



# PONY TRACKS

Newsletter of the Northwest Montana Posse of Westerners

Vol. 10, No. 7

Kalispell, Montana

August 15, 2023

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## AUGUST MEETING

Monday, Aug, 21, 2023

**Topic:** "Gustavus Sohon:  
A Pivotal Player in  
Northwest Exploration"

**Presenter:** Ken Robison,  
of Fort Benton, Montana

**Where:** Second floor of the Northwest  
Montana History Museum,  
124 2nd Ave. East, Kalispell

**Time:** General membership meeting at 6 p.m.,  
followed by Greet 'n' Gab, book raffle  
and book signings.

Beer, wine and soft drinks available  
for purchase from museum staff.

**Historic Presentation:** Program begins at 7:00  
p.m. No reservations are required, but  
seating will be limited; so come early  
since space may be limited.

Posse members may join the program through  
Zoom at the following address:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82117748155?  
pwd=aHY4YXh1THVXV2xoYTJhbFBXWVd  
GZz09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82117748155?pwd=aHY4YXh1THVXV2xoYTJhbFBXWVdGZz09)

Meeting ID: 891 9948 1805

Passcode: 003734

E-mail Tim Christenson at  
[tim.chris@yahoo.com](mailto:tim.chris@yahoo.com) for more help.

## ABOUT THE PRESENTATION

Though almost  
lost to history,  
German immigrant  
Gustavus Sohon  
played a key role in  
four historic  
expeditions in the  
Northwest.

He was involved in  
the 1853-1854 Pacific  
railroad survey, in  
territorial Governor  
Issac Stevens' treaty  
tour of 1855, the 1858  
military campaign of  
Col. George Wright, and John Mullan's famous  
construction of a road between Fort Benton,  
Montana, and Walla Walla, Washington in 1859-  
1862.

Yet he is little known and unappreciated.

Author Ken Robison, who specializes in  
neglected Montana history, will describe how  
Sohon was a jack-of-all-trades, an artist, a  
linguist, a topographer, a scientist, and an  
accomplished diplomat. Fluent in German,  
French, and English, he quickly mastered tribal  
languages, and served as an official interpreter for  
two key Stevens' treaties – May 1855 near the  
Walla Walla River and July 1855 at Missoula.

But he is best known for his pencil sketches and  
watercolors. Sohon roamed the Northwest and left  
us with the first detailed views of the spectacular  
mountainous landscapes, portraits of prominent  
tribal chiefs and a first-hand painting of the



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historic treaty gathering that created the Flathead Reservation.

Sohon also explored the Flathead Valley in 1854 with John Mullan. The expedition traveled up the lower Flathead River to Flathead Lake, and followed the Stillwater River and the Tobacco River to near present-day Eureka. When Sohon's army enlistment ended, he again joined Mullan and worked in surveying and construction in building the Mullan Road.

### ***About the Presenter***



Ken Robison, a native Montanan, is a historian who serves as a historian on several historical groups in the Fort Benton and Great Falls area. He graduated from the University of Montana, later adding an M.A. in Colonial History at George Mason University.

Retiring as Captain, he served in U.S. Naval Intelligence for thirty years with eleven years of sea duty in the Pacific and Indian Oceans during the Vietnam War and Cold War contingency operations.

Along with writing historical articles for Montana the *Magazine of Western History* and regional journals, Robison is the author of more than six books including *Historic Tales of Whoop-Up Country*; *Yankees and Rebels on the Upper Missouri*; *Montana Territory and the Civil War*; *Confederates in Montana Territory*.

His website is [kenrobisonhistory.com](http://kenrobisonhistory.com). Signed copies of Robison's books will be available for sale at the meeting.

Posse members will recall Robison's presentation on John Healy and Fort Whoop-Up at the June 2020 meeting.



## **FROM THE SHERIFF'S SADDLEBAG**

By Edward "Eddy" Byrne

Once again August is upon us along with the dog days of Summer. The good news is Labor Day falls on September 4th this year to give us another unofficial week of Summer. This is "Fair Week" and should hold something for everyone. I encourage everyone to enjoy the weather and myriad events throughout the Flathead over the final weeks of August.

This month's presentation by Ken Robison is of one of my favorite historical figures – the artist, Gustavus Sohon who traveled with Lieutenant John Mullan in his initial years capturing the western frontier through his paintings and sketches. Over his relatively short time spent in the West (roughly 10 years), he bore witness to and recorded some of the most significant and important events in the West.

We have moved the monthly board meeting to 6:00-6:30 p.m. before the 7 p.m. presentation at the museum. All members are welcome to attend to observe the meeting. Also, anyone interested in becoming more involved in the Posse is encouraged to attend.

During our last board meeting, it was decided to pause the effort to withdraw from Westerners International and not rename the NMPW. We will relook our options later this fall.

Once again to volunteer or if you have any questions, recommendations, or concerns, please get in touch with me at 406-871-6001 or [edwardjbyrne860@gmail.com](mailto:edwardjbyrne860@gmail.com).

## **NEW MEMBERS**

The following have recently joined the Posse:

Ilo and Rod Wendt, Kalispell  
Al and Charlene Chee, Rollins  
Paulette Lawrence, Kalispell

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## GENERAL MEETING INFORMATION

**NMPW 's** meetings are held on the third Monday of the month, except the months of December and January.

Sessions begin with a board and general membership meeting at 6 p.m., followed by a Greet 'n' Gab for a chance to get acquainted. Historical attire is encouraged, but not required.

Local history authors will have their books for sale, and will be available for signing.

The historic presentation starts at 7 p.m. and is free for members and youths 16 and under. Non-members pay \$5.

Historic books are raffled off as a fund raiser.

All meetings will be broadcast on-line via Zoom for out of the area members and the members who cannot attend the meetings.

Contact Kathy at [kbrittonrn@gmail.com](mailto:kbrittonrn@gmail.com) with any questions .

## FUTURE PROGRAMS

### ● September 18 :

“Fools Rush In: Johnny Grant and the Early Montana Cattle Industry ”  
by Lyndel Meikle

### ● October 16:

“Indian Trails of the Northern Rockies”  
by Darris Flanagan



## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

On Saturday, Sept. 23, the Conrad Mansion, Hockaday Museum of Art and Northwest Montana History Museum will offer a discounted admission of \$12 for adults and \$5 for age 12 and above for all three museums.

Hours for the triple event are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

## FROM YE EDITOR'S DESK

By Rick Hull

We recently had the opportunity to tour the former National Bison Range at Moiese now that it has been taken over by the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes.



The main road winds up Red Sleep Mountain.

The biggest change is at the visitor's center, where the displays cover both the impact of the loss of wild bison herds on the tribes, and the Flathead Reservation's up and down history.



The view from the top of Red Sleep Mountain.

The other change is the gates are open, and the bison are no longer divided into two herds that are confined to rotating pastures around the 18,800-acre preserve. The plan is to eventually remove the internal fencing.



As always, the bison range has as much scenery as wildlife. The main road takes you to the top of Red Sleep Mountain, and then down a winding road that seems impossibly steep. However passenger cars have no problem navigating the gravel road.



**Bison graze on a hillside next to the main road.**

We thought we were about to be skunked as when we neared the end of the 19-mile loop, only to run into a large herd lounging along both sides of the road. There are elk and bighorn sheep, and even mountain goats, but we didn't see any.

The cost is \$20 per car, and national park passes do not apply. Summer hours are from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m., with a 6 p.m. deadline to start the self-guided tour.

The Bison Range also still has its attractive picnic area along Mission Creek.



**A calf has a evening meal not far from its mother.**

## TRIVIA QUESTION OF THE MONTH



Last month's questions was about the mythical creature trapped in the Mission Mountains near Ronan. Look at this cropped photo of McDonald Peak. Do you see the sheep's head, with a white eye, the mouth outlined by the snowfield and a rock ear and shoulder.

Susan Foster pointed out that Mission Valley residents all know about the sheep's head.

The Flathead Indians have a legend about the sheep. According to a story preserved by the Montana Writers Project in 1943, there once was an old mountain sheep that loved tormenting the local animals.

If he saw fish heading up streams, he would divert the water. He would loosen rocks on mountain trails to cause deer, elk and goats to plunge to their death. He particularly disliked youngsters, and would ram trees to shake fledglings from their nest.

People were also his prey, and he would trigger avalanches to trap hunters and decimate berry fields before they could be picked.

All the people, animals, birds and fish gathered to decide what to do about Mountain Sheep. Old Man Coyote, who previous run ins with Mountain Sheep, had a plan. While Mountain Sheep slept on McDonald Peak, everyone would gather rocks and swiftly pile them on his back and shoulders.

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The weight of the rocks would trap Mountain Sheep where he laid. But his head would remain uncovered, as a sign the enemy was now pinned down and could no longer harm anyone.

### ***This Month's Trivia Question***

McCarthyville, located east of Essex, was one of the toughest towns in Montana.

But the Great Northern Railway construction camp has rivals for the title.

The Northern Pacific construction town near Thompson Falls had 10 lynchings, according to a national newspaper.

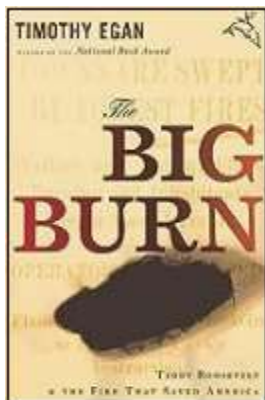
And eight bodies were found when the snow melted at the Millwauke Road construction town near St. Regis.

What were the names of these two other toughest towns?

Submit your answer to Ye Editor at [richardahull@charter.net](mailto:richardahull@charter.net) and we will print the names of all those who get it right.

### **FROM THE BOOK SHELF**

**By Rick Hull**



The *Big Burn* starts with a bang – the destruction of Wallace, Idaho by the 1910 fire. But then it swings back to explain the creation of the Forest Service, and the rise of the conservation movement. One hundred pages pass until the story of the catastrophic fire resumes.

The background is about the partnership between President Theodore Roosevelt and the Gifford Pinchot, the first head of the Forest Service, and the creation of the National Forests.

Most of the early National Forests were in western Montana and Idaho. The geographic names will be familiar – Bitterroot Mountains,

Missoula, even the North Fork of the Flathead. So will much of the controversy – the dispute between eastern bureaucrats and locals over who should control the forests. There are descriptions of other significant characters, including Ranger Ed Pulaski, whose heroism in saving his crew did not reap immediate fame or even pay his medical bills.

The summer of 1910 resembles our present summer. After a reasonably wet winter, the rains simply stopped. Soon the woods were a tinderbox, with fires breaking out everywhere. The role undertaken by the brand new Forest Service was to control the forests by controlling fire.

But the 1910 fire, as it exploded across the Bitterroot Range near Lookout Pass and present Interstate 90, was unstoppable. More than three million acres burned in two short days. Towns disappeared, some forever, and more than 85 people died.

Author Timothy Egan is an excellent writer. Here is his description of the blowup. “In pops and crack and snaps and gulps, in gasps and whistles, the fire metastasized – more clamorous with every fresh intake, charging ahead.”

There is plenty of local history here. If anything, the book is too localized. Egan tries to cover the impact and lesson of the 1910 fire on the Forest Service. In fact, the book is subtitled, “Teddy Roosevelt and the Fire That Saved America.”

But it doesn't look at other lessons that came from the destructive fire season, including timely disposal of logging slash.

Paperback, 324 pages. \$9.95-\$15.95

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# THE FORGED SIGNATURE

## The Flathead Chief who fought to stay in the Bitterroot Valley

By Rick Hull

It was a simple X, signifying Flathead Chief Charlo's agreement to leave the Bitterroot Valley. However it was a blatant forgery – the signature did not appear on the original document.

An up-and-coming U.S. Senator from Ohio, James Garfield, had added the signature to the official 1872 document on his own volition.

“I do this in the belief that when he sees the work going forward, he will conclude to come here with other chiefs and then keep the tribe unbroken,” Garfield acknowledged in his report. Then he rushed back to Washington D.C. to deny he had taken a bribe in a developing railroad scandal.

But he didn't know who he was dealing with.

“Your Great Father Garfield put my name to a paper which I never signed, and the renegade Nez Perce, Arlee is now drawing money to which he has no right,” Charlo declared.

When Garfield, newly elected as President, was assassinated in 1881, Charlo was still holding out. The dispute would continue for another 10 years and include Charlo journeying to Washington D.C. to make his appeal.

Finally Charlo's band of 342 ended up being forced out of their traditional home. But the betrayal had gone further, disrupting tribal leadership and leaving his people in poverty.



Charlo by E. S. Paxson

It was a provision of the Hellgate Treaty of 1855 that created the problem. The unresolved question was whether all the Flathead Tribe would be moved to the Jocko and Mission valleys, or if they could stay in the Bitterroot Valley near Stevensville.

According to Articles 9 and 11 of the treaty, the President of the United States would decide. The

Jocko reservation had its advantages – it wasn't as rocky as the Bitterroot, and it contained the mission at St. Ignatius and the Indian Agent's headquarters. But it wasn't the traditional home of the Flatheads. The Bitterroot had been their home for centuries, and it was where they had first greeted Lewis and Clark, and welcomed the first Jesuit missionaries. The issue remained hanging when Garfield arrived in 1872 as the official representative of President U.S. Grant. At a conference in Stevensville, Chiefs Arlee and Adolph agreed to move to the Jocko reservation. Not only would the two chiefs get the \$50,000 payment, but Arlee would be officially recognized as head of the tribe.

“This is an insult that no chief can forgive,” noted Flathead Indian Agent Peter Ronan.

Despite a personal appeal by Garfield, Charlo refused to sign. But when the agreement was published, there was an X after Charlo's name.



James Garfield

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Charlo, sometimes written as Charlot, and whose native name was “Little Claw of a Grizzly Bear”, had always been a friend of the whites.

When the Nez Perce started their retreat into Montana in 1877, after killing four settlers in Idaho, Charlo rode out to confront him. He refused to shake Chief Joseph's hand and warned against harming any settlers or their property.

Bitterroot Valley residents thanked Charlo with a celebration and feast. But Missoula residents responded by demanding military protection, resulting in construction of Fort Missoula.

In the 1855 Hellgate Treaty, the Flatheads had been granted a reservation that stretched from just north of Missoula to halfway up Flathead Lake, and encompassed 1.25 million acres. But that was chipped away.

First the Northern Pacific Railroad decided to run its main line through the reservation in 1882. The Flatheads asked for a million dollars in return, but that was rejected out of hand. The final deal was sweetened with a promise to exploring extending the reservation to the Canadian border, taking in the present Flathead and Lincoln counties.

Nothing came of the promise, and the tribe got only \$16,000, plus payments to individual tribal members whose property was crossed by the tracks. The reservation was soon invaded by railroad workers and the accompanying drinking, gambling and prostitution.

There were other lapses. There was never a survey of the Bitterroot Valley, as required by the treaty, and the Bitterroot Indians never got the school teacher, blacksmiths or carpenters as promised. And in 1883, the Bitterroot Valley was opened to homesteading.

That same year another Congressional delegation came to Montana and tried to persuade Charlo to move. Charlo refused, throwing down his hat in anger and stomping on it. “You may take Charlo to the reservation – but Charlo will have no breath in his nostrils. Charlo will be dead!”

In 1884 Charlo and a delegation took the fight to Washington D.C. The group called on Gustav Sohon, and met briefly with President Chester Arthur.

Secretary of Interior Henry Teller offered Charlo an annual pension of \$500, a house, and restoration to chief of the Flatheads if he moved. Charlo replied that he only wanted the Great Father's permission to live unmolested in the Bitterroot, the home of his father and the land of his ancestors.

But Charlo's description of the extreme poverty of his band resulted in the first delivery of treaty wagons loaded with food, plows and implements to the Bitterroot band.

Back in Montana, the Bureau of Indian Affairs offer 160 acres, a house, two cows, a wagon and plow, to families who would move to the Reservation. Twenty-one took up the offer. A census had counted 101 families remaining in the Bitterroot.

Finally in 1889, Charlo conceded. As the last of his band signed the papers to sell their Bitterroot



Sohon's drawing of the 1855 Hellgate Treaty council.

holdings, Charlo sat on the floor for a hour, smoking his pipe. Then he said, “I will go with big heart to the Jocko. I will sign.”

Stubborn to the end, he had several conditions. There would preservation of a two-acre Indian burial ground at Stevensville, his people would get food for the trip and cows when they arrived. But, most importantly, he would get the house and farm owned by his nemesis, Chief Arlee, who had since died.

In October, 1891, troops from Fort Missoula marched the last of the Bitterroot band through Missoula and to the Reservation.

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The next issue of Pony Tracks will be issued September 12, 2023 (or thereabouts)

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