, finally able to note his valuable contributions with keeping minutes and excellent records, offering helping hands with set ups/take downs for many and all events, bringing sharp minds and thoughts together for better solutions and policies, and being part of demolition and reconstruction wherever needed.

JOHN NUTTER, EDWARD IVINSON AWARD winner 2021

WELDON TUCK, outgoing executive director of the Wyoming House for Historic Women, stood with Germaine St. John, 2021’s Louisa Gardner Swain. “Louisa” also stood in the sunlight with Camryn Williams, the 4th Grader from Yoder, Wyoming, whose research and presentation won her the opportunity to walk alongside Germaine as that first vote of September 6, 1870 was re-enacted this year. The autumn sunlight streaming upon Louisa’s statue, Camryn and Germaine warmly reminded us of that very special, unique-in-the-world first vote on equal terms with men.
An Elephant Stampede in Laramie?

It happened on July 30, 1909

It seems improbable, but an elephant stampede really did happen on the day the Ringling Brothers Circus train arrived in Laramie in 1909.

First, there was the traditional circus parade through town as the menagerie unloaded and the elegantly dressed performers enticed the public to buy tickets for the show that day and the next. A writer for the Laramie Republican newspaper on the July 31 edition described the parade’s “two-toned four-horse teams, a team of camels, a team of zebras...and hundreds of other features.”

Writing a decade later, Wesley Johnson says of the circus arrival in Laramie: “the greatest sight of all was the eight-horse team pulling the steam calliope. One could hear the music played on this instrument a long way off. And of course there were the elephants marching along single file and each holding the tail of the one ahead.”

Johnson’s memoirs are archived at the LPM—he will be remembered as the father of the late Everett Johnson, who was the director of the University of Wyoming Extension Service and served as the first dean of the university’s new college of agriculture.

Johnson provides more details on the elephant’s escape, saying: “they went to the river and took a good bath. Most of them kept on going, some up the stream bed, and others took to the road leading out of town. The many ranchers coming into the circus met the runaway and many a team of horses ran away. Brother Nave saw an elephant coming up the road just as he was about to get to the old river bridge, so he got out and unhooked his team, thus avoiding serious trouble. Some of the elephants went out as far as the Hutton grove which is eight miles from town.”

Nate Johnson had been called into town from the ranch that day, to be at his wife’s side at her parent’s house on Cedar St., where she was about to give birth. The Johnson family no doubt had great fun telling little Helen Johnson, born “with elephants in the back yard” that fateful day, as her uncle Wesley recalled.

Dr. Jean Garrison, who now owns the “Stickney” house at 620 S. 7th St. at the NW corner of Sheridan St., says that she’s been told that the high-ceiled carriage house behind her house once housed an elephant. It’s quite possibly the story is true, if the elephant handlers needed a place where one could be penned up securely for the day after the elephant’s escape. But if the owners at the time, Martha and David Stickney, ever told the story about the elephant in their carriage house, that has not yet come to light.

Source: Wyoming Newspaper Project

Milk Mary, a Pioneer Story

By Ronnie Cronk, Laramie Plains Museum Curator

On October 22, 1921, the Daily Boomerang lamented the loss of several Wyoming pioneers after hearing the news of the passing of Buffalo Bill’s widow: “Every Wyoming city and town has had its fair share of the famous buffalo hunter and his brides of fortune who braved the hazards of pioneer life in this country. But, within the past few years, it seems that death’s harvest has gathered in an unusually large number of these admirable characters.” The passing of famous showman John Butler “Buffalo Bill” Cody caused a national outpouring of grief, and the story of his third wife, Catherine, now known affectionately as “Milk Mary,” was told in the Laramie newspapers, before her marriage to Jack Martin, who took the surname “Hofer.” It is possible that Catherine took her maiden name, Erhardt, after her husband’s desertion, which could explain why Dora spent by a different surname.

During this time Catherine continued to operate her dairy and engaged in the cattle business as her herd increased. She eventually accumulated approximately 300 head of cattle. Numerous times she experienced tragedy with her stock. In June of 1871, a team of horses ran away. Brother Nate saw an elephant in the back yard with the ladle, which is how she earned the nickname “Milk Mary.”

There are numerous newspaper articles in the Boomerang and Sentinel praising Catherine’s ability to cook and host meals for her friends. The Semi-Century marked a drop in cattle prices with the market flooded. On top of reduced value, the combined drought of 1886 and the blizzards of 1887 and 1888 saw an approximate 15% drop in the cattle population, depending on location. She had to sell her cattle as none were grazed in the smaller animals. This was probably the time when Catherine decided to head her herd of 40 head and engage in raising poultry—chickens, ducks and turkeys. Catherine continued to operate the dairy and was well-respected during the winter holidays with her turkey sales.

In Catherine’s youth, the Laramie newspaper reported that Catherine’s “husband deserted her on a farm near the town.” Catherine’s son, Octavian is also a mystery. It is speculated Catherine happened to Laramie since he only appears in the 1890 Federal Census as living with Catherine and her children. According to the 1921 Boomerang, Catherine’s eldest son, Octavian was born in 1857 and a daughter, Theodora “Dora” was born in June of 1859. According to research titled “Milk Mary,” Catherine’s maiden name, Erhardt, after her husband’s desertion, which could explain why Dora spent by a different surname.

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Dora’s remarriage in 1905 to Martin Hofer.

When reviewing Catherine’s life, it is easy to see much sadness and despair. Yet, testimonies from people who knew her reflect so much more. For example, from research conducted with Catherine’s grandson, William “Dicksie” Knight May, says such things as “Milk Mary” was a wonderful character, always ready to help anyone with advice or in any...
other way. She saw no difference between rich and poor people;” or “Aunt Mary was very fond of a glass of beer. She was the only respected woman, in Laramie, who made a habit of going into the saloons and drinking a glass of beer while visiting with the many men who were her friends of many years.” And “Aunt Mary Erhardt was the best and happiest soul that ever lived. She did more good than almost any one else here…”

I think one way to describe Catherine’s life is that it was complex. She did not allow the negative experiences to affect her, and she continued to live as she saw fit.

One of the blessings of researching someone who was written about frequently is that there is much information about them. However, differing stories emerged from various sources and contradictions were born. Catherine’s story (and that of her family) is fraught with contradiction, but only in the details. Historians tend to favor information that is repeated in several sources. The only time that rule is broken, is when it is clear the article was based on a more reliable personal interview rather than a recollection.

The information in this article is heavily dependent upon research conducted by Dicksie Knight May, Albany County Historian. Also, this article is in part a presentation given to the Albany County Cattlegwomen by Konnie Cronk.

Boy-oh-boy are we hurting for volunteers! We’re hoping that we will retrieve many after this pandemic fully subsides, but in the meantime, it’s been a skeleton crew around here. We had half the student docents we normally have in summer and almost double the amount of guests wanting to get back out and about. When the students went back to school a week early, we found ourselves down by seven senior docents to fill our fall schedule! Eek! We totally understand that during the course of 2020 and 2021 isolations, our older docents started dealing with health and mobility issues and the worry of COVID exposure put cautions to their extra interactions. We also saw some of our younger adult docents landing the jobs they’d been seeking, and we are very happy for them. We do understand that volunteering is working around personal schedules because you are voluntarily giving, not receiving, but we still think it’s worth an ask for those of you who have considered volunteering but delayed, or are finally starting to feel like you want to try to get out and about. We can always use your helping hands and bright spirits! We have a couple of new volunteer faces who have taken the handbooks and training tours and are deciding where they might best be interested in helping. Yay!

Shoutouts to Judy Knight and Gina Gibson who saved us by working extra days when we had no docents scheduled during these first five weeks of late summer/early fall! And Mary Vaske, Sylvia Hansen, Germaine St. John, Cheri Bellamy and Marian Helm have faithfully returned and covered too many tours on their designated days. We are very grateful for the dedicated docents we have so we’d like to assist them with some extra helpers on their shifts. Tours are only given Tuesday-Saturdays 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. now that we have made it through the summer visitor impacts. It’s really not too bad to take an afternoon each week if your schedule allows. The more volunteers we can draw from, the less chances of burning out our excellent roster of docents. Other areas where we will be looking for volunteer help are with decorating for the Holiday Open House in early December and then next spring we hope for some new faces for our May, June and July Teas. The curatorial area has been very fortunate with interns arriving from UW this fall, but we dream that we can also gain some others—maybe older faces—who will stick with us, to help as consistent volunteers for this special place. Volunteers have always been the secret to our success! We need you!

Bernie Horst served and the Sandeen sisters enjoyed the delectable treats served at one of the special Victorian Teas we were able to present this 2021 summer. We only allowed 100 guests so that we had social distancing in the reception hall, but many ladies, gents and guests from outside Laramie could enjoy this special 30-year tradition in support of the Museum’s curatorial work.
Together Again at the 2021 Evening

1940s cowboy, Scott Morton, our contact for vintage vehicles from CC Brown and Vance Backer, also was great with helping pull the fabulous charcuterie trays together!

1940s glamour from Joyce Powell, Konnie Cronk & Mary Mountain!

Danno of Wyo: Always great fun, music and auctioning power!

We can’t resist these mischievous smiles from Barb Hoffman and EG Meyer!

1940s smiles fabulous grins from Teri Harvey with Joyce Brown and her daughter Amber.

Former LPM Board director/president Pat Kiovsky came up from her Johnstown, Colorado home for our Evening. What a pleasure to have her here again. Pat was active with Laramie Garden Club, Laramie Woman’s Club, LPM, and many other organizations in Albany County were graced by her inspired help. In fact, Pat was one of our early hands-on workers with pulling off the very first “Evenings at the Ivinsons”.

Board director, Greg Bauman, wife Tasha, and Greg’s family from Baggs, Wyoming, Anita & Pat Grieves added great fun to the event.

Charming Karen & Bruce Lange.
We are so grateful to those who coordinated and worked the event!

2021 Evening at the Ivinsons’ Committee
Joyce Powell—Chair, Debi Ockers—Chair, Mary Mountain, Christa Warden, Konnie Croak, Bernie Hoef, Karen Lange, Rhecha Davis, Doug Powell, John Nutter, Silvya Wear, Barb Rouse, Bruce Lange, Greg Bauman, Konnie Cronk, Bernie Horst, Karen Lange, Rhetha Davis, Doug Powell, Joyce Powell

Favorite friends of the
We are so grateful to those who coordinated and worked the event!

—Chair, Mary Mountain, Christel Walrath

Evening
Zee. Lorraine is President of The TUC actors Lorraine & Cal Van Zee. Lorraine is President of The Unexpected Company still

Thank you so, much for giving so much of your time and many talents to help us all launch out of the COVID isolation. You were incredibly flexible and understanding as so many folks were unsure of coming in for the Evening. You graced us with your humor, skits and songs—marvellous touches for this very special theme of the 1940s. We truly can’t thank you enough.

Although you all deserve individual shout-outs, I just have a couple of moments here to mention your leaders because it all couldn’t have come together without their devotion: Valorie Clymer-Smith, Dave Van Oss, and Karen Bard: you are ABOVE AND BEYOND!!! Thank you so much for your hours and hours of efforts and rethinking. I DO know how that goes. Thank you, Lorraine, for helping TUC members dip their talented toes back into the production waters.

Thank you, all, for just being great people and lovely friends of this beautiful Museum complex.

We love you!
All of us at Laramie Plains Museum

KUDOS! KUDOS! KUDOS, wonderful TUC friends!!

Thank you so, much for giving so much of your time and many talents to help us all launch out of the COVID isolation. You were incredibly flexible and understanding as so many folks were unsure of coming in for the 2nd half of the Evening. You graced us with your humor, skits and songs—marvellous touches for this very special theme of the 1940s. We truly can’t thank you enough.

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Our Evening this year was a fine breakout event. We thought long and worked smartly to pull together most of the event in the social distancing of the great Ivinsons’ mansion. The gardens were beautiful, the auction items intriguing, and the camaraderie of gathering with friends felt good.

The Mansion, with its select 1940s-themed special exhibits, was open to viewing by the guests, but everyone enjoyed just socializing again after so many months of careful separation, that it was seen by all. Alice Freeman did play her beautiful harp in the historic majesty of the house nevertheless! In the gardens, Dan Brain kept us on our toes with his music, charm and auctioning cajoling and the Cox family offered their lovely melodic strings in the out of doors. It’s tricky with our large landscape, but we are working to make sure those kind of sounds can be showcased at special lawn events during Laramie summers. The Cox family was patient with our sound struggles but their music was outstanding! We promise to showcase them when everyone can benefit from great sound outside.

The beautiful charcuterie trays were created by the Byrnes and VIPs. The Beyond! offered some exceptional scenes from the 1940’s radio show. Thank you, TUC. And thank you to the Unexpected Company as well as the pies and coffee we were able to enjoy inside later in the evening. We know that it was a tough call to move inside after the COVID scares so we understand the abbreviated audience. The Unexpected Company still showcased at special lawn events during Laramie summers. The Cox family was patient with our sound struggles but their music was outstanding! We promise to showcase them when everyone can benefit from great sound outside.

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