



Bonner Milltown History Center & Museum

Keeping our local area and timber heritage alive for the enjoyment and education of the public

December, 2025

Rooted in history...

Growing for the future

Rooted in history

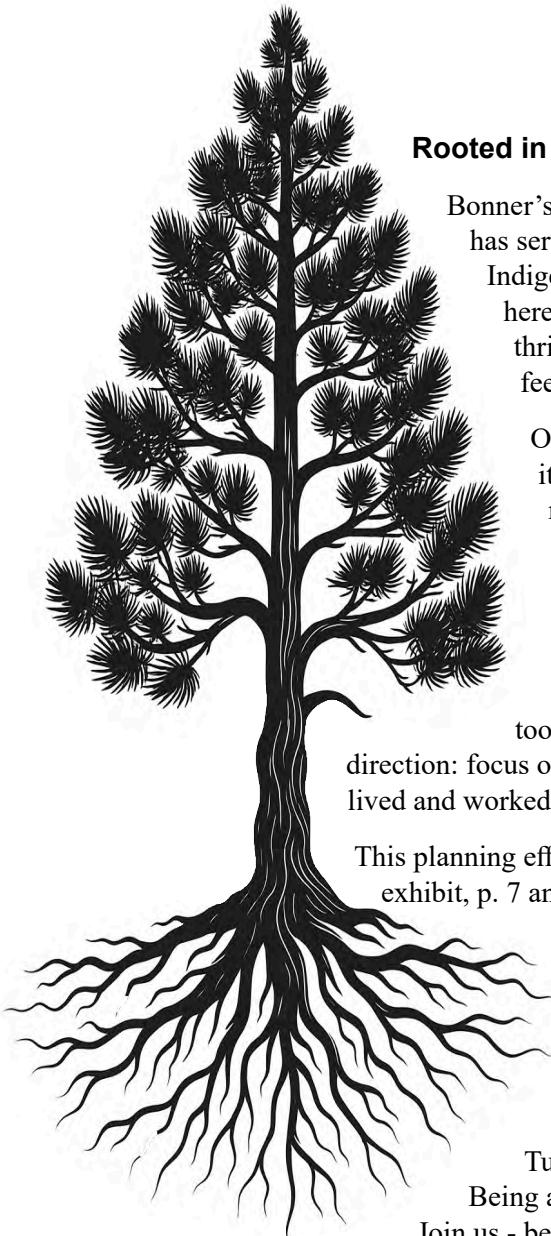
Bonner's landscape shaped its story. At the confluence of two major rivers, the area has served as a natural travel corridor for fish, wildlife, and people—first Indigenous communities, and later the workers and families who built their lives here. For more than a century, the rivers and surrounding forests supported a thriving timber-based community that still influences how Bonner looks and feels today.

Other places share a timber history, but Bonner really is unique. What makes it so distinctive? And how can we connect its past to the lives we live here now?

Growing for the future

To explore those questions, BMHC launched an interpretive planning process in 2024. Guided by Lisa Bickell of Field to Frame Interpretive Planning and funded by a Preserving Missoula County's History grant, we took a close look at our collections and resources. Stakeholders gave us clear direction: focus on what makes Bonner special, and elevate the stories of the people who lived and worked here—including Indigenous voices.

This planning effort has already produced two new exhibits ready for visitors (see railroad exhibit, p. 7 and safe exhibit, p. 6).



We're excited about what's ahead: An engaging lineup of 2026 Roundtables (see p. 2). The railroad exhibit's official opening. Bonner first graders experiencing history first-hand and sixth graders strengthening their sense of connection by improving the native plant garden we all enjoy. We'll hike and stroll through the landscape, remembering the past and creating new stories along the way. And on Tuesdays and Fridays we'll meet to swap stories with old friends and new.

Being a tiny museum doesn't limit us - it inspires us to imagine what's possible. Join us - be a part of our story! -Judy Matson



Roundtables - the 2026 season...

January 18: "Salish Trails to the Bison and Beyond" Tim Ryan

We're privileged to announce that our speaker for the first BMHC History Roundtable of 2026 will be Tim Ryan, an artist, archaeologist and professor at Salish Kootenai College. On Sunday, Jan. 18, he'll present "Salish Trails to the Bison and Beyond," stories of the seasonal rounds and material culture of the Salish, how they thrived beyond survival, and the success of the tribe in contemporary times.

An entertaining and highly respected enrolled member of the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribe, Ryan has a deep background in his tribe's relationship to the landscapes of Montana such as Naayc̓stm, "Place of Big Bull Trout," at the junction of the Clark Fork and Blackfoot rivers. He'll tap a vein different from any we've heard in the previous 16 years of Bonner Milltown History Center roundtables.

Mark the date: Sunday, Jan. 18, at 1 p.m. at the Bonner KettleHouse taproom, 605 Cold Smoke Ave., Bonner MT.



Tim Ryan

February 15: A new generation discovers A River Runs Through It



2026 is the 50th anniversary of the publication of Norman Maclean's book *A River Runs Through It*. Building on last year's successful *Timberjack* project, this class of Bonner sixth graders will explore Bonner history against the background of Norman Maclean's classic story. The project's conclusion will include a public display of the students' work, BMHC exhibits featuring the time frame of the book, and the movie.

Mark the date: Sunday, Feb. 15, at 1 p.m. at the Bonner School gym, 9045 Hwy 200 E, Bonner

March 15: "Living with wildlife - a historic perspective" Jamie Jonkel and panel



Wild game, fish, and birds played an integral part in the lives of early Bonner residents. We'll explore our past and present relationships with our wild neighbors with a panel of biologists from Fish, Wildlife and Parks led by Bear Manager Jamie Jonkel. After the program, enjoy the St. Ann "Better than Butte" pasty dinner.

Sunday, March 15, at 1 p.m. at St. Ann Catholic Church, 9015 Hwy 200 E, Bonner

Our volunteers make a difference: “Every person can make a difference, and every person should try.” – President John F. Kennedy

Joe



Your donations are important to us

BMHC supporters love preserving and experiencing our local history. However, no volunteer loves number-crunching to the point that we can maintain a membership data base. The good news is that makes **everyone** a partner in BMHC! Please join in on our programs and activities - and please join us in financially supporting BMHC!

It's easy:

1. Drop cash in the donation box at the Center
2. Mail a check or cash donation in the enclosed envelope
3. Make a donation via our Givebutter account. It's free to BMHC to use this service and you can choose whether or not to add the credit card administration fee to your donation. If you don't, Givebutter makes up the difference and we receive the total amount of your donation.



Our intern Joe Smiley is a UM student in Museum Studies and Public History. He has helped bring our PastPerfect collections database up to date and is preparing a how-to sheet on taking photos of our artifacts and adding them to PastPerfect. He has composed an Outreach list and is currently working on putting metadata with our photos.

You may have met Joe at the opening of our exhibit “A Safe with Many Secrets.” He assisted with set-up and take-down of equipment, greeted guests, and was a raffle ticket seller extraordinaire!

IMMEDIATE OPENING

Volunteers to greet visitors;
catalog photos &
transcribe recordings

If interested, please email
bonnermilltownhistorycenter@gmail.com
or call 406-370-5929 for details

Joyce



If you've attended any BMHC event during the past several years, no doubt you've met Joyce Morgan. Joyce is the History Center host each Wednesday morning from 10 a.m. until noon. When she's not working on a project, she's making sure the center is clean and welcoming to visitors.

Joyce is always on hand to greet event guests and to serve as a mentor for Bonner School students. Thank you, Joyce!!

Making certain it goes on...

Richard Hugo's poem "Making Certain It Goes On" first appeared in the American Poetry Review in October 1982. It later inspired our March, 2018 Roundtable, "Making Certain It Goes On: Prose & Poetry of Bonner & the Lower Blackfoot." Today, Making Certain It Goes On has become the Bonner Milltown History Center's unstated passion—to preserve and share Bonner's rich history for generations to come.

*In this dreamy summer air you and I
dreamily plan a statue commemorating
the unknown fisherman. The stone will bear
no inscription and that deliberate anonymity
will start enough rumors to keep
the mill operating, big trout nosing the surface,
the church reforming white frame
into handsome blue stone, and this community
going strong another hundred years.*

The final lines of "Making Certain It Goes On"

Next Gen History

First graders take a walk through time — and run the bases too!

By Kim Briggeman

It was back in 2018 when Kristin Vogel's first graders at Bonner School first took a "Then and Now" history walk through Bonner with BMHC volunteers. Those students are in high school now.

The 2025 walkers on May 27 were some of our favorites for their enthusiasm and, we hope, the fun they had. We started in Ms. Vogel's classroom, where Robyn Heyer, a retired elementary school teacher, read a Dick and Jane book and shared her memories of first grade at Bonner. The class broke into three groups and Linda Briggeman, also a retired elementary school teacher, tutored them on the intricacies of marbles on the bus porch. Kim Briggeman staged them on the (imaginary) front steps of the old two-story Bonner schoolhouse (1907-1958) for group photos.

Then it was on to Kelly Pine Field where Gary Matson and Rich Hamma gave each group a quick lesson on Bonner baseball history and a chance to hit off a tee and run the bases. Down on the boulevard a

hard-hatted Andy Lukes, with the help of Dick Anthony, displayed the tools of a woodsman, then and now.

At the history center these first-graders became the first to enjoy the new native garden under the guidance of Judy Matson. Dennis Sain taught them a thing or two about the railroad switch stand that would anchor our railroad exhibit. Then it was inside the history center, where Tony Liane, Joyce Morgan and Gregg Bauer turned 'em loose to explore the room and learn the mysteries of an old-fashioned dial telephone, connected just for the occasion.

For the second year, the day wound up with a picnic and games at Margaret Hotel Park across from the post office. The students got to take home some shooters and cat-eyes from their marble experiences. Many thanks to Ms. Vogel, the parent and BMHC volunteers, Bonner School and Mike Heisey for helping make the day go down in history in the minds of another class of first graders.



Reading stories in the classroom and baseball transcend time. A dial telephone - not so much.

Putting down roots

BMHC welcomes Bonner sixth graders to the history center several times each year. These visits are far more than standard field trips—they're chances for students to experience the past firsthand and strengthen their own roots in Bonner.

"Having traveled around this state and seeing what different communities have to offer their students in terms of local history, I feel so grateful to be teaching at a school like Bonner, where there are strong community partnerships that allow our students to feel a sense of contribution to their place. You can't branch out if you aren't connected to your roots! The BMHC always helps us aspire to that idea, and in the case of the Native Plant Garden, quite literally!" -Dylan Huisken, 2019 Montana Teacher of the Year



Students, mentors, and sponsors celebrate the garden.



Heidi West

In April the 2024-25 6th graders, mentors, and sponsors gathered to celebrate the success of the native plant garden they helped establish the previous October. Heidi West, Missoula County representative, expressed gratitude for the new public space. In a teachable moment, Dylan Huisken pointed out to his students that Heidi is a real public servant that they learn about in class.



The 2025-26 class recorded observations about the plants. Later that fall, they returned to add more plantings.

"When we walked into the museum to learn about native plants, everyone was really friendly. I loved how organized the volunteers were and now I am looking forward to coming back in the spring to check on how our plants are doing." -Easton

"I liked learning about Bonner's place in history. It was awesome to hold and see artifacts from our community to bring history more alive." -Daniel



Dylan Huisken distributes data forms to his budding historians. The students described the objects on display and developed ideas about their function.

What are these?

Students made prints in art class and deduced that the objects on the left are tools used for printing. Correct! The ring on top is a lumber end stamp and the plate is a stamp used in the box factory to label wooden tomato boxes.

Identifying the cobbler's stand in the middle picture was more challenging. While it clearly related to feet, the idea of resoling leather shoes and handing them down within a family was new to many students.

Students pose with their favorite artifacts. Be sure to attend the February Roundtable to see the Bonner history projects they will create in January/February and to share your stories with the students. (see p. 2)



Stories transcend borders, cultures, and time

Telling Our Stories

New exhibits engage viewers at the Bonner KettleHouse taproom and on the north side of the Bonner Milltown History Center.

"A Safe With Many Secrets"

By Robyn Heyer

After the mill closed in 2008, former Stimson executive Jeff Webber rescued the 2700-pound antique Hall's safe from an uncertain fate.

Our research suggests the safe was built in the 1880s in Ohio and made its way to Nebraska, Livingston, MT and then Butte where it was in use until 1911. There is a 50-year gap in its known history from 1911 to the 1960s. The safe was in the mill "White House" office from the early 60s until after the last mill closed in 2008. We do not know how or when it came to be in the Anaconda Copper Mining Company's possession in Bonner. Therein lies the mystery!

Webber transported the safe to Oregon where he had it restored, revealing the original ornate paintings on the interior and exterior of the safe. In February 2025, Jeff returned the safe to Bonner and donated it to the museum. Through a collaborative effort between the mill owners, BMHC, Webber, and

Kettlehouse owner Tim O'Leary, the safe has found a new home at the Taproom.

On October 12, the new safe exhibit was officially unveiled to a crowd of about 80 people. Many former employees, who hadn't seen each other since the mill closed, enjoyed a mini-reunion and shared their stories and memories of the safe.

As an emotional Jeff Webber stated during the exhibit opening celebration...."*I'm so happy to see the community has stuck together after the mill's closing.*"

Please take a nice drive, stop in at the KettleHouse, and enjoy a beverage as you check out our community's history. Feel free to share any stories or knowledge of the safe's history with us. Perhaps we can fill in the missing timeline and solve the mystery!

You can share your stories or ideas about the safe's history at bonnermilltownhistorycenter@gmail.com



January, 2025. The safe arrives in Bonner.



Lisa Bickell of Field to Frame guided the interpretive project. Nick Wethington of MechaNickal Wonders designed and built the exhibit frame, custom built from 2x4s stamped "Champion."



Jeff Webber recalls the incredible journey of the safe from its rescue in Bonner, to Portland, to Bend, to The Dalles, to Bend, and, finally back home to Bonner.



Many of the office staff hadn't seen each other for 30 years. Rich Voorhees, and Mary Ann Buckhouse, reconnect.



Representatives from BMHC, Bonner Property Development, and KettleHouse celebrate the signing of the exhibit agreement with a toast of Coldsmoke Ale. Pictured left to right are Gary Matson, Tony Liane, Joyce Morgan, Judy Matson, Mike Heisey, Tim O'Leary, Kim Briggeman, and Robyn Heyer.

When railroads came to Bonner

By Kim Briggeman and Dennis Sain

In November, the installation of interpretive signs completed BMHC's newest outdoor exhibit, The Railroads of Bonner.

A 9-foot replica of the Milwaukee's Bonner Junction sign mounted high on the side of the building presides over the display. The original sign, donated by Bill and Jan Taylor a few years ago, rests safely inside.

Two large panels set the stage. The first is titled "When Railroads Came to Bonner" and includes a map of the various rail routes through the area. The second focuses on the Anaconda Company's No. 7 steam locomotive that was featured in the 1955 movie *Timberjack*. Smaller interpretive signs explain Bonner Junction, the switch stand donated by Dennis Sain, and a pair of rails manufactured by a Chicago steel works factory in 1893 for the Great Northern Railroad that were donated by Peter Nielsen.

The artifacts and five interpretive signs are hemmed against the side of the building by the original railroad ties that supported rails that

transported logs into the mill site on a spur from the Milwaukee trestle on the north end of town. A Milwaukee Road switch stand used to direct trains either into the mill site or on across the Blackfoot River on the Big Blackfoot Railroad branch anchors the display.

Stop by any time to see both of our outside exhibits - the native garden and the railroad display - and watch for the public opening of the railroad display in spring, 2026.

The exhibit was made possible by a grant from the Garnet Preservation Association License Plate Fund, with additional support from Missoula County and Friends of Two Rivers. Lisa Bickell of Field to Frame led the interpretive team, which included BMHC members and railroad history experts. Dennis Sain, MechaNickal Wonders, Murt Works, and DM Carpentry provided the hands-on skill that brought the project to life, installing this tribute to Bonner's little-known railroad history.



The Milwaukee Rail Switch, that is now at the BMHC, is a reminder of past railroad activity. It was originally located at the south end of the Bonner Railroad Bridge, on the Blackfoot Branch, called the Big Blackfoot Railroad, that became the Milwaukee Railroad. This tall metal switch controlled rail traffic from two tracks across Highway 200, to one track across the Blackfoot River.



Dennis Sain introduces the switch to a first grader.



The evolution of an exhibit. The vision started with a generous grant from the Garnet Preservation Assn. An unadorned site transformed by Dennis Sain's Kubota work made the exhibit seem possible. Kim Briggeman accepted the challenge of researching the history. Hours of coaching by Lisa Bickell resulted in interpretive signs! Know-how provided by Nick Wethington, Marty Lamb, and Dillian Mathys brought it to life. Success!

Story Strolls and History Hikes provide place-based perspectives on area history

By Kim Briggeman

BMHC adapted its second summer of Story Strolls to better fit its core audience. Instead of eight weekly strolls, we hosted four every other week from late June through early August. Walk distances were shortened in favor of more focused talks, and we formalized monthly—or nearly monthly—History Hikes for those who preferred longer outings. Many thanks to all who joined us, and to our partners: Jim Howard and the Bonner School staff, Greg Morse of Blackfoot Crossing LLC, and Mike Heisey of Bonner Property Development, all of whom generously provided premium access to key sites.

Story Strolls

Bonner School, June 25 (14 participants):

Junior high teacher Dylan Huisken joined Kim Briggeman for stories beginning at the front gazebo and continuing through the school, the gym, and the site of the old—and now updated—playground. Annie Bahm of the Bonner PTA shared plans to replace the 1950s-era playground equipment, a project completed in the fall.

Milltown at the Black Bridge, July 9 (30 participants):

Our best-attended and most emotional stroll was a tribute to Mike Nelson, lifelong area resident who passed away in September 2024. On the breezy bridge, family and friends—including his wife, Linda—shared stories and memories. Some attendees continued up Anaconda Street to reflect on former homes and businesses.

Bandmann Flats / Milltown State Park Overlook, July 23 (18 participants):

Dusty Deschamps, lifelong Marshall Grade resident and recently retired district judge, joined the group. His father, Bob, once leased all of Bandmann Flats for hay and pasture. At the overlook we shared refreshments, and Mike Kustudia reflected on the removal of Milltown Dam and the restoration and redevelopment of the Blackfoot–Clark Fork confluence.

Hotel Margaret Park and the Bonner Homes, Aug. 6 (22 participants):

Participants gathered near the former site of the Gay 90s-era hotel to share stories of life in the Bonner company town. BMHC storyteller Glenn Max “Hooligan” Smith held court, and others strolled past the historic homes—including former residents Dale Jacobson and Richard Hamma, who offered their recollections, and newer owners who shared updates.

History Hikes

A mix of Story Strollers and new faces joined the season's longer History Hikes, led or co-led by Kim Briggeman. The first, on July 5, coincided closely with the 1806 date when Meriwether Lewis and his party followed the Road to the Buffalo along an ancient Indigenous trail.

On Aug. 22, hikers retraced part of the same route farther up the river along the old Blackfoot Railroad grade to a mysterious 50-foot-deep cave, mine shaft, or explosives cache.

Two October hikes, on the 19th and 25th, explored Marco Flats and the former picnic grounds and Boy Scout camp between the First and Second Red Bridge sites, drawing a combined 29 people.

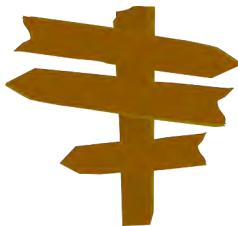
Our final hike at press time, and the longest, was a rainy four-mile outing on Nov. 16. Guided by former Milltown State Park manager Mike Kustudia, the group that started with 21 people hiked from the Bandmann Flats lot across the summit and down through the restored floodplain—decades after the removal of the Milwaukee Road's “Duck Bridge” and 17½ years after the March 28, 2008, breaching of Milltown Dam.



History hikes and story strolls lead to new perspectives



Special groups get together on Tuesdays and Fridays



On the road with the Roadies

Old Roads and Rabbit Holes - there's always something new

By Tony Liane

The Roadies are alive and well, meeting at the Bonner/Milltown History Center on Fridays from 10 a.m. until we get tired of talking and digging. Attendance ranges from 5 or 6 history buffs to standing room only! We continue to follow old trails, roads and railroad tracks - studying maps, reading passages from historical books and trying to determine where old photos were taken. There's always some new Rabbit Hole to crawl down.

Each summer and fall we try to take some field trips to historical sites or points of interest to the group. This year we traveled to Arrastra Creek to look for, would you believe, an arrastra, a mining apparatus used to crush ore.

A trip was taken to Stevensville to visit Fort Owen and the museum at St. Mary's Chapel. A whole group

of us took a trip to Primm's Meadow to look at the stand of old growth yellow pine and learn more about early homestead days.

A trip to Avery, ID followed old railroad grades through hand dug tunnels and over old trestles to learn how the railroads helped build the West.

Our final trip was to the Holt Heritage Museum in Lolo. The group enjoyed looking at the vast collection of items of both historic and cultural nature. We're look forward to more field trips in the coming year.

We always welcome visitors and new history buffs who can add to our knowledge of local history or have a new rabbit hole to go down.



Whether in the friendly confines of the history center, in the field checking out peel trees, or visiting a museum in Ovando, the Roadies are always discovering new old history.



Just a reminder that every Tuesday morning from 9 till noon the Bonner Milltown History Center, next to the Bonner Post Office, hosts an informal coffee session for the Bonner community and visitors. Usually 4 to 8 Bonner community members drop by to share their knowledge of the Bonner area, its history or current events and to enjoy each others company. Come for ten minutes or stay for three hours. Coffee and other treats are provided by the weekly volunteer host.

The coffee is a great chance to experience "Old time Bonner Hospitality" and the "Best free cup of Coffee in Bonner."

Come and enjoy Bonner hospitality!

Roundtables, BMHC's time-honored tradition

Community conversations

Since 2009, each winter two or three programs are presented

January: *Timberjack* - then and now

By Cheryl Hughes

From September of 2024 through January 2025, the Bonner Milltown History Center (BMHC) partnered with teacher Dylan Huisken and his sixth-grade students at Bonner School to explore the changing identity of the timber industry in western Montana. The project examined both the historical experiences of timber workers and the ways the industry and their community have evolved.

A central focus of the project was the 1955 Hollywood film *Timberjack*, starring Sterling Hayden and filmed in the Bonner and Blackfoot River region. The movie portrays the conflicts, dangers, and rugged life of timber workers and logging bosses, capturing the economic realities and aspirations of the mid-20th-century timber world. Because the film was shot locally, it became a powerful tool for students and community members to analyze how their own history had been represented, interpreted, and remembered on screen.

Many members of BMHC, together with Mr. Huisken, Kali Zaglauer, and Cheryl Hughes, supervised the study. They combined the study of the film with oral history interviews conducted with BMHC members, historical documents, local archives, and Library of Congress primary sources to help instruct the students.

Students used materials and background to connect Hollywood storytelling with real lived community experience, gaining perspective on both what has changed and what remains central to Montana's timber heritage. With this background, they designed tri-fold display boards that addressed their choice of subject research related to Bonner and its

cultural, labor, and social history.

The entire project was developed and funded through the National Council for History Education's Rural Experience in America initiative, which supports place-based public history efforts that empower students and community members to research and interpret their own past. The project's goal included fostering shared learning and celebrating Bonner's timber history, honoring the workers and families whose labor shaped the region.



*Their learning goal was achieved on January 19, 2025, when students hosted a community celebration showcasing their research and capstone projects, followed by a public screening of the 1955 film *Timberjack*.*

A 25-minute podcast episode documents the project, presenting both historical context and contemporary community meaning—illustrating the enduring legacy of the timber industry and the people who built and sustained the Bonner. You can access this podcast at <https://open.spotify.com/episode/4RFBIuICPQfqmorl2T7OAB>

February: "Unlikely Suspects, Bucking Beasts, and Other Unexpected Clark Fork Stories," Sally Thompson

By Minie Smith

"The past still lingers along old trails and among the people who live here today..." back cover of *Disturbing the Sleeping Buffalo*

The second of the Bonner Milltown History Center's annual series of Roundtables focused on indigenous involvement on the Upper Clark Fork River. Sally Thompson, author of the recently published *Disturbing the Sleeping Buffalo* offers a fresh view on this topic, the result of her years of anthropological research on the early days of the area that eventually became Montana. Sally worked with the tribal committee that was chosen to add Native perspective of the effects on tribal lands of the smelter and mining operations in Butte.

She noted that their memories were "amazing," as often the lands were now unrecognizable from the impacts on them. She herself got a new perspective, being forced to slow down instead of zooming through at 70 MPH. Now she took back roads to explore the area with them. She offered the idea that there were indeed tribal peoples around the edge of Glacial Lake Missoula, and this is now a more accepted concept. Oral histories of these folks or their descendants were essential to the understanding of the tribal role, as they had deep connections to the land. Interviews with homestead families were also essential, as they tended to retain memories of the past. A good portion of the talk was devoted to Father DeSmet and his perceptions of Native involvement.

Up to the 19th century there were Salish people coming up the Clark Fork River. Fishing was important, especially as food shortages became widespread. Sally feels that many Salish were particularly affected by the Interstate, and it created a changed perception of the river, from a source of food (fish) to only speed. She also mentioned a change in the Salish memory of peeling Bitterroots which was done by the women who enjoyed the social aspect, something not possible after Interstate was built.

Sometimes Sally had to piece together information from several sources to get a whole picture. For example, Dale Karkanan and several others remembered a buffalo cart. In the 1930s whole cattle industry experimenting with finding a new breed that could cope with the severe

March: "Removing the Milltown Dam and Restoring the Clark Fork River," Expert Panel

By Gary Matson

On March 16, 2025 BMHC sponsored its 42nd community roundtable, "Removing the Milltown Dam and Restoring the Clark Fork River." Panelists were Peter Nielsen, retired supervisor of the Missoula Valley Water Quality District; Diana Hammer, retired Community Involvement Coordinator for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); Doug Martin, Administrator of the Montana Natural Resource Damage Program (NRDP); and Mike Kustudia, retired Milltown State Park manager. They talked about the "3Rs" of the Milltown Superfund cleanup: Remediation, Restoration, and Redevelopment.

Peter recounted the history of the Milltown site, including how the toxic wastes from the Butte mines got deposited in the Milltown Dam reservoir during the 1908 flood. Local water contamination was discovered in Milltown during routine water quality checks in 1981. The area was designated as a Superfund site in 1982. Peter's river sampling during a 1997 ice scouring event was instrumental in demonstrating the critical need for dam removal as a key element of the site clean-up.

Diana took her turn next at the Roundtable and described EPA's remedial actions, the first of the 3Rs. EPA's remediation goals were to



How did this

This Roundtable explored the "why" and "how" of the Superfund cleanup of the Milltown Reservoir, the removal of the Milltown Dam, and the effects the projects had on the river and the area. This and all Roundtable programs are available to view under "Roundtables" at www.bonnermilltownhistory.org

weather, so getting a buffalo to pull a cart was a logical experiment.

In the last part of her program, Sally focused on Flint Creek Valley. Sally noted that archaeologists rarely find objects of Native daily life because they tended to end up on now private homestead properties. The sites where homesteaders settled had often been the sites of Native American usage at a specific times of the year. The Natives buried their tools for another year anticipating that they would return.

Sally's talk can be viewed on the BMHC website as Roundtable #41. Her books are available at most bookstores or let us know and we can get them to you.



restore the drinking water supply, protect the fishery, and provide fish passage in the Blackfoot and Clark Fork. EPA's remediation began in 2006, and the last trainload of contaminated sediments was hauled out in 2009.

Doug recounted NRDP's restoration goal to restore a naturally functioning river, very challenging in the absence of any evidence about what it was before the dam. He consulted with experienced specialists to come up with an appropriate river design and restoration work began in 2008. The completed restoration proved its resiliency, remaining intact after a major flood in 2011.

Finally, Mike, who was an active participant in public site evaluation and planning, discussed redevelopment. He became the Milltown State Park Manager after a competitive selection process. Park development was time consuming and challenging. The park's Grand Opening was in 2018. It offers its many visitors a uniquely rich history which now includes the 3Rs: remediation, restoration, and redevelopment.



Become this?

(FWP photo circa 2018)

New donations

Objects donated to BMHC during 2025

New acquisitions reveal more Bonner stories

By Minie Smith

Thanks to many generous donors, the following items have come to the History Center:

Perhaps the major gift (featured in Robyn's article p. 6) was the restored safe from Jeff Webber of Bend, Oregon. He started working at the Bonner mill in 1980 when Champion was the owner and continued there until he transferred to the Stimson Lumber Company after the mill was sold to Stimson in 1993. Webber was promoted to Vice President of Stimson and moved to their Portland office in 2000. He left the company in 2013. But when the Bonner mill closed in 2008, he acquired the safe. He had it restored and kept it in his office but always knew he had to find a permanent home for it. Eventually he found BMHC and brought the safe back and donated to the History Center. Luckily the Center was able to come to an agreement with the Kettlehouse to house it (it weighs 2700 lbs!) and the Bonner Development LLC (who also owns the building that the Center occupies) agreed to help install it. We are very lucky!

Steve Bixby, who often comes to Old Roads on Fridays, has brought in various items including a copy of Arthur Stone's well-known book *Following Old Trails* which is a good addition to the library. He also donated two copies of blueprints of the old trolley line which went from Fort Missoula to Bonner in the early 1900s until 1932 and a copy of a postcard of the Big Blackfoot Milling Co. postmarked 1909. Most recently he brought several items from an estate sale of items once owned by long time Bonner resident Charles Teague. These included several tags related to old car collections owned by Teague and several old pictures of the Bonner mill. Also included was a photo of the teachers at Bonner School. In addition, there is a ribbon identifying the wearer as Bonner's oldest resident.

Chris Weatherly, also an Old Roads participant, donated a peavy (in great condition) and an Anaconda tape measure. An Anaconda ashtray was donated by John Warner. Don Henrikson donated a framed photo of the Big Blackfoot Lumber Co. Jack Demmons' nephew Scott Kerr donated items from Jack's collection, all relating to the mill. They include a metal box lid of a box that held stones used to sharpen saw



New artifacts often present tantalizing mysteries. This tree was likely harvested in the Arrastra Creek drainage. Who hung the horseshoe on the branch of this Ponderosa pine? When? Why?

This was a large tree. In its early years, it likely witnessed travelers on the Road to the Buffalo. Possibly Meriwether Lewis?

blades and a large wooden painted sign that identifies the direction of Edger Number 3 in the planer building.

Peter Nielsen, retired from the County Health Dept. and involved in the removal of the Milltown Dam, donated two documents related to the event including a chronological history and a safety analysis.

Mike Maples donated a unique fabric sign for the Big Blackfoot Lumber Company. A very diverse box of items came from the family of John A. Peters Jr. who worked in the Plywood Plant from 1958-1993, eventually being the Supervisor there. The family is putting together more information about the donation which we will incorporate. The box included a photo of Mrs. Martel's first grade class at Bonner. John helped with reading in her class. In an article in The Tamarack, Champion's Newsletter, he said, "It's a wonderful feeling when you walk in the room and hear, 'I want to read to John,' and are greeted with lots of smiles and hugs." There was also a lot of mill-related information.

Minie Smith donated a printed photo from Tony Liane's collection of photos about the removal of the Bonner Dam. Another framed photo of the Bonner Mill was donated by Antoinette (Toni) LaBelle, daughter of Robert LaBelle who had been Project Engineer for US Plywood and had had the photo in his office in 1974, the year he died.

R. T. Cox gave his union book from his tenure at Champion in 1973 and mill photos from the same period.

Probably the most unusual donation came from Cal Bonnet, retired lead millwright whose career spanned Anaconda and Champion ownerships. While on inspection from the catwalk, Cal spotted a horseshoe embedded in a large Ponderosa log traveling along the carriage towards the saws. He was able to stop the carriage and cut out a section of the log containing the horseshoe. Cal also donated documents illustrating Champion's emphasis on production.

Please let us know if we have inadvertently not acknowledged your gift.



Rooted in History; Growing for the Future

Keep our stories alive with your gifts of time and money

Thanks to the generosity of Bonner Property Development owners Mike Boehme, Mike Heisey, and Steve Nelson; the dedication of a core group of volunteers; and the enthusiastic support of our community, a seed planted in 2009 to keep Bonner's history alive has taken root and is now thriving.

Let's keep that growth going! Are you interested in sharing—or learning more about—Bonner history? Consider volunteering. In 2026, we're developing new projects to expand our outreach through the Montana History Portal and our website. If you enjoy transcribing, we have stories waiting. If organizing is your thing, we have photos to catalog. While we'd love to expand our public hours, many of these projects can be done from home.

We run on volunteer power, but volunteerism alone doesn't cover expenses. We live by the old adage, "Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without," yet even with an all-volunteer crew, we still need \$6,000 a year to operate. Can you help us meet that need?



2025

Roundtables - approximately 275 attendees in 2025 + YouTube outreach

Strolls and Hikes - 159 participants

School Visits - 85 students plus parent volunteers

Grant funding raised for exhibits and projects - \$11,076

Groups hosted on Tuesdays & Fridays - approximately 990 attendees

Newsletter outreach - 500 copies distributed

Social media outreach - 979 followers

Exhibit public opening, 2 events - approximately 126 attendees

Visitors in 2025 (open 13 hours/week) - 100

Website visits in 2025 - 13,000

BMHC Planning Committee Members and Volunteers

Kim Briggeman

Robyn Heyer

Cheryl Hughes

Tony Liane

Andy Lukes

Judy Matson

Gary Matson

Joyce Morgan, Volunteer

Anna Sain

Dennis Sain

Joe Smiley, Intern

Minie Smith

Hooligan Smith

Sharon Smith

Kali Zaglauer

Thank You to our contributors!

Kim and Linda Briggeman; Minie Smith; Dennis and Anna Sain; Bob Bateman; Bill and Jan Taylor; Joyce Morgan; Cal Bonnet; R. T. Cox; Toni LaBelle; Tony Liane; Bonner Property Development: Mike Boehme, Mike Heisey, Steve Nelson; Maureen Peers; Andy Lukes; Alan McQuillan; Bonner Milltown Community Council; Tuesday Coffee group; Jeff Webber; Cheryl Hughes; Lisa Bickell; Missoula County; Missoula Community Access Television; Ron Scholl; St. Ann Catholic Church; Friends of Two Rivers; Elaine Nagle; Bev Cheff; Dick Anthony; Rick and Pat Swanson; Fred Beyer; Michael Kustudia; Gary and Judy Matson; Pat and Jim Habeck; The Historical Museum at Fort Missoula; Wally Otterson; Richard Black; Les and Sue Iverson; Ray and Jan Anthony; Scott Kerr; Steve Schombel; Peter Nielsen; Mike Maples; Joe and Cathy Peterson; Kelli Sinner; Jim McDonald; Jim Hill; Pat McDonald; Maurice and Cathi Darrington; Chris Weatherly; Carrie Nowlen; Tom and Tomi Briggeman; Ilona Hangas; Joan Sipherd; David and Vicki Otto; Roberta Bemis; John Warner; Jerry and Mary Ann Buckhouse; Scott and Debbie Willis; Lee Legreid; Rick and Judy Gendrow; Annie Bahm; Guy Trenary; Dean Goodrich; Don Felton; Gary Little; Robert Dunlop; Our Savior's Lutheran Church; Don Henrickson; Danya Zimmerman and Ursula Neumann; John Rimel; Kali Zaglauer; Leif Fredrickson; Walter Peckham; Sam and Kathy Milodragovich; Mary Bradford; Sally Thompson; Kristin Vogel; Jim Howard; Stan and Doreen Olean; Norman Jacobson; Annelise Hedahl; Shirley Olson; Ed and Judy Olean; Bill and Jean Walker; Glenn Max and Sharon Smith; Old Roads and Rabbit Holes group; Land Lindbergh; Nancy Braun; Ann Libecap; Bill and Peggy Colwell; Anne and Jeff Rupkalvis; Chuck and Mary Erickson; Ralph Dufresne; Sally Timp; Catherine Schuck; Alan and Karen Wagner; Dusty Deschamps; Bruce and Sue Hall; Brent Shaffer; Mary Ellen Stubb; Kris and Bill Unger; Joe and Barbara Gorsh; Tom Hilmo; Jeff Moore; Virginia and Jack Thibodeau; Chuck Teague; Jo Labbe; Parker Mickel; Bonner School; Dylan Huisken; Jen Elison; Matt Lautzenheiser; Greg Morse; Laura and Steele Campbell; Alyssa Koury; Michael and Delaney Koury; Dylan Moore; Kaaren James; Austin Haney; Steve Bixby; MRFD: Cory Horsens; Bruce Mihelish; Steve and Doni Ramos; Eric Hoberg; Burt Caldwell; Karl Uhlig; Scott Kuehn; Garnet Preservation Association. We also have many unidentified contributors and cash donors. We likely have missed someone. If that someone is you, please let us know so we can set the record straight! To all, a heartfelt thank you!

History tidbits welcomed by Bonner Milltown Community Council

By Judy Matson

Since 2022 BMHC has presented a “history tidbit” at each meeting of the Bonner Milltown Community Council. Here’s a sampling of bits from the tidbits:

Bonner School [was] one of the first community buildings established in 1889 to educate the children of the mill managers and workers. The mill itself was built in 1886.

In 1897, 20 Buffalo Soldier Iron Riders rode bicycles 1,900 miles from Missoula to St. Louis. This group passed through Bonner on the first day.

In 1929, Professor Edward Milton Little of the university suggested a ski trip up Woods Gulch and over to Marshall Mountain with “some time … spent in the bowl skiing on slopes of any steepness desired, with little cause for spills as the snow is at least 10 feet deep.”

December 16, 2011, 3 p.m.: Mike Boehme and Steve Nelson signed documents transferring ownership to them from Stimson Lumber Company - a new era for Bonner began!

“Because sinker logs can present a hazard to recreationists and damage bridge abutments, the state and county have removed close to 20,000 sinkers from the Blackfoot and Clark Fork Rivers in the years since the dams came down (2005 and 2008).” Missoula Current, October 16, 2019.

Donating to BMHC with a QR code is quick and easy

1. Open the camera app on your phone
2. Focus on the QR code
3. A yellow oval with the words “givebutter.com” appears under the QR code
4. Touch the oval to open the website
5. Donate to BMHC!



BMHC is social!

The Bonner Milltown History Center and Museum has a Facebook and an Instagram page. “Like” and “Follow” us for announcements and photos.

The Bonner Milltown History Center and Museum is located in the Bonner Post Office Building

*Physical address: 9397 Hwy 200 E., Bonner MT 59823 * Mailing address: PO Box 726, Bonner MT 59823*

Public Hours: Wednesday 10 - 4 p.m. and Friday noon - 2 p.m.

Coffee and conversation: Tuesday 9 - Noon;

Old Roads and Rabbit Holes: Friday 10 - Noon

*Email: bonnermilltownhistorycenter@gmail.com * Website: <https://bonnermilltownhistory.org>*

Our thanks to P.E.T.E.S. Electric for supporting this newsletter!



We appreciate our 2025 raffle donors.

River City Grill - KettleHouse Brewing Co.

Posh Chocolat

Bonner School

Minie Smith

Robyn Heyer

Pat Kittleson

Kim Briggeman

Judy Matson

Please support our local businesses!