

Big Sky Roundup



MSGs Web Site:
<http://www.rootsweb.com/~mtmsg>

2010-2011 Officers

April 2011

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President's Message

With many of us experiencing the worst winter in years, it is such a relief to finally see green grass replace the fields of snow. After a long, long, wait it looks like Spring is almost here.

Another highly anticipated event is almost here as well. Seventy-one years have passed since the 1940 US Federal Census which means we will finally have access in less than a year on 2 April 2012. Unlike previous releases, 1940 will not be available on microfilm. It will only be available digitally and it will provide several fields that have not been available in previous years.

These include:

- Listings of Persons Absent from the Household
- The Residence in 1935
- More Employment Data
- And in my own opinion, the best addition – 1940 will include the name of the person giving the information. Finally – a census that records its source!

However, NARA will only release the actual population census pages next April. We will still have to wait for an index.

Shawna Valentine, President



Summary of the March 12, 2011 MSGS Board Meeting

The MSGS Board met in Helena, Montana on March 12, 2011 with 8 board members present. President Shawna Valentine called the meeting to order at 10 AM. The minutes of the previous board meeting were read. The treasurer's report was given and the audit report has been completed.

Verba Valentine, 1st VP, reported on the plans for the 2011 Conference to be held in Kalispell on September 22-24. Thomas Jones has been contracted as the main speaker. Other speakers

will be Gil Jordan, Lon Brown and Christine Kirkham, all from Montana as well as Shirley Oakes from Spokane, Washington. Registration flyers will be out in July. There will be a reception Thursday night and possibly a cemetery tour or a tour of the Conrad Mansion.

The 2012 Conference will be in Billings at the Big Horn Resort September 21-23, 2012. Josh Taylor of the New England Historical and Genealogical Society has been contracted to be the main speaker.

Shirley Rogers, 2nd VP, reminded everyone that she only wants genealogy or history type books for the book frolic (no fiction or periodicals).

It was decided to have Reid's in Lewistown do the T-shirts, but they will have to be pre-ordered.

Mary Pitch, Registrar, reported that Great Falls has rejoined the State Society. We now have 14 societies and 603 members.

Librarian Karen Huck wants to get shelf canopies to protect our books from water and dust. MSGS and the Lewis and Clark Society will share the cost of \$1200.00.

Fern Kauffman reported she has received several new applications for Early Settler and First Family certificates. It was also decided to share information from the application files only on those persons who are deceased. 200 more Volume III are being printed.

Shirley Rogers needs society materials by August to take to the FGS Conference to be held in Springfield, Illinois, September 6-10, 2011.

The \$500.00 was sent to the Montana Historical Society building fund. A thank you was read from Mike Cooney, Interim Director.

The next meeting will be July 23, 2011 at 10 AM in Helena, Montana.

Marilyn Lewis, Secretary

MSGS TREASURER SUMMARY – January 13, 2011 – April 14, 2011

MSGS INCOME		MSGS EXPENSES	13.93
Club and Individual Membership	875.00	Bank Charges	0.75
Club Pins Inc		Expenses	8.80
Pins Bought 2011	-333.00	FGS Delegate Registration & Expenses	207.00
TOTAL Club Pins Inc	-333.00	Newsletter	129.00
DEATH INDEX	30.00	TOTAL MSGS EXPENSES	\$359.48
FFM and ES	753.50	OVERALL TOTAL	-943.51
FFM & ES Expenses	-1,911.28		
TOTAL FFM and ES	-1,157.78	TOTAL Cash and Bank Accounts	\$14,578.02
Interest Income	1.75		
TOTAL MSGS INCOME	-584.03		

Respectively submitted this 14th Day of April 2011

Carol Woodley, Treasurer

421 South 13th Street, Livingston, MT 59047

PLEASE HELP ME BRAG ABOUT US!!

The **Federation of Genealogical Societies Annual Conference** will be in Springfield, Illinois September 7-10, 2011. I will be in attendance, representing MSGS and ALL of its member societies. Each year, I set up a table display in the Exhibit Area with stand-up boards. I really enjoy being able to brag about all of our accomplishments, but in order to do so I need to know what each society has been up to. At the very least I would like to have a **printed sheet** showing what your society has to offer – books for sale, activities, special resources on your website, etc. that I can put on the boards. It would be best if you could supply me with several copies of a **brochure** about your society that attendees may take with them. If you don't have a brochure, I encourage you to make one. If only 1 copy is sent, I won't be able to make multiple copies for distribution. I need to have the printed material sent to me by **August 20th** at the latest. My Address is: Shirley Rogers, PO Box 24, Boulder MT 59632.



22nd Annual Montana State Genealogical Society Conference

Hilton Garden Inn

Kalispell Montana

September 22, 23, 24, 2011

1st Vice President's Report

We are eagerly awaiting the arrival of spring in Montana. Since it is reluctant to show its beautiful head let's just go right on past summer and concentrate on "Gathering Lost Leaves" in Kalispell at the Hilton Garden Inn, September 22, 23, 24, 2011.

Thomas W. Jones a Certified Genealogist and Certified Genealogical Lecturer from Virginia will be our national speaker. His topics will be "Solving the Mystery of the Disappearing Ancestor", "Five Proven Techniques for Finding Your Ancestor's European Origins", "Organizing Evidence to Overcome Record Shortages", and "How to Avoid Being Duped by the Internet".

Gil Jordan, Executive Director, Northwest Montana Historical Society will speak on "History of the Flathead Valley"

Chris Erhman, Manager of the Montana Digital Newspaper Project and Digital Initiatives Specialist Tina Kirkham, staff members of the Montana Historical Society, will show off several new or newly expanded digital resources, including historical Montana Newspapers, two dozen county history books, and a growing collection of prisoner description sheets with mug shots from MT State Prison records.

Shirley Penna-Oakes, Eastern Washington Genealogical Society Outreach/Educational Chairman will talk on the research records and archives in Eastern Washington.

Lon Brown will speak on Revolutionary War Genealogy and Hereditary Societies.

Check your homes for material for the Book Frolic. Anything related to genealogy but please do not bring periodicals or unrelated books such as novels. Door prizes will be appreciated also.

Make your plans now to go to conference in September. There is a link on the MSGS website for your use in making hotel reservations. Deadline is September 1. Rates are \$94 per night with a hot breakfast for up to 2 per room. Each additional breakfast will be \$9.95.

Registration flyers will be mailed mid July.

Verba Valentine, MSGS 1st Vice President

In Need of City Directories?

If interested, please contact the Beaver Head Hunters at 15 S. Montana, Dillon, MT 59725, or email Pat Darling at pdarling@bmt.net

The Head Hunters have some City Directories they will send to anyone who would like them, for the cost of postage. We have the following:

Billings City Directory 1970, 1980, 1981, 1982, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987/88.

Great Falls City Directory 1969, 1986, 1987

Helena City Directory 1974, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1983/84, 1985, 1990, 1991



WE WOULD LOVE TO BE ABLE TO PUBLISH
YOUR SOCIETY'S NEWS.

Please submit items to Shawna at
smv2222@bresnan.net

I would like to extend a sincere apology to the Beaver Head Hunters. Due to a mix up on my part, their report was omitted from the January 2011 issue. Their full report that should have ran in the last issue follows. Shawna Valentine, Editor.

Beaver Head Hunters (January Report)

The Beaver Head Hunters had a great Christmas party. We always have a potluck dinner and play traveling Bingo afterwards. If you have never played traveling Bingo, here is how we do it. Each person brings a wrapped white elephant gift which is given a number. When anyone gets a Bingo, they call out the number of the gift they want, then clear their card, (the others continue filling in their cards until they get a Bingo). As the night progresses, sometimes you have several gifts, and sometimes none, depending on if the number of a gift you have is called or not. Every year there seems to be two or three gifts with a very intriguing look that get called for nearly every time and are passed around a lot. We play for about 45 minutes and then open and keep the gift that we have. If we have more than one gift, we share with someone in the group who is giftless. Our Christmas party is one of our yearly high-lights.

Pat Darling has completed indexing the Naturalization Declarations of Intention for Beaverhead County. We are taking a pause as we consider indexing the Naturalization Final Papers.

Darlene Hildreth has been diligently indexing the county School Census records. This census was taken from shortly after Montana became a state until 1972. The data varies over the years but includes name, gender, age & birthday of each child (from birth to 20), and who their parents or guardian are. This can be very helpful, especially when trying to find birthdates or where a family moved to within the county. When the rural schools are finished, she will be ready to start the Dillon city schools. At that point it will become our society project as the Dillon schools nearly take up a whole file cabinet drawer by themselves. You can search the Schools and the Naturalization indexes that have been completed, along with our other indexes (obituary, marriage, & census) at:
<<http://www.3rivers.net/~rockhaven/BHH/search.cgi>> Click the "more details" link to see which schools have been completed, etc.

Submitted by Carla Andrus, BHH Liaison

Beaver Head Hunters (April Report)

In February we went to the Lucy Carson Library of the University of Montana Western. The head librarian, Mike Schulz, give us a tour of the library archives. They have many historical books, yearbooks, club scrapbooks, art work, and other items that relate to the Normal College which later became Western and finally UMW. If anyone is doing research of ancestors who went to this college, should definitely look through these archives for more information.

In March we had Dr. John McCollum come to our meeting and tell us of his great-grandfather John F. Bishop, one of the pioneers to Beaverhead County. John Bishop was one of the first men to bring sheep into the county. Dr. McCollum also brought several of the diaries that Bishop wrote.

This month one of our members, Pat Darling, will discuss maiden names and give us hints on how to find female ancestors. We are also beginning plans for our summer outing and a one day genealogy workshop this fall.

Submitted by Carla Andrus, BHH Liaison

Broken Mountains Genealogical Society

The alphabetically indexed cemetery data base is completed to date with over 2000 names listed. The Liberty County obituaries from 1905-2010 are up to date and both are found on the Broken Mountains Genealogical Society Link on the state genealogical web site.

Plans are for starting a new project to encourage people of the community to write down their memories--places they've lived, the hardships as well as the happy times and to leave a written legacy for their grandchildren who later on will want to know what life was like in "the olden days."

Submitted by Pat Ludwig, BMGS Liaison

Butte Silver Bow Genealogy Society

Sadly, BSBGS lost one of our members this month. The following comes from her obituary.

Marti Pecukonis, of Butte, died peacefully March 17, 2011, surrounded by family at St. Patrick Hospital in Missoula. She was born Martha Mary Sieffert on Oct. 22, 1944, the second of nine children to Bernadette (Heim) and Martin Sieffert of Aliquippa, Pa. She graduated from Hopewell High School in 1962, where she received the Betty Crocker Homemaker Award, then Ohio Valley General Hospital School of Nursing in 1965. Marti was a decorated Vietnam veteran, serving from 1967 to 1969 as a surgical nurse in the Army. During her a tour in Vietnam, she met her future husband, Edward R. Pecukonis. Marti was a devoted mother to three loving children: Mark, Ellen and John. The family moved to Butte in 1975. Marti worked as a nurse at St. James Hospital, Montana Chemical Dependency Center and Highlands Hospice, and earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Montana Tech.

She was involved in many acts of charity, including repairing dolls and crafting blankets for underprivileged children and volunteering as a mentor at the Florence Crittenton Home. Even at a young age, Marti epitomized resourcefulness and thriftiness. As her father said, she could "make a silk purse out of a sow's ear."

Submitted by Linda Lee Holmes, BSBGS Liaison

Great Falls Genealogy Society

Great Falls Genealogy Society is once again a member of the State Society and looking forward to working with other societies, sharing ideas, information, and problem solving. Since we last belonged to the State Society, our membership has grown to the current number of 173. The genealogy library is located in the Great Falls Public Library at 301 2nd Avenue North and holds over 10,000 publications and CD resources. Hours are Monday – Saturday, 10am to 4pm. Besides our microfilm reader, a microfiche reader, a scanner and a copier for our patrons to use, we also have two computers with internet access to aid in research. Members may use the computers free of charge; a small hourly fee is charged to non-members.

GFGS is planning for an annual research trip to the Family History Library in Salt Lake City. This is the seventh year the group has made the trip and it is open to non-members as well as members. A group rate has been secured at the Plaza Hotel, next door to the library. For more information call GFGS at 727-3922.

We extend an invitation to all state society members to visit and see what we now have to offer at our new location.

Submitted by Alice Heisel, GFGS Liaison

Park County Genealogy Society

We have been working with the Park County Commissioners to utilize some funds that have been set aside for the restoration and preservation of the two oldest cemeteries and other historical sites in Park County. Old Chico and Emigrant cemeteries are situated in the Paradise Valley going towards Yellowstone National Park and are in need of extensive repairs. Our intent is to restore them and place interpretive signs along the Old Yellowstone Trail. We are grateful for the help received from Park County Historian, Jerry Brekke and Archeologist, Dr. Larry Lahren for their guidance in assembling the required data needed for the financial request.

We have sold two boxes of the First Family and Early Settlers of Volume III and working on a third one along with a few books of Volume I and Volume II.

At the February meeting Laura McCarthy from the Yellowstone Gateway Museum came and talked about what is happening at the museum with the Whithorn collection of pictures.

In March we had Jon Swenumson from the Livingston Public Library talk about the resources available for researchers. He announced the Library has purchased a new digital microfilm reader that should be in use by the end of April. Our society is thrilled to have this improvement in our research area. His handout can be made available by contacting the library.

Genealogy members will participate in the "Bring Your Old Photos: Name-Date-Save!" at our April 16th meeting. Our April 26th meeting will be at the Livingston Senior Center at 7 pm with Tom Davis from Franzen Davis Mortuary as our guest speaker. He will talk about the history of mortuaries in Park County.

With the Historical Society, we will co-sponsor the 3rd Annual Cemetery Walk at Mountain View Cemetery in Livingston on August 13th. More details as they become available.

Submitted by Carol Woodley, PCGS President

Powell County Genealogical Society

Hello to all! We've had a pretty slow winter but met every month except February. Between members who went south for the cold months and those who couldn't get to town because of treacherous roads, we had a short "crew" at our meetings.

We are certainly ready for some spring weather which will enable us to move forward with our "Grave Stones" project. We had taken a few photos of unusual and beautiful grave stones in the oldest part of Hillcrest Cemetery last fall with the idea of developing a format for a booklet (and CD). Research in our old newspapers would provide information for short summaries of pertinent facts about the deceased to be included next to the photo of the headstone. We have decided on a format and are ready to take additional photos and "get to work"...just need the weather to cooperate!

A few of the members continue to do genealogical research requests...mostly direct queries or referrals from the library, court house, city hall, etc.

We get monthly reports from members regarding any interesting and helpful genealogical internet sites. This has been extremely helpful as so much information is added daily.

We wish you all a "sunny" spring and look forward to reading the news from the societies.

Submitted by Megan Thompson, PCGS President

Western Montana Genealogical Society

Our programs this year have been very interesting. We've "taken a trip" to Sweden to search for our roots, solved our problems with our Brick Wall night, learned how to take care of our paper and photographs from a professional and learned about Josephine Hale: Montana Artist, Traveler, and Genealogist. Coming up is a program about one member's 10 year (and counting) ancestor photo project. We plan on continuing with cemetery indexing and headstone photography this summer. We also have been invited to return to Ft Missoula's 4th of July celebration. Our info/display table is always well visited and the members staffing the table have lots of fun.

Submitted by Nancy Shrader, WMGS Liaison

Yellowstone Genealogy Forum

The Forum started the New Year off with popcorn and a movie. We watched a video from the 2010 NGS national conference "A Celebration of Family History" with David McCullough. McCullough is the author of 1776 and John Adams. It was a delightful two hours of family history stories and music by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir & Orchestra.

February found the Forum at the Gravestone Saloon, after a hearty potluck dinner. The Mayor of Gravestone invited Bella Stary, Abbie Oakley, and others to welcome the new sheriff, Wylie Arp. Unfortunately, a murder occurred during the event. (In case you haven't guessed, we finally held our Murder Mystery.) After examining clues and much discussion, Ellen Booth was accused of the dastardly deed. The actual murderer was Abbie Oakley played by yours truly.

Sons of Norway promised a program in March then cancelled. Ann Ferguson & Rick Davis jumped in and gave us a great lesson, using the LDS website, on Scandinavian Research.

A woman from the home school association in Billings asked the Forum to teach a class on genealogy. We decided to present a basic class on how to fill out family group sheets and pedigree charts using the students' own birth certificates as well as those of their parents, and their parents' marriage licenses. A second class used the Internet for research – using Heritage Quest, familysearch.org, glorecords at blm.gov, ellisland, FindaGrave, SSDI, Cyndi's List, and a few others.

The same Internet class was taught at Parnly Billings Library to 20 interested parties. Hopefully, they, and the students, will attend an open house at the Gen Room.

The Forum will continue to meet at the LDS Church on 6th St. West & Avenue D in Billings. After Bob Erekson's passing in December, we weren't sure if we could continue to meet there. The President and the Bishop of the stake have been very welcoming and assured me that they want to Forum to continue meeting there.

Submitted by P. J. Smith, YGF President



The Roundup accepts submissions of historical and genealogical interest that have a Montana connection. Examples include, but are not limited to, brief family or town histories, Church or Court Records, Cemetery transcriptions, Newspaper abstracts, Bible Records, Letters, descriptions of holdings and hours of Research Facilities within the state, and instate attractions of historical interest. Photos may also be accepted if some type of written description of the photo's content accompanies them. All submitted materials must include a cover letter from the submitter giving Montana State Genealogical Society permission to publish. Questions, proposed articles and photos may be sent electronically to Shawna Valentine. The editor reserves the right to accept or reject any submitted material, as well as the right to edit copy.



Twin Bridges Orphanage

How it filled the needs of one family in the 1920s

By Dolores Harris

The kids playing in the yard raised their heads as they watched the dust being raised by the automobile coming down the lane. What could Sheriff Mountjoy want this time? During the past months he'd been a frequent visitor and the sight of his car warned them that something was afoot.

The Lockhart Meadows, between Butte and Basin in Jefferson County, were beautiful in the summer, although cold, snowy and remote in winter. Elmer and Rose had left their familiar warm home in Missouri to make their fortune in a mining claim. News of all the wealth in Butte, Montana, had gotten back to Missouri. Elmer dreamed of finding his fortune, so he packed up his bride and 7 children and hopped the Union Pacific for Butte, Montana.

After much searching he found a claim with a house north of Butte, near enough to have mineral ore deposits. His luck didn't hold out, however, and he was having a tough time mining enough ore to support the clan. He roamed the hills and towns looking for work or food. One day he happened upon an old horse; his family needed meat, so he proceeded to butcher the horse, which belonged to someone else. Lo and behold he was caught by the Sheriff, who escorted him to Deer Lodge penitentiary. There was an incredible trial that made headlines in the Montana Standard Newspaper in Butte. His daughter Alice was required to testify at her father's trial. This was difficult for her, since her testimony ensured a guilty verdict. He was sentenced to ten years. This left Rose alone on the Lockhart Ranch with 7 of her children ranging in ages from 7 to 15, plus her oldest daughter Helen's 2 small children. Helen's husband, Jeff, who was implicated in the crime, was sentenced to the penitentiary also, leaving behind a pregnant wife and 2 small children. With 9 children and 2 women living in the Lockhart Meadows house, and no source of income, life would be very difficult for the family.

Sheriff Mountjoy knew the family was in dire straits, but it took a while for him to accept what he knew he had to do. When the children saw him coming down the road they were afraid. They knew he had taken their father away. What would be next? When Helen answered his knock, she asked what he wanted. He said what no one wanted to hear: "I have come to pick up the kids to take them to the welfare department." When the children heard this they were filled with fear. Fourteen year old Burton ran for the hills, and the other children tried to hide in the house. Burton was caught and subsequently sent to the boy's reform school in Miles City. All the other children were placed in the Sheriff's car with their belongings. Both women were crying and sobbing, not wanting their children gone, yet knowing they had little choice.

Sheriff Mountjoy drove the eight children to the Boulder Courthouse where they were taken before Judge Bennett. The Judge decreed that they be taken to Twin Bridges Orphanage as that was the only available place for them. They were delivered to the orphanage on July 11, 1926, according to the Twin Bridges Orphanage intake records. My mother Alice (age 15) was one of these children. For four years she lived, worked in the infirmary, played, and attended school at the orphanage and said it was the best four years of her childhood. Once she even won a spelling bee, which made her very proud.

Children could only stay in the orphanage until they turned 18, so on June 17, 1930, her 18th birthday, she was released from the orphanage. She was given an orphanage dress, shoes, and about \$18.00 for working in the hospital, and was expected to make her way in the world. Fortunately about the same

time Elmer was released from prison on the unexpected order of a Judge. Rose, Elmer and Alice then took up residence in Butte, Montana. In an effort to get their family back together, they petitioned the court for the return of their other children from the orphanage, and this was granted. Now they could resume their lives together. In the end they were married 60 years and had 14 children.

Meanwhile, Helen divorced Jeff (the convict) and married Roy. They went to Twin Bridges to get her 2 children, but found the baby, Jeff, had been adopted from the Orphanage. They took Lucille with them, went to New Mexico and began a new life. Lucille still is looking for her little brother Jeff. She told me that Helen had been contacted by Jeff, but mother Helen never answered or told her of Jeff's whereabouts.

Burton entered World War II. I have a picture of him with his mother in his uniform. However he disappeared from the Troop Train heading for New York that would take him overseas. No one knew of his whereabouts after this. Rumor had it that he secretly visited Rose a few times during her life time. She never mentioned his visits, but his younger brothers were aware of his visits trysts.

This is a true story, but names have been left out or changed to protect the remaining family. Also, the reasons people chose to be what they are and do certain things remain a mystery. This story is created from facts I've gleaned from records and family memories. I hope you read this story with an understanding heart of the way life was in the 1920s.



Main Building, Twin Bridges Orphanage

The Rest of the Story....,

Submitted by
Pat Darling



Superintendent's Building

Some 6,000 other children also spent part of their childhood in the Twin Bridges Orphanage during the eighty-two years it operated. Some, like Alice, found it to be the best years of their life. Others, usually the boys, experienced misery and abuse at the hands of the workers. Each experience seemed to be individual.

The Orphanage opened in 1892 because of a need for a place to care for the many children of poor families who could not afford to support their children. Some of the charges were actually orphans, coming to the home when both their parents had died. But many were placed on a temporary basis, hoping to be reunited with their families at some time. If years went by without the parents being able to take their children back, the orphanage would allow the children to be adopted against the wishes of the parents. This was a sad situation for the parents, but often the children were adopted into loving families that gave them a good life. The children often tried to keep in touch with siblings that were not adopted into the same home. Sometimes this wasn't possible, and they never saw their siblings again.

The state made great efforts to make this orphan home a complete entity in itself. On a 223 acre complex one could find a hospital, swimming pool, dairy, livestock, gardens, and an elementary school, in addition to a majestic administration buildings and dorms for the staff. It provided cottages for the different sexes, divided by age groups. Each child had a number. The number was used extensively to refer to that child and his belongings. Each cottage was under the charge of a Matron. The nursery building was the most extensive cottage. A look at the burials in the orphanage section of Twin Bridges Cemetery shows frequent deaths of children under the age of two. It is hard to reconcile the cause for this. In spite of having a hospital on the grounds, they still lost many of the infants, some being only one day old.

The goal of the orphanage was to teach true work ethics and lifelong skills to the orphans to prepare them for life on their own when they left the home by the age of age 17 or 18. Many of the orphans who wrote or spoke of their experience in the home agree that this goal was successful. They may not have enjoyed the strict, sometimes miserable experiences, but it taught them to get along in life and to be able to cope with the problems that life often brings.

A former orphan, John Christiansen, in his book "Throw-Away Kids", wrote in chapter 14 about the

reunion held in 1995 for all the surviving orphans. He realized there was a theme in each person's account of their years in the home. "They were all survivors. They were not whiners." He goes on to explain "In the Home, we toiled long and hard in the fields. Just before I left, at the age of 11, I and another boy milked 38 cows at 5 in the morning and 5 every evening. We came out of the home with a work ethic that should be emulated by today's generation of young people." It is sad to have to learn these lessons in such a miserable way.

The introduction to the book tells more. "Those dismal times shaped our future lives and taught us valuable lessons about Life. After leaving the Home I was never afraid of hard work. We learned that hard work and imaginative enterprise helped smooth a rocky road. We all learned that honest sweat could be proudly worn - that each one of us was required to carry our own weight – that personal sacrifices should be made for the good of all."

"When I left the Orphan's home, I had a master's Degree in Hatred. Writing this book helped me in a therapeutic way, to gain closure on the bitterness of past experiences. I felt I had been robbed of my childhood. The story is an account of the cruel and impractical manner in which government institutions operate. It painfully showed what utter lack of respect some people had for little, innocent children who were treated as non-persons."

Noel Freedman wrote a diary about his years in the orphanage, published as "The Way We Were". He stated: "I grew up in an orphanage and trained to be self-sufficient, and was 'on my own' after being released at 17 years of age. I was in the Navy Reserve and on active duty for two years. Boot Camp was like being back in the orphanage – I already knew Yes Sir, No Sir, Please, Thank You: so the Navy was an easy life, with pay. I was a real estate broker for 43 years. The best advice I ever took was: Keep an open mind, attached to nothing. Be not offended by what you see, hear, taste, touch or smell. Plus: Don't get cynical."

John Christiansen tells more about the reunion. The Montana Historical Society was present at the reunion and gave many former orphans the opportunity to tell their own story. They told of many horrid events, until I wanted to cry out "No more – no more!" These stories validated what he had written in his own account of his life at the orphanage. On the tour of the campus during the reunion, memories kept flooding John's mind. He went into the rooms where they were locked up as punishment, and saw the windows painted over so you couldn't see out, and a heavy wire mesh screen covering the window. There was no door knob on the inside, and there was a huge deadbolt on the other side. Not a single happy memory came to mind. Only the tears and misery remained in his mind.

When the upcoming reunion was advertised, many orphans and relatives of orphans posted notes to bulletin boards and blogs searching for information on the home. "Sue" says her grandmother was placed there at age 5 due to financial hardships in her home. The only thing her grandmother would ever say about the home was that it was a horrible place, the living conditions were terrible, and there was a great sadness among the children. The granddaughter of "Dorothy" states her grandmother was at the home from 1936 to 1950. She wants to trace Dorothy's lineage. "I get such a sad feeling every time I go by there." "Noel" told that he had attended the reunion, and 450 former "kids" showed up. He wasn't surprised that most of the kids ended up in a solid marriage with self sufficient careers. He felt this was due to their early training. Another person wants to trace "Gertrude's" family tree. Her daughter was adopted from the orphanage at age 3 and her name was changed. She was not having any luck finding family information. "Norma" replied to an email saying when she received the information sent to her it was heart-breaking to read it. She broke down and cried when she found letters her mother and aunt had written to their father while in the orphanage, only to find out the letters were returned to the orphanage because the family had moved. Later the orphanage wanted to put the girls up for adoption because their father wasn't able to send any money. He pleaded that his children not be put up for adoption. It is not known what happened to these girls.

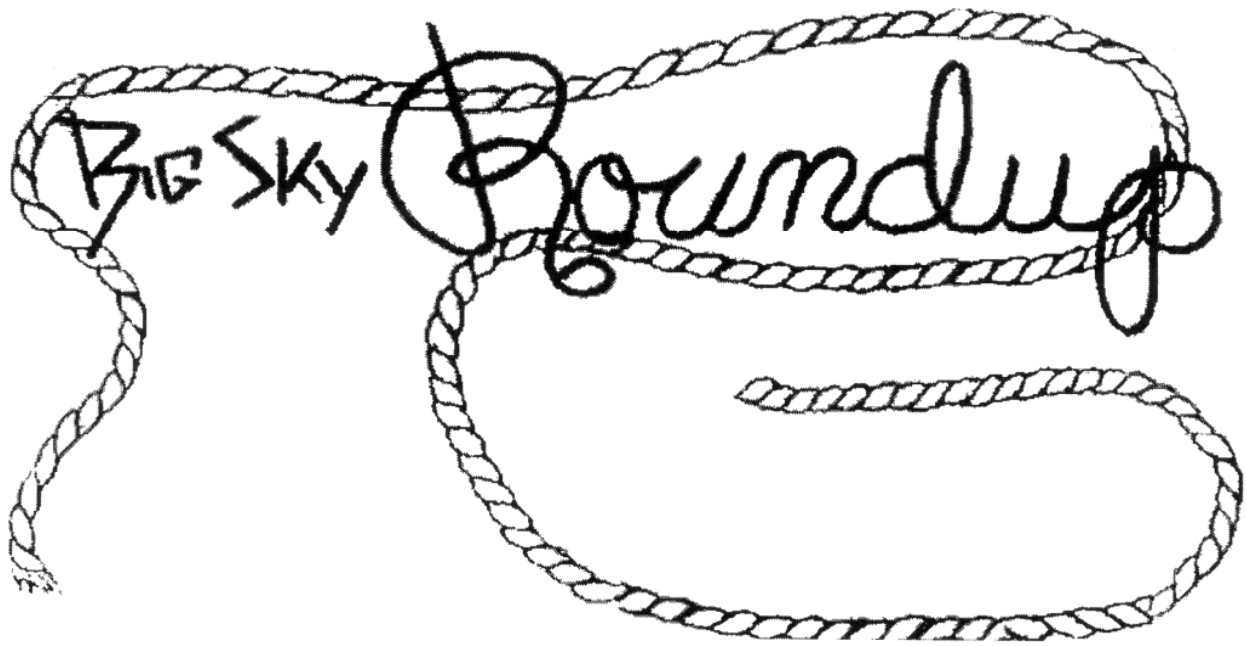
Yet another message says "My grandfather was raised during the depression. During this time it was not uncommon for families to put their children into orphanages so that they could eat and stay in warm clothing. My grandfather and his siblings were raised at the Twin Bridges Orphans Home in Montana. It is said many children died while at this orphanage because of the harsh conditions."

These tearful requests go on and on. The orphanage touched the lives of many people before it closed in 1975. Thousands of children had spent a good portion of their lives in the facility, and each had a story to tell. And so it was at the Twin Bridges Orphans Home from 1892 until the day the doors were locked forever. Today the deserted buildings stand in ruins as a heartrending reminder of days gone by. Another piece of Montana history sadly fades away.

Sources: Letter from John Christiansen to Jesse Long, July 31, 2001; Misc. Internet blogs & bulletin boards; Noel Freedman: Google Profile; Throw-Away Kids by John G. Christiansen; Twin Bridges Cemetery: Interment.net; Twin Bridges Home: T. Bridges Hist Soc.



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September 22, 23, 24, 2011