



PONY TRACKS

Newsletter of the Northwest Montana Westerners

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ABOUT THE PRESENTATION

Many locals may be surprised to learn that two local Indians were lynched in the Flathead Valley in 1888.

And that the vigilante action was just the first round of murders and raids that ended in a mass hanging in Missoula.

Westerners member and former reporter Rick Hull will unravel this story at the August meeting.



Tombstone of the three murdered prospectors in Demersville Cemetery.

The chain of events began when a group of Kootenai men boasted about killing and robbing three prospectors east of Libby. The story was leaked to local officials, who raided an Indian camp near Demersville, a pioneer town located just south of present-day Kalispell.

Two of the alleged murderers were captured. After a short trial, the pair were hung from a cottonwood tree just across the river from the steamboat town.

Tales of possible revenge circulated and a posse attempted to intimidate the Kootenai at their home on the Flathead Reservation. But it went badly, starting with a posse member accidentally shooting his horse.

Trouble broke out again when the Kootenai

AUGUST MEETING

Monday, August 19, 2024

“The Demersville Lynchings”

Presenter: Rick Hull of Kalispell

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

Time: Gab 'n' Greet, raffle sales and book signings start at 6:00 p.m. Soft drinks, beer and wine available.

Historic Presentation: Program begins at 7:00 p.m.

No reservations are required, but seating will be limited; so come early. Call (406)-309-0938 with any questions.

chief's son was killed in Demersville, and there was a reverse invasion by the chief and tribal warriors demanding answers.

During the unrest, two companies of Black “Buffalo Soldiers” from Fort Missoula were brought in to police the valley.

Then, at a Fourth of July celebration that turned deadly, the murder of a lone traveler near Lakeside was exposed. The identity of the victim remained a mystery for months.

The climax came when the Missoula Sheriff organized a posse and forced the reservation chiefs to turn over the guilty parties. The hanging of four Indians in Missoula on Dec. 19, 1890 brought the saga to a bitter end.

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Though the lynching and killings have been mentioned in local history books, the full story remains largely untold.

Tapping a series of confusing and contradictory first-hand accounts, Rick has assembled a lively narrative of the actions and motives of those involved.



Pierre Paul, LaLa See, Pascale and Antley were hung December 19, 1890 in Missoula.

About the Presenter

Rick Hull is editor of the Westerner's local newsletter, the *Pony Tracks*. Born in Whitefish, he had a lifetime career on local newspapers, including the *Kalispell Weekly News* and *Daily Inter Lake*.

He also worked as a database programmer and a commercial real estate appraiser.

His fascination with local history was a foundation for newspaper features stories and now the articles tacked to the end of *Pony Tracks*. One of his earlier historical features was expanded into a story published in *True West* magazine.

He previously spoke on the history of Japanese immigrants in Northwest Montana at the February 2023 meeting of the Westerners.

FROM THE SADDLEBAG

By Edward "Eddy" Byrne



As we move through the last full month of Summer, the events and opportunities throughout the greater Flathead have been non-stop. Truly something for everyone's interests ranging from myriad music genres, to plays, art, outdoor activities that run the full spectrum of types and abilities. As a sign of the inevitable end of summer we are seeing the combines starting to harvest winter wheat and barley as well as hay fields being swathed, raked and baled for the last time (unless the fields are irrigated). Next will come the harvest of the spring wheat and canola.

This year our August meeting immediately follows the conclusion of the Northwest Montana Fair and Rodeo. Thankfully the residents of the Flathead and surrounding counties were able to enjoy the fair in its entirety after the drama of possibly loosing the grandstands for lack of maintenance and attention over the past years.

This year saw the return of the downtown Kalispell parade to kick off fair week on Friday, August 10 after a three-year hiatus. Kudos to the local United Way for sponsoring and spearheading the parade. It was a packed house with 90 minutes of floats, bands and vehicles passing down Main Street to spectators of all ages, albeit a heavy dose of children, who lined the sidewalks along the entire route.

On a side note, the Valley has been blessed with local organizations who have stepped up to organize and sponsor the various parades in downtown Kalispell given the lack of interest and support from the Kalispell Chamber of Commerce who disavowed the events years ago. A special thanks goes out to the Flathead Marines who have taken the lead for the 4th of July parade for the past couple years and once again complimenting the local United Way for stepping up for this year's Fair parade.

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On an all too familiar occurrence, I am sad to report the passing of another founding member of our group. That being Marge Rothfuss who passed away last month on the 15th. Marge and her husband Ed were stalwart supporters of the Northwest Montana Westerners and donated untold numbers of books to our monthly raffles. She will be missed and our thoughts and prayers go out to Ed and their entire family.

The Board meets from 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 with the group is encouraged to show up early and volunteer your time and services.

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

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

By Rick Hull

I had a “Biden” moment and messed up. I thought Jon Axline was the August speaker. However he informed me that I had actually put him down for September.

In the meantime I had scheduled Sally Thompson for in September. So we pushed his presentation on Montana Highway Tales back to October, and scrambled unsuccessfully for a replacement. As a bunt, my November talk on the Demersville Lynching was pushed into the slot.

This boils down to a cry for help. A new year is coming, and we need to start filling the 2025 schedule. Do you know someone who has written a book of local history, or volunteers with a local museum, or knows about an interesting topic?

Our criteria is simple – historical, and about Montana or the Northwest.

And is there a topic you don't think we have covered? Contact Ed or myself with suggestions.

The lynching of two Kootenai Indians in 1888 has been on my radar for years, and I saved a copy

of every document I ran across. A deadline meant it was time to distill it into something solid.

You learn best by teaching, and writing down the story has brought the chain of events in focus.

It is surprising how even eye witnesses could get timelines wrong and be mistaken about details. But overlaying the accounts has resulted in a coherent story.

Some firsthand accounts were exposed as fiction in the process.

I like to think that my background as a reporter gives me insight to how to sift out the real story from conflicting accounts. In many cases, different versions of the same event reflect people's different perceptions.



FUTURE PROGRAMS

- **Sept. 16:** “23 Unexpected Stories that Awaken Montana's Past” by Sally Thompson
- **Oct. 21:** “Montana Highway Tales – Curious Characters and Peculiar Attractions” by Jon Axline

GENERAL MEETING INFORMATION

Northwest Montana Westerners' meetings are held on the third Monday of the month, except the months of December and January, at the Northwest Montana History Museum at 124 Second Avenue East, Kalispell, Montana.

Meetings begin with a Gab 'n' Greet session from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. for a chance to get acquainted.

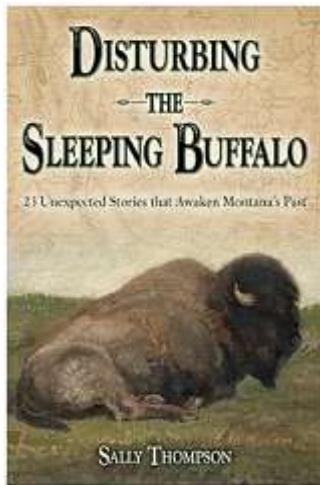
The presentation starts at 7 p.m. and is free for members and youths 16 and under. Non-members pay \$5.

Historic books are raffled off as a fund raiser. Soft drinks, beer and wine will be on sale by museum staff.

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FROM THE BOOK SHELF

By Rick Hull



For a preview of September's presentation, pick up speaker Sally Thompson's *Disturbing the Sleeping Buffalo*.

Subtitled “23 Unexpected Stories that Awaken Montana's Past,” it is a series of both unusual historical tales, and unusual substories about well-known tales.

It starts with the legend of a Yazoo Indian who may have traveled from the Mississippi Delta to the Pacific Ocean. Lewis & Clark carried a copy of the narrative. Some of the directions seem wrong – north instead of west – but the description of geography and tribes seem feasible.

More questionable is William Hamilton's trip with the Kootenais, that is full of battles that no one else of the time recalls.

Then she switches gears, and wonders if the Kootenai's mythology extends back 12,000 years to the Glacier Lake Missoula floods. And the “Sleeping Buffalo” is a rock dating to the Ice Age that local tribes considered sacred.

On twists on familiar topics, she writes of the “Moccasin Telegraph” that Native tradition says tracked Lewis & Clark. Then she looks at 57-year-old Father De Smet's journey up the Clark Fork River, and discovers a witness to a close call for Andrew Garcia, of *Tough Trip Through Paradise* fame.

Among other stories is the history of a Missoula city park and a 1,200-pound hybrid buffalo named Jumbo.

The series ends with her search for a unique hill in Lewis and Clark Pass, and her involvement in documenting the cultural significance of the Badger-Two Medicine area on the Blackfoot Reservation, with its controversial oil leases.

Since Dr. Thompson is an anthropologist instructor at the University of Montana, there might be some concern she would tip-toe around topics and dilute the tales with politically correct terminology. But other than an occasional “colonization,” her tone is straight forward.

Paperback, 298 pages. \$22.95

TRIVA QUESTION OF THE MONTH

The usual suspects, Scott Tanner and Barbara Boorman, both had the answer to last month's question about what happened to the *Swan*. The 30-foot sailboat was the first commercial boat to ply Flathead Lake in 1883. But it took two weeks for a trip between Polson and the Flathead River mouth.

The *Swan* was sold to Captain J.C. Kerry, and fitted with a steam engine. Rechristened the *U.S. Grant*, it became the first steamboat on the lake in 1885. During the winter of 1886 it was upgraded with a new power plant.

This Month's Trivia Question

The Kootenais spent much of their time on the water, including on their namesake lake Kootenay Lake (Canadian spelling) in British Columbia, and were known for their canoes.

This month's trivia question is: What was unique about their canoes?

Submit your answer to the editor at richardahull@charter.net and we will print the names of all those who get it right.

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FRANK LINDERMAN'S RUN IN WITH THE KOOTENAI AND CHIEF AENEAS

Kalispell author Frank Linderman (1869-1938) made a living writing about local Indians, including *Kootenai Why Stories* (1926). But he told an interviewer Jean P. Smith, "I do not hold Aeneas in high regard, for of all Indians I have known he was the only one with whom I had trouble,"

Linderman added. "Oh, he slapped my mouth once. That's Big Knife. He wanted me to leave the country. And by George, I did!"

Below is one of Linderman's versions of the encounter, as published in the 1923 Annual Kalispell Water Department Report.

I think it was in the spring of '88 that two of my horses disappeared from their winter range on Angel Point (then nearly bald and covered with luxuriant bunch grass). I felt sure that the Kootenais had stolen them. Saddling up, I took a pack mule and set out to find my stolen property.

I camped at Big Lodge, not far from the old reservation line. It was early in the evening, but I wanted my horse and mule to fill up before I tied them for the night. While they were grazing I cut



Frank Linderman

some kindling from a fat pitch stump, and after building my fire, saved a quantity of the pitch wood for morning. I cooked and ate some supper and then turned in.

I remember that rain fell shortly afterward, and that the night was very dark and still.

Somewhere near midnight I was awoken by the sound of horses traveling on the trail and sat up in my blankets to listen the better. In a moment more two riders stopped near the dying coals of my campfire and I stood up, tossing the sticks of fat pitch onto the coals.

"How how." said a voice.

Walking nearer, I made out two Kootenai



Chief Aeneas

horsemen. One was very tall and lean; the other older and stouter, and going close up to the nearest horse, I put my hand upon his neck to peer up at the face of his rider. The horse's mane had been roached (not an Indian custom) and instantly I became suspicious, since the mane of one of my missing horses had been roached earlier in the year. Just then the fat pitch which I had dropped upon the coals caught fire, and in the light of the blaze a glance proved that both the visitors' mounts were my property.

I took them, obliging the angry Indians to depart with their saddles on their own backs. After they were gone, I tied the recovered animals to the pine tree at the head of my bed with the horse and mule and, quenching my fire, lay down again. But I was worried and did not sleep.

At daybreak, as I expected, I had visitors again. This time Aeneas himself, with twenty Kootenais riding into camp, and I realized that it was up to me to be extremely careful how I conducted myself. I

backed up against the pine tree and waited developments.

I felt relief when after a few moments silence Aeneas spoke to me through the agency of a pock-marked half-blood, who I thought relished the transmission of the chief's message.

"You'll pack hup," he said, dismounting and stepping on my bed. "You'll pack hup an' you'll gain' 'way quick."

Offering no argument, although I was not on the reservation, and knew this, I had begun to pack up when one of the band, who had been handling my camp equipment as he pleased, and to start a row slapped my face with the flat of his hand.

I was young, and the insult brought my six-shooter from its holster in a jiffy. The Indian backed away, and surprised at the turn of affairs, several of his fellows cocked their rifles. I heard their locks; and for a moment there was a tableau there at Big Lodge.

I knew the game, if opened, could not be won by me, and with what grace I could muster, I thrust my gun back into its holster, tailed-up my outfit and rode away followed for miles by more than a dozen singing Kootenais, who wanted nothing more earnestly than an excuse to carry the quarrel farther and to a different conclusion.

—FRANK B. LINDERMAN

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month's issue. Copy received after that date will be held over until the subsequent issue.

The next edition of Pony Tracks will be issued September 11, 2024 (or thereabouts).

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