

finding Color

Fall/Winter 2007

News from the Montana Heritage Preservation & Development Commission

Dredging Up The Past

by Bill Peterson, Curator of Interpretation



Removing the label from a tin can before recycling it is pretty much habit (hopefully) to most people anymore. This has not always been so. In the old days people just threw the can, label and all, in the trash. Often times the trash just ended up in a pile out behind the house. As a result, archaeologists dig up lots of cans and bottles. Bottles are relatively easy to identify and date. Cans rust away and the labels almost never survive. As a result, historic can and bottle labels are quite rare.

Noted western history scholars like Patricia Limerick even talk about the can dumps behind many homesteads. To Limerick this was a defining feature of the American West. She just couldn't know what the can labels looked like. Had she stopped in Simeon R. Buford's store in Virginia City during her research, she could have seen the can labels.

S.R. Buford's store is now an exhibit on Wallace Street next to Bandito's restaurant. Buford was a freighter turned grocer after the 1878 take-over of the store by local banker

Henry Elling. The number of properties in town and ranches in the area that Elling foreclosed on is a story for another day. Nevertheless, Buford and Elling were friends and Buford was equally as talented at the grocery business as Elling at banking.

By 1899 Buford expanded his business to include heavy machinery and mining equipment and built additions on the original brick building. S.R. Buford died in 1905 and his son continued the business into the 1920s. The Buford's had a strange habit of bundling up their junk mail and for some strange reason, often they included can labels from goods in their grocery store. When Charlie Bovey bought the Buford block in 1945-6 he also acquired all of the Buford store records, including odd bundles of junk mail. Those odd bundles of mail contained yet another treasure that we Montanans can give back to the world — can labels from the first two decades of the twentieth century. In short, I know what Patricia Limerick's tin can labels looked like when they were new and if you have seen the Buford store exhibit, so do you.

There is a shipwreck in Iowa, and a football team in Green Bay, Wisconsin that also factor into this story. The steamboat, Bertrand, left St. Louis, bound for Fort Benton, Montana on March 18, 1865, carrying 250 tons of cargo and 50-60 passengers. On April 1st, the Bertrand hit a snag and sank. As was common in those days salvagers saved what they could, but the river entombed the wreck in short order. The Montana Post had this to say about the wreck: "We learn from Mr. R. Simpson that Gen. Dorris, one of our pioneer merchants, lost, by this accident, a part of the goods he was bringing to this city."

In 1969, the Bertrand, and her mostly intact cargo were excavated. The cargo is now on exhibit at the DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge in Missouri Valley, Iowa. With no question we know exactly what the cargo coming to Alder Gulch in 1865 looked like. The stuff

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"Step Into Montana's Past"

Nevada City Living History Profile: Coburn ("Coby") Johnson; Nevada City Laundress

What do Women's Rights, Laundry, Nevada City and the Mansfield library at the University of Montana have in common? They are all important in Coby Johnson's life. Coby is the Interim Head of Bibliographic Management Services, the Principle Catalog Librarian, and Authorities Coordinator at the University of Montana Mansfield Library. Coby is also the Nevada City Living History Programs Laundress, spending her summer washing the gold and mud out of miner's clothing and teaching her skill to the many visitors that come through the Nevada City Museum. Coby has a MA in Library Science from the



(PROFILE, *continued on pg 3*)

EDUCATION FOR EVERYONE: MONTANA'S HERITAGE RESOURCES AS EDUCATIONAL TOOLS

The Montana Heritage Commission (MHC) owns the best surviving original Western gold rush era downtown in the United States and according to the National Park Service, "the largest group of original first generation gold rush era (1860s) buildings on their original sites in the American West." The structures in Virginia City have survived intact since 1863 and represent more than 140 years of American vernacular architecture. These first structures were simple log construction of pole and sod with animal hide roofs. In many respects these structures were built quickly as "ramshackle" miners' cabins with no thought given to permanence. As the site developed into the Territorial Capital in 1865, architectural influences from the east quickly arrived.

With the sudden growth, permanence was literally foisted onto parts of the community. Instead of tearing down these earlier structures, residents and business owners just overlaid the existing with the modern materials. Many of these buildings were inhabited through the 1930s and were continuously updated and modernized. In 1944, Montana Senator Charles Bovey began purchasing those structures along the City's main street that represented the buildings dating to original gold strike in 1863. In so doing, he began one of the first, and most important historic preservation movements in Montana ensuring the preservation of this remarkable resource. Today scholars from across the country are beginning to realize the immense value of this resource.

From historic preservation methodology seminars, and archaeological explorations to material culture comparative studies and nationally acclaimed seminars for school teachers, this piece of Montana's heritage is much more than a tourist stop. Graduate students and grade schoolers alike are exploring American history through this cultural resource.

Vermont Teachers Visit Alder Gulch on NEH Teach American History Trip

During the last week of June, 2007 thirty teachers from Vermont spent three days in Alder Gulch exploring Montana's rich cultural heritage as a teaching resource. The project was put together through a National Endowment for the Humanities Grant, a Vermont organization called The Flow of History, and the Montana Heritage Commission.

The Flow of History is a history education network for Vermont and New Hampshire communities along the Connecticut River watershed. Through funding from the federal Teaching American History program, we are linking local and regional history to the national experience. The Flow of History is on the web at: <http://www.flowofhistory.org/>

Flow of History's Director Sarah Rooker contacted the Montana Heritage Commission's Education and Interpretation department last winter for aid in putting together a memorable three day learning experience translatable back to classrooms in Vermont. Through census records and research with the aid of Linda Peavey, they came up with a list of nearly twenty Vermonters who came to Montana in the 1860s. The goal of the visit was to learn about what it may have been like for a Vermonter on the Montana gold rush frontier.

Not only did they learn the history of the area, they also had seminars in the following topics: Principles of Historic

Construction, Historic Food Ways, Living History Interpretive Techniques, Civil War Tensions in Alder Gulch, Historic Mining Techniques, Census, Probate, and Deed Records in Historic Research, and Chinese Experience in Alder Gulch. Linda Wruck, Education Officer from the Montana Historical Society also gave a presentation on how they take Montana History to the classrooms through their educational outreach program.



Janet Sperry of the Mai Wah Society leads a discussion on the lives of Chinese people in Alder Gulch.

A Great Big Salute

Heres to all the volunteers, staff and merchants who helped make this year so great!

Thank You

(PROFILE, continued from page 1)

University of Denver, and a BS in History from Montana State University.

Coby's career started as the Assistant Catalog Librarian instructor with the University of Montana in 1972. She became a Cataloger at the Mansfield Library with the Journalism Collection of Recon Grant in 1984, worked as Project Coordinator and Chief Cataloger on the Northwest Grant Recon Project in 1986. From 1990 – 1991 she served as the Technical Director, Montana Indian Tribal Libraries Networking Project, LSCA Grant Fort Peck Community College. She also worked with the Confederated Salish/Kootenai Tribal Heritage Program, at the Salish-Kootenai College as a Cataloger in 1993. Coby's expertise in the library sciences quickly advanced her to the Principal Catalog Librarian, Authorities Coordinator and Associate Professor, in 2004.



Coburn has been active at the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula on the Collections Committee, chair 1996 -2000, and is again serving as the Chair. She is a founding member of the Friends of the Historical Museum at Ft. Missoula, and is presently serving on the board of directors for the Fort. She is a member of the Montana Association of Weavers and Spinners since 1980, a member of the Association of Northwest Weaving Guilds and has been extremely active in both organizations. Coby brings an excellent insight into the types of materials and fabrics that were used during the 19th century in Alder Gulch, which provides extra insight to what she offers as Nevada City's laundress.

We recruited Coby in 2001 to assist with the Frontier House opening presentation; her first experience with the living history program was staffing the Brooks cabin with another member of the Montana Historical Society Friends. Coby said that her favorite part of working with the Living History Program in Nevada City is working with the living history staff and talking to all the people that she meets. She enjoys presenting a different approach on how laundry was done. Coby is an excellent interpreter able to switch from historic demonstration to first person presentations on the Women's Rights Movement. Coby has been active this summer in the new living history afternoon program "Past Meets Present." She comments to a museum guest, "People just don't realize that women were property." Usually, many questions follow about the place of women in society during the 19th century.

One of Coby's favorite parts of the summer is working with our Hands-On History camp as a counselor. Coby and her husband Dale act as chaperone's for this program in addition to assisting with teaching the history camp students during the week, assisting with library research, and final project presentation.

Coby is a wonderful addition to the living history program, and many visitors, young and old alike walk away from her interpretive post with not only wrinkled hands, but a new understanding of what it was like to do the daily chore of laundry in Victorian times. ~

..... Up in the Alley

Reeder's Alley is where the past is present and history is our future. MHC and alley tenants are teaming together in projects and fellowship that is bringing new life to the alley. Both the Caretakers Cabin Restaurant and Karmadillos continue to serve up tremendous goodies. We welcome Deserly & Associates to the alley as well as A. Wilson Photography.



Tours of pioneer cabin and the alley itself continue to delight and amaze visitors. A big thanks to Gretchen Olheiser, Sandy Baglivo, and Shirley Herrin for their hours of dedication. Of course a big hug for Ellen Baumler who paints the most colorful pictures for all to see of the alley and cabin.

High five to all the volunteers, organizations and tenants who plant and clean and help maintain our little corner of the world - you truly are the driving force behind the serene beauty and delightful character seen everyday by young and old. 2007 has been a tremendous year for us here at the alley - there are only greater things to come in 2008! Stay tuned. . . .

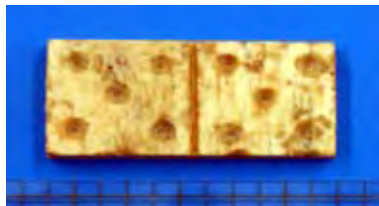
**ARTIFACTS
STOLEN**

Thieves entered the Dance & Stuart store in Virginia City through a back window and stole many items from the collection. They were very particular about what was taken, seemingly knowing where items were displayed and what they wanted. They were also very careful in moving or touching other items as nothing was broken or mishandle.d Beaded purses, ladies hats and hat pins, and mining lamps were among the items taken ,totaling approximately \$5000+. If you have any information regarding the recovery of stolen items, Please call the Madison County Sheriff @

406-843-5301

Elderhostel digs into Nevada City

The summer season ended with another successful Elderhostel service program. Eighteen participants came to Nevada City to experience archaeology hands-on, some returning for their second time. They learned about excavation and laboratory methods as well as the accessioning process.



Double Five Bone Domino recovered during the 2007 excavation.

The participants were guided by staff archaeologist Cecile Gevock with the support of the other staff and volunteers. The group accomplished a lot in all areas covered during this five day program, including opening 21 test units, processing all artifacts from the past two field sessions and accessioning the entire archaeological collection to date for this site. They enjoyed all aspects of the work, especially the excavation where they uncovered more pieces of Nevada City's enigmatic history.

The program is slated for another session of hands-on archaeology in September 2008, when the group will investigate a new area in Nevada City. ↻

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We would like to take this opportunity to thank our hundreds of donors and friends. We couldn't do it without you!

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(DREDGING THE PAST *continued from page 1*)

bound for Virginia City included, shovels, tools, clocks, locks, candles, lamps, salts, castor sets, cookware, cutlery, coffee grinders and laundry supplies. That is just the start of the list; there was also Lea and Perrin's Worcester sauce, preserved fruits, medicines, and various other goods.

Buford too sold Worcester sauce, and when Charlie Bovey and John Ellingsen built the Buford exhibit in 1975, they included in the exhibit a can of meat from the Indian Packing Corporation of Green Bay, Wisconsin, namesake of the Green Bay Packers. That was an interesting fact our graduate student intern Laura Nowlin dredged up for me during her summer research on the Buford store can labels.



Changing Faces in Montana Heritage!

Please help us welcome Paul Reichert as Executive Director. He was offered the chance to jump on the MHC speeding locomotive permanently after serving in an interim capacity and has accepted the challenge. Paul has great vision and aspirations for the Montana Heritage Commission and has already started to implement positive changes that will help ensure continued preservation and promotion of some of the great American west's historic treasures for future generations to come. We here at MHC are excited to have Paul permanently aboard and are excited to be a part of this new chapter with MHC!

Also jumping on board are five new board members. All bring a great wealth of experience, knowledge and energy that will help propel this project forward. We welcome Randy Hafer, Billings; Philip Maechling, Missoula; Colin Mathews, Virginia City; Senator Lynda Moss, Billings; and Marilyn Ross, Twin Bridges.

****Farewell Wishes****

Jim Carpita, Virginia City Site Manager since 2004 decided this fall to pursue new adventures. We wish Jim the very best in future endeavors and thank him for his dedication and service. Good Luck and God Bless.



101 Reeders Alley, Helena, MT 59601

Seasons Greetings from the
Montana Heritage Commission
and staff at
Virginia City, Nevada City and Reeders Alley

