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MUSSELHELL VALLEY HISTORICAL MUSEUM ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

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Spring 2016

This year's theme is "Musselshell Valley Main Streets"

MUSSELHELL VALLEY MAIN STREETS

The towns along the Musselshell River Valley got their start when the Milwaukee Railroad (also call the CMSTP&P, which stands for Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific), chose this valley to lay their tracks. The railroad was required to set aside space for a town site and give the site a name every so many miles. Some of these sites have been reduced to no places of business at all and others have been drastically reduced in population and number of jobs.

ROUNDUP

Roundup's Main Street has undergone many changes since the town was formed many years ago. The tiny white St. Benedict's became the beautiful current Catholic Church; the Methodist Gym gave way to First Security Bank; two theaters were transformed into a dwelling and the Pioneer Café; Vicar's Drug is gone with a proposed Community Garden scheduled to take its place; the Grand Hotel burned and the Grand Bar grew on that spot. Across the street, the regal Palace Hotel was demolished to make way for Wells Fargo Bank; a once-upon-a-time Safeway Grocery store is now Shopko Pharmacy; and a filling station was turned into the present day liquor store. This is only a tiny sample of the many changes that have occurred.

Today Main Street is beautiful in summer with its stately trees and colorful flower tubs. Although we regret the many empty buildings, we take pride in the many individuals and organizations that so lovingly tend the area and keep it clean.

RYEGATE

Golden Valley County (of which Ryegate is the county seat) has a number of the old town sites: Harlowton, Shawmut and Barber to the west of Ryegate. Research shows that over the past 50 years (1965 – 2015), Ryegate has lost over 50% of the businesses that were present in 1965.

The town of Ryegate was at its largest in terms of population (405) back in 1920 when the first recorded census was taken and the county itself was established. The estimated census for 2014 was 243. This means that the town has experienced a 40% drop from the original census figure of 405. Ryegate lost the services of its only bank back in the early fall of 2015. The bank branch had been there since 1998. Back in 1965, Ryegate had at least four gas stations. There was quite a long period of time when the people living there had no gas station at all. Now there is one gas station and it is part of the only “miniature grocery store” that is in town.

LAVINA

Lavina and Ryegate are the only incorporated town sites in Golden Valley County (which is one of the smallest counties in the state). Lavina has also experienced a 50% loss of the businesses that were operating back in 1965.

The first train arrived at the depot in Lavina on February 16, 1908. The town became known as the “White City” because of such lavish use of white paint. The town’s Main Street consisted of a mercantile, bank, meat market, blacksmith, lumber company, drug store, two hotels, jewelry, saloon, restaurant, grocery store, and many more.

Lavina has two buildings that are on the National Register of Historic Places. The first to be added (in December of 2000) is the Slayton Mercantile building at 23 Main Street. There is now a grocery store in this building, the only one in town.

The second building to be added to the register (in December of 2005) is the Adams Hotel at 1 Main Street. The Adams Hotel was originally a 22-room establishment. It has been rented and used for a variety of purposes since it stopped being the “Adams Hotel”--everything from a church to a family residence. The current owners are slowly restoring this grand old building to what it was originally built for.

MUSSELSHELL

Along the scenic Musselshell River near Highway 12 is the town of Musselshell. This community was originally called "The Crossing." It was one of the first Musselshell River crossings to appear after a trail opened from Fort Custer to Fort Maginnis in 1882. In 1885, Fred Handel and George Ives bought out the stage stop at the Crossing and later built a stone store. In 1889, Fred's brother, George came into partnership with Fred after the death of Ives in an accident. A post office was started in 1883 and the last freight wagon ran in 1908 when the railroad was built. In 1920 the population was 500.

A newspaper, the *Musselshell Advocate*, was printed from 1909 to 1923. There were a number of businesses, such as a bank, blacksmith, drug store, lumber yards, pickle factory, to name just a few. There were also three churches, Methodist, Congregational and Catholic. In 1913 a two-story brick school was built with an addition built in 1919. The first graduation class was in 1923 and the last in 1968. The school now serves as a community center.

MELSTONE

The "Big Bend" of the Musselshell began to be settled in the early 1880s. Melstone became a city in 1908 when the railroad came through the area. It was named for a Milwaukee executive Melvin Stone. Melstone boasted a thriving Main Street and at one time had four hotels. There was also a round house, coal dock and water tower to service steam engines as it was a division point on the Milwaukee. It also had a large bunkhouse for railroad employees to stay in.

From 1908 to 1919, Melstone thrived on the homestead boom, which brought in hundreds of settlers to live on 320 acre homesteads. After this Melstone began a slow decline due to harsh weather conditions and the price of wheat falling from \$4.65 to 50 cents a bushel. Many people drifted away.

In the 1950s Melstone was revived by the oil boom. Between the late '50s and early '80s, there were close to 700 producing oil wells in the area.

The railroad left the town in the late 1970s and the tracks were pulled up in 1980. Today Melstone survives on cattle, grain, oil and hunting.

Writers contributing to the forgoing articles are Pat Berry, Shirley Parrott, Rhea Eickoff, Ralph Knapp, and Phyllis Adolph.

MUSEUM BOARD OFFICERS

Edith Sloan, President
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ANNUAL MEETING TO BE HELD ON MARCH 13

The annual meeting of the museum board will be held on Sunday, March 13 at 2:00 p.m. in the museum basement. At this time election of officers and board members will be held. This meeting is open to the public as are all board meetings. Regular meetings are held the second Sunday of each month at 2:00 p.m. in the museum basement.

The museum is open each year from May through September for 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. each day of the week.

Membership dues are due and payable on February 15 every year. Certificates of membership are issued on a yearly basis for \$20 for the first year and \$10 each year following. A lifetime membership may be purchased for \$150 and business lifetime memberships are \$200.

You are most cordially invited to become a member of the museum and be a supportive member of our community.



NEW COAL MINE EXHIBIT COMING SOON

A new coal mine exhibit is being planned for the museum. This exhibit will examine the major coal mines and the communities they nurtured in this county during the early 20th century. This area has a rich bed of high carbon, low sulphur coal relatively close to the surface and it came in high demand as the steam engines of the railroad roared through Roundup. Eight major coal mines will be featured in an extensive display along with miners and many other related topics. You don't want to miss this!



This buggy was donated to the Museum by the Newton family. Relatives tell us that Marion Newton, J.W. Newton's wife, didn't like to ride horseback, so she went everywhere in this horse-drawn buggy. Can't you just imagine this fancy rig, pulled by a spirited horse, trotting down Roundup's Main Street?

Three small rooms have been built along the wall in the Art Room. They house cattle drive memorabilia, an early-day barber shop, and a farm room containing farm related items.

Photos courtesy of Joe Parrott



The "Western Room" in the outdoor complex is also new. Come and see what treasures it holds! Also don't forget to watch for the opening of the "New Coal Exhibit."

Coming Events...

The museum will open on Saturday, May 7 with the annual pancake breakfast to be served the following day, Mother's Day, May 8.

There will be no school art show in the art room this year. In keeping with our theme, "Musselshell Valley Main Streets," the walls will hold photos of the various towns and related subjects.

The Yard Sale will be held on Saturday, June 11. Be sure to clean your closets, basement and attic for unwanted items to donate.

The museum will close on October 1.

As soon as the new coal exhibit is in place, the museum hopes to have a grand opening for that display. We hope to have a chuck wagon lunch with various demonstrations throughout the day. Be sure to watch for announcements for this upcoming event on the local radio station and in the newspapers.

Did you know...

- *that the Musselshell Valley Historical Museum accepts no tax money?
- *that it is very expensive to maintain the museum building? (One especially cold month the treasurer paid a \$1,000 fuel bill)
- *that Roundup once had a piano store that sold nothing but pianos?
- *that Vicar's Drug once had a heated stand that kept nuts warm for snacking?
- *that the museum has a scale that will tell your weight for a penny? (Years ago it was in one of our drug stores and came in very handy in the days when not every bathroom had a scale!)
- *that there were at one time three drug stores in town? (Vicar's, Blair's and Grave's)
- *that a thriving shoe repair business was located on Main Street?
- *that the museum has on display two pieces of furniture (with marble tops) that were actually used by Lowther and Clifton at the NF Ranch?
- *that the museum does not charge admission, but cheerfully accepts donations?

IN MEMORY OF SALLY BENES

Sally Benes passed away on November 10, 2015. She and her husband, Ted, were longtime members of the museum board. She will most certainly be missed.

Thank You

As usual, we wish to thank everyone who helps to make the museum the wonderful success that it is. Thanks to those who visit the museum, those who guide, those who give donations and memorial contributions. Thanks to RSVP for coordinating and scheduling the guides. The museum board is thankful for each one of you, whatever your contribution!



Musselshell Valley Historical Museum Membership/Donation Form

Please return the completed form to Musselshell Valley Historical Museum,
524 First Street West, Roundup, MT 59072

Name _____

Address _____

Phone # _____

Please check one Individual Membership Business Membership or
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 Donation

Check enclosed (payable to Musselshell Valley Historical Museum)

\$ _____

Memberships are: **Individual:**

Yearly: \$20 first year, \$10 each year following

Lifetime: \$150 one time fee

Business: \$200 one time fee