



# Big Sky Roundup

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE  
MONTANA STATE GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

**Desirée Funston**

I had two - and only two - opportunities to practice my winter driving skills this season. Both occurred on MacDonald Pass while I was on my way to visit the new Montana Heritage Center in Helena. If you have not made the trip yet, our annual conference, coming up 10-12 September, will be a wonderful introduction.

My first visit to the Heritage Center this year was to attend the Library and Archives open house in March. I got signed up for my researcher card, and I cannot wait to schedule an appointment to dig deep into MTHS's resources.

Then in early April, I had a walk-through of the event spaces with MTHS's event coordinator. I am delighted that the Lewis and Clark County Genealogical Society will host our 34<sup>th</sup> annual conference in this beautiful new venue. There is ample classroom space, additional rooms for workshops and meetings, and a lovely catering kitchen where our meals will be served from.

Planning our annual conference is always so much fun, and implementing it is even better. We are so excited to see you in Helena in September. Read on for details about our speakers and their sessions. More information is available on the conference website:

<https://montanamsgs.org/conference/>

### OFFICERS:

President: Desirée  
Funston (2023 - 2026)

Vice President for  
Programs: Stacey  
Corcino (2024-2026)

Vice President for  
Development: Julie  
Bushmaker (2025-2027)

Secretary: Dianne  
Klinski (2023 - 2027)

Treasurer: Terry Atwood  
(2013 - 2026)

Registrar: Margaret  
Kemner (2024-2027)

Newsletter Editor:  
Desirée Funston



# MSGs EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING SUMMARY

**Dianne Klinski, Secretary**

**27 March 2026, 9:00a via Google Meet**

**Board members in attendance:** Desirée Funston, Terry Atwood, Karen Huck, Stacey Corcino, Margaret Kemner, Julie Bushmaker, Dianne Klinski.

**The following reports were accepted by the Board:**

Minutes from the 7 January 2026 meeting, Vice President for Programs Report, Vice President for Development Report, Treasurer's Report, Registrar's Report and Library Report.

**Unfinished Business:**

**Membership Dues Restructuring:** Desiree presented ongoing research into making sure dues will supply sufficient funding for MSGS in the future.

**Conference Updates:** The possibility of going to an all-online registration was discussed as well as available platforms that would work best.

**New Business:**

**Strategic Planning:** Progress is being made. The possibility of bringing on an intern was discussed.

**Next Meeting :** Thursday, 9 July 2026 at 9a



## Scholarship Opportunity

Apply to attend the upcoming GRIP Genealogy Institute course, "Genealogical Organization Excellence: A Course for Group Leadership" with a cohort of six MSGS members. [Click here](#) for more information and to apply by 1 May 2026.



# LIBRARY REPORT

## Karen Huck, Librarian

MSG's library is a member of the Montana Shared Catalog. You can browse our holdings online here: [https://mtsc.ent.sirsi.net/client/en\\_US/MT-GEN/](https://mtsc.ent.sirsi.net/client/en_US/MT-GEN/) No login is required. The rotating carousel at the top of the page displays recently added items, including county history books, city directories, yearbooks and church directories that were donated and added to our collection.

I attend the Montana Shared Catalog meetings; the next one is coming up on May 8.

In the Fall of 2019 and spring of 2020, FamilySearch helped us digitize 565 of our books. Reports show that between November 2025 and February 2026, FamilySearch users viewed 1,401 pages and accessed 455 of our books online. To use the books on FamilySearch, login with your username and password, then click Search and then Catalog. If you need further assistance, feel free to email Library Karen Huck at [dkhuck@aol.com](mailto:dkhuck@aol.com).



## IN MEMORIUM

**Norma Ardeson, 9 April 1942 - 28 March 2026**

From Gallatin County Genealogical Society Vice President, Karen Maika:

"It is with broken hearts that we share with you the news that Norma Ardeson passed away early Saturday morning, March 28<sup>th</sup>. Norma has been a member of our GCGS for many years, as well as our Treasurer. A Celebration of Life and Open House was held on Norma's Birthday, April 9<sup>th</sup>, Story Mansion from 11-3 p.m."

Norma's [obituary](#) is on the Dahl Funeral & Cremation Service website.

# 2026 Annual Conference



The 34<sup>th</sup> annual MSGS Conference will be hosted by the Lewis and Clark County Genealogical Society. We will convene at the newly-constructed Montana Heritage Center in Helena, 10-12 September 2026.

The full schedule and hotel information are available on our website. Registration will open in early June.

<https://montanamsgs.org/conference>

## Conference Highlights

### **FREE pre-conference activities, Thursday, 10 September 2026**

- FREE Montana History Portal workshop
- FREE Genealogy Jam Session - Join this informal, hands-on work session. Bring your laptops and your questions; volunteers will be available to assist you.
- Dessert social and tour of MSGS's library at Helena's Lewis and Clark Library

### **A full day of learning, Friday, 11 September 2026 PLUS**

- Membership meeting and officer elections
- Banquet dinner and awards presentation

### **More learning, Saturday, 12 September 2006 PLUS**

- Raffle drawings

### **Extras**

- Book Frolic Gambler's Sale
- Door prizes
- Socializing with old friends
- Networking with new friends
- FUN!



# Speakers

**Jennifer Zinck** will present four in-person sessions on DNA research.

Jennifer Zinck is a Certified Genealogist®, Accredited Genealogist®, and Accredited Genealogist Lecturer™ with more than twenty years of genealogical research experience. She serves as a Trustee for the Board for Certification of Genealogists® (BCG), where she also chairs the BCG Webinar Committee and represents the organization to the Records Preservation and Access Coalition (RPAC). She is currently in her sixth term as President of the Connecticut Professional Genealogists Council and serves on the Board of Governors of the Connecticut Society of Genealogists. She has also been a member of the Genetic Genealogy Standards Committee, contributing to discussions surrounding best practices for the use of DNA evidence in genealogical research.



## **Jennifer's sessions:**

- After the Test: Exploring AncestryDNA Results
- Unleash the Power of DNA: Testing Family Members
- Expecting the Unexpected: Surprises in our DNA
- Connecting Cousins: Finding Living Relatives on the Internet

**Lori Samuelson** will present two virtual sessions on artificial intelligence.

Lori Samuelson is a professional genealogist, lecturer, and author based in Indiana. She is the founder of Genealogy At Heart, where she provides genealogical research, coaching, and educational presentations for family historians. Specializing in historical research methods, migration patterns, and genealogical problem solving, Lori writes and lectures regularly on research strategies and the thoughtful use of emerging technologies in genealogy.



## **Lori's sessions:**

- AI & Ancestry: Using Artificial Intelligence to Expand Your Genealogy Research
- AI as a Genealogical Research Assistant: Breaking Through Genealogical Brick Walls

**Shannon Combs-Bennett** will present two virtual sessions on lineage societies.

Shannon Combs-Bennett, QG, FSAScot, is an award-winning author who resides in Northern Virginia. From there, she writes and presents various topics across the US and internationally, from genetic genealogy to methodology techniques. Shannon is on the board of directors of the Association for Professional Genealogists and the Guild of Genealogy Speakers in addition to serving as a Trustee for the International Society for British Genealogy and Family History. She earned her Bachelor of Science in biology with an emphasis in genetics from Indiana University and her Master of Science from the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, Scotland. Shannon is researching the correlations between genealogy and lineage societies in the United States for her doctoral thesis.



**Shannon's sessions:**

- The Perfect Fit: Locating and Applying to a Lineage Society
- Proving What You Know: Documentation for Lineage Society Applications

# Anna Mae Hanson Award & Al Huntsman Award

Nominations due 31 July 2026

<https://montanamsgs.org/awards/>

## Raffle Baskets

We are soliciting donations of raffle items and baskets. Do you or your society have something fun to share? Bring it to the Ponderosa Room on Thursday, 10 September, 3-6pm. Raffle tickets will be available for \$1 each or 6 for \$5.



## Book Sale



At the Book Frolic Gambler's Sale, book prices start low and drop lower throughout the conference - but wait too long, and your favorites might be gone! Will you play it safe or risk the wait for a better deal? The sale begins at 7:30am on Friday. Opening prices are \$5 per hardcover and \$3 per paperback.

If you have items to donate to our fundraiser, please drop them off at the Ponderosa Room on Thursday, 10 September, 3-6pm. We accept items of genealogical or historical interest such as county histories, genealogy how-to guides, compilations of genealogical data, and more. Please no quarterlies or outdated material!

## Officer Elections

The following positions are up for election for the 2026-28 term:

- President
- Vice President for Programs
- Vice President for Communications
- Treasurer

Officer positions are open to all qualified members of the Montana State Genealogical Society who are Montana residents. To nominate yourself or someone else, send an email to [admin@montanamsgs.org](mailto:admin@montanamsgs.org). Officer duties are described in our bylaws: <https://montanamsgs.org/bylaws/>



# Local Society Updates

## **Butte Silver Bow Genealogy Society**

The Butte-Silver Bow Genealogy Society met in February to collaborate on member research problems and sharing of methods and resources. The March meeting was canceled at the last minute due to predictions of serious windstorms which thankfully did not materialize.

In April we were fortunate to have Aubrey Jaap, Director of the Butte-Silver Bow Archives, present a program on "The Business of Burial in Butte." This program was initially presented at the annual meeting of the Montana Historical Society last fall. Aubrey talked about the cemeteries in Butte and the burial records available at the Archives. She noted that the Archives staff leads public tours of the cemeteries in the summer. We are all looking forward to summer when we can get out and search for the long-lost family graves, whether locally or on road trips.

The group also brainstormed on possible methods for increasing awareness in the community, something a bit challenging now that traditional media is not as closely followed. We will continue to try new ways to "get the word out" and would appreciate other groups sharing their ideas with us.

-Linda Lee Holmes

## **Crazy Mountain Museum, Big Timber**

### **Preserving Roots and Stories: The New Genealogy Center at Crazy Mountain Museum**

This spring, the Crazy Mountain Museum will unveil a dedicated genealogy center that's quickly becoming a gathering place for history lovers, family researchers, and community members eager to connect with their roots. Situated in Big Timber, Montana, the museum has long been committed to preserving Sweet Grass County's past – from pioneer ranching to indigenous landscapes – and this new genealogy initiative expands that mission in meaningful ways.

#### **A Space for Discovery and Connection**

The genealogy center offers a research library and archive where visitors can explore genealogies and biographies of local families. With resources spanning photographs, documents, and historical records connected to Sweet Grass County's rich heritage, the center provides both amateurs and seasoned researchers with tools to uncover family histories. Experienced staff and volunteer genealogists are on hand to help guide visitors through everything from basic queries to complex ancestral puzzles.

## Crazy Mountain, continued

### The center also hosts a variety of learning opportunities:

Weekly genealogy classes are held most Tuesdays and Thursdays, where participants can learn research techniques, use digital tools, access online sites and share discoveries.

A lecture series and special events that bring in experts and storytellers to discuss local history, fascinating family narratives, and the latest in genealogical methods.

For those unable to visit in person, a research request service allows people to submit questions online and receive curated responses from the museum's genealogist. The first 30 minutes of assistance are offered free of charge, with additional help available by arrangement.

### A Hub for Community Memory

What makes the genealogy center special isn't just the records and reference books – it's the living stories and shared connections it fosters. Residents and visitors alike have already begun donating family artifacts, bibles, photo albums, and historical documents, enriching the museum's collections and ensuring that community memories are preserved for future generations.

Whether someone is tracing a great-grandparent's journey to Sweet Grass County, exploring the history of early homesteaders, or simply curious about the people who shaped this corner of Montana, the genealogy center offers a welcoming invitation to dig deeper into personal and local history.

### More Than History — It's Heritage

The center stands as a testament to the importance of preserving not just facts, but the stories and connections that shape identity and community. In expanding its spaces with new classrooms and archival areas – part of a larger building project set to be completed in spring 2026 – the Crazy Mountain Museum reinforces its role as a cultural anchor in Big Timber.

For locals and visitors alike, the genealogy center is more than a place to look back – it's a place to connect, reflect, and build a bridge between the past and the present.

-Kelly Odron



Starting at age 73, the IRS requires you to withdraw funds (a required minimum distribution or RMD) from certain tax-deferred retirement accounts. Donating to charity through a qualified charitable distribution is a great way to reduce the tax liability on the RMD. This charitable strategy can help manage your taxes and support the causes you care about. So talk with your financial advisor about donating to MSGS today!

## **Great Falls Genealogy Society**

Great Falls is trying out a new class/seminar program this year called 3rd Saturdays. What started out as a celebration of our country's 250th birthday has turned into a combination of classes on beginning genealogy and speakers talking about niche subject areas.

We started in January with Beginning Genealogy, February was about Census and other lists, March had Jan Thomson speaking on Indigenous Research and April will be a class on Bureau of Land Management-Government Land Office records, Montana Cadastral, and the National Archives & Records Administration.

In May our member Dave Feist will present "Who are the Germans from Russia," and in July, Burnette Batista will speak about the history of Fort Shaw. Future topics may include the history of Malmstrom Airforce Base and The History Museum.

Our FamilySearch digitizers are starting to wind down their scanning project by ending with Coroner Records. Unfortunately, FamilySearch decided not to scan Croxford Funeral Home records so GFGS decided we can do it. One of our members has generously donated an additional scanner and computer that will be dedicated to this and future digitizing projects. We are saddened these records will not be online, but we will have a copy at our library for future researchers.

We have CSEP participants working at our library. Some projects they are helping us with include indexing vertical files filling in gaps in our cemetery books, now that more information is available online.

We continue to look for ways to get our name out in the community and to let people know what great resources we have available.

-Stacey Corcino, President

## **Lewis & Clark County Genealogical Society**

Hello from Helena!

As the host society for the 2026 state conference, we've assembled a conference committee and have been making plans for September. We chose the theme "Piecing Together the Past" and had a couple of logo options created by committee members. The membership voted on their favorite and you'll see it in the conference materials and announcements.

## Lewis & Clark, continued

We've also been working on finding a great banquet speaker and planning the other details. We look forward to having everyone here, and especially for you to see the amazing new Montana Heritage Center.

For our January program, Karen Huck presented research she conducted on her husband Dennis's uncle Frank Adams Carr of Columbus who overcame the adversity of polio and had a fascinating life. It was a case study in the joy of researching collateral relatives. As member Dianne Klinski noted, "Not only did we get to hear what life was like for victims of polio during the 1930's, we learned how to find records that give deeper insight into what parts of our ancestors' lives we never thought to research."

In February we had our annual election of officers with the following voted in:  
President - Julie Walker  
Vice President - Dense Martin  
Secretary - Dianne Klinski  
Treasurer - Sandi Olsen  
Ad-hoc board member - Rita Gibson

In March Dennis Heffner presented some key information from the RootsTech 2026 conference in Salt Lake City. Among other things, he shared an amazing video by David Ouimette about the full-text search creature at FamilySearch.org. If you haven't seen it yet, it's a must watch! You can find it here:  
<https://tinyurl.com/3t99j8vh>

Wishing everyone a wonderful Spring!

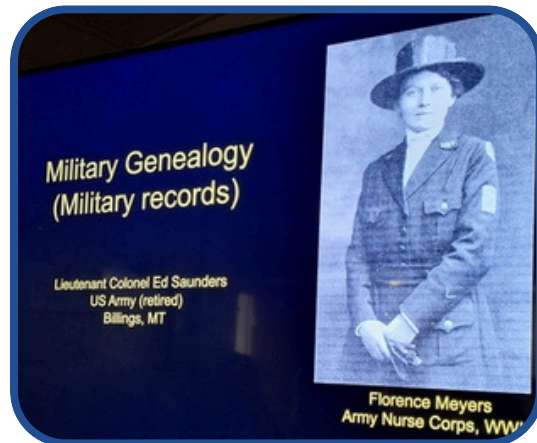
-Julie Walker, President



## Contribute to the *Big Sky Roundup*

Do you have family history stories, biographical sketches, or historical photos that you'd like to share? Send them our way! Maybe your research revealed a juicy story, or you learned how to use a great new tool. Tell us about that, too! We're always seeking fresh content for this newsletter! Send it to [editor.roundup@gmail.com](mailto:editor.roundup@gmail.com)

## Yellowstone Genealogy Forum



At our January meeting, military historian and genealogist Ed Saunders of Billings spoke about researching ancestors who have served in the U.S. military. Resources include the National Archive and Record Administration in College Park, MD, which has the great bulk of records. ([www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov)). Others are: the National Archives on the Mall in DC.; The Daughters of the American Revolution Constitutional Hall; National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, (a devastating 1973 fire destroyed or damaged millions of documents); African American records; Library of Congress American Folk Life Center Veterans History Project; and military historical centers for each branch of the armed services.

In February, Kevin Owen spoke via Zoom on "Using Artificial Intelligence to Advance Our Family History". Owen is a retired software engineer, volunteering for the Family Search Center in Boise, ID. Kevin took members on a user-friendly tour of seven AI websites that help genealogists do everything from create a research plan on a specific ancestor to restore old photos. He also provided an excellent, easy-to-understand worksheet on the topic. If your group would be interested his presentation, please contact him at: [kevinowen3@gmail.com](mailto:kevinowen3@gmail.com)

At our March meeting, we watched a video of Allison DePrey Singleton of the Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, IN, discussing how to track down information about our female ancestors. Research into women on our family trees can be hampered by name changes after marriage and a lack of legal rights preventing women from owning property.

Forum members continue to give research assistance to the public at our genealogy library at the Billings Community and Senior Center five days a week. It is the only genealogy library within 100 miles of Billings.

In addition to the library, we are responsible for an educational program each month at the BCSC. In January, Ann Hefenieder reported she had 15 people come to her talk about the Montana Constitution. In February, Sonia and Zane Jansen spoke on their trip to Australia and New Zealand for World Police and Fire Games. In March, Phillip Parker spoke on his time aboard a nuclear submarine during the Cold War. In April, Heide Reed is scheduled to discuss gardening.

Members also gave outreach programs in the community. YGF President P.J. Smith gave an Introduction to Genealogy class to Women's Connections in Billings. P. J. and Heide Reed taught genealogy classes at senior residence facilities in Billings and the surrounding area October 2025 through January 2026, which drew 73 attendees.

-Mary Pickett Parker