



Big Sky Roundup

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE
MONTANA STATE GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Desirée Funston

I hope that our members near and far stayed safe while commemorating America's 250th birthday. What special memories do you have of celebrating Independence Day? How do those memories shape and influence your current traditions around the holiday?

One of the things I enjoy most about genealogy is discovering how our own family stories connect to the larger story of our nation. The "semiquincentennial" provides a wonderful reminder that history isn't just about well-known names and famous events. It's also about the farmers, miners, lumbermen, railroaders, and countless others whose lives helped build the communities we know today. Every family tree we research, every photograph we identify, and every story we preserve helps keep those memories alive.

Thank you for your enthusiasm, your curiosity, and your commitment to ensuring these stories are passed on to future generations.

The Board and I look forward to convening with you at our 34th annual conference in September. Remember, the Early Bird registration deadline is fast approaching! Sign up by August 15 and your name will be entered in a drawing for a refund of the conference fee (up to \$130).

To guarantee conference meals, we must receive your registration by August 27th.

We look forward to seeing you in Helena!

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 MINUTES

Dianne Klinski, Secretary

9 July 2026, 9:00a via Google Meet

Call Meeting to Order – Desirée Funston, President

Desiree called the meeting to order at 9:00am

Roll Call of Officers & Committee Members – Dianne Klinski, Secretary -

Members present: Stacey Corcino, Karen Huck, Desiree Funston, Julie Bushmaker, Terry Atwood, Margaret Kemner, Fern Kauffman and Dianne Klinski. Guest: Julie Walker.

Minutes from the 27 March 2026 Meeting –

Stacey moved to accept the minutes as presented, Karen seconded. Minutes approved as presented.

Vice President for Programs Report – Stacey Corcino

Stacey is working on assembling materials and ironing out details for Conference. Julie moved to accept the VP report as presented, Terry seconded. VP Report for Programs approved as presented.

Vice President for Development Report – Julie Bushmaker

Julie gave updates on raffles/prizes/donations/gifts. She is still awaiting submissions for the Anna Mae Hanson and Al Huntsman awards which are due at the end of July. Julie has also been reaching out to different organizations to see if they would be interested in having a table at the Conference. The 2027 Conference will be hosted by the Western Montana Genealogical Society in Missoula, and the 2028 Conference will be hosted by the Butte-Silver Bow Genealogy Society in Butte.

Stacey moved to accept the report as presented, Karen seconded. VP Report for Development approved as presented.

Minutes continued page 3

BOARD MEETING MINUTES CONT'D

Treasurer's Report – Terry Atwood

Checking has \$3,625.93 and Savings has \$24,031.87. A \$1000 donation came in; general operations are looking good due to that gift. He's not received much in the way of monies from First Families/Early Settlers recently. Catering deposit for Conference has been paid as well as travel expenses for speaker Jennifer Zinck. Stacey moved to accept the report as presented, Julie seconded. Treasurer's Report approved as presented.

Registrar's Report – Margaret Kemner

There have been 30 registrations for Conference so far. Deadline for meals is 8/27. Karen moved to accept the Registrar's Report as presented, Terry seconded. Registrar's Report approved as presented.

Library Report – Karen Huck

Invoices have been rec'd for the OCLC and Montana Shared Catalog for 2027. History Day at the Capitol Rotunda was well attended, despite the weather. Karen, Mary Pitch and Dennis Heffner were on hand to answer questions and help attendees with research. Terry moved to accept the Library Report as presented, Julie Bushmaker seconded. Library Report approved as presented.

First Families & Early Settlers – Fern Kauffman

13 applications for FF/ES completed recently. Fern will be at the Conference with FF/ES books available for purchase. Karen moved to accept the FF/ES report as presented, Stacey seconded. FF/ES Report approved as presented.

Social Media – Jennifer Van Syckle

Jennifer has been making regular posts on Facebook about the upcoming Conference and filling in with previously used but still relevant posts to keep the page moving.

Newsletter – Deadline for submitting items is ~~July 15~~ July 20. (Desirée extended the deadline after the meeting.)

Unfinished Business:

- 2026 Conference – Julie Walker reported that final details on the Conference Committee list are nearly done. Instead of providing tote bags with various Conference ephemera, attendees will be able to purchase a Heritage Center bag and choose from the materials offered. The theme for table decorations is "Piecing Together the Past" using jars containing puzzle pieces. Mary Jane Bradbury will give a portrayal of Nancy Cooper Russel, wife of Charlie Russel. Jennifer Zinck has been reserved to speak at the Conference. Volunteers for the Book Frolic and registration table are still needed. Training for registration and concierge volunteers will be on Thursday 9/10 at 2:00. Julie Walker, Julie Bushmaker and Stacey Corcino will be training volunteers. The need for volunteers on Saturday will depend on how many registrants sign up for just that day.

BOARD MEETING MINUTES CONT'D

- Dues - Local Society dues will change to \$2.00/ member based on their rolls as of January 1st of each year. Bills will be issued to each Society. Individual membership will be increased from \$10 to \$15 and Family membership will increase from \$15 to \$20. More information on this change in fee structure will be announced shortly. The issue will also be discussed during the Annual Meeting at Conference. This change will go into effect January 2027. Terry made the motion to change the due structure, Margaret seconded. The motion passed.

New Business:

- Bylaws Article 5, Section 3: "All elected officers shall be residents of the State of Montana and qualified members of a Society during the term of office." There was discussion as to whether Board Members should be required to live in Montana. Presently, an individual must be a Montana resident to be on the Board; is this necessary? No changes will be made at this time, but this is something to consider changing in the future.
- Upcoming election of Officers - We will elect the following positions during the Membership Meeting:
 President (2026-2028)
 VP for Programs (2026-2028)
 VP for Communications (2026-2027; position was created in 2025 and has not been filled. If filled this year, the initial term will be one year, then up for election for two years in 2027.)
 Treasurer (2026-2028; Terry Atwood has self-nominated)
 Registrar (2026-2027, finishing out term)

Next Board meeting: Thursday, 10 September 2026, 3:30pm in the Goldfinch Room at the Montana Heritage Center.

Deadline for the next Roundup is 20 July 2026.

Stacey moved to adjourn the meeting, Karen seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 9:58 am.



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

2026 Annual Conference



The 34th 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 is open now! <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 2026 PLUS

- Raffle drawings

Extras

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



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 this year:

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

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. Officer duties are described in our bylaws: <https://montanamsgs.org/bylaws/>



Local Society Updates

Butte Silver Bow Genealogy Society

At our May meeting, Julie Bushmaker presented the newly released 1926 Irish census to the Butte-Silver Bow Genealogy Society. She discussed the information contained, and how to access and search the records. Following that, members had time to explore the Butte-Silver Bow Archive collections and do research with fellow member assistance. Many of our members are Archives volunteers with a lot of knowledge about the available records.

In June, as we do every other month, we worked collaboratively on member questions and research problems, devoting a lot of the time to looking at available records for a Dowling family in New York. All of us find these work sessions extremely valuable, as researching someone else's family inevitably gives us some new ideas on what to do with our own research.

At our July meeting, in keeping with our celebration of America's 250th birthday, JoAnn Piazzola presented a program on the Mayflower, the founding of Plymouth colony, and the Mayflower Society.

Our August plans are for a summer get together at president Ann Monaghan's house, where we will share good food and company, and of course family stories. And of course, everyone is looking forward to making the trip to Helena in September for what looks to be a wonderful state meeting.

Linda Lee Holmes, Butte-Silver Bow Genealogy Society Liaison



Anna Mae Hanson Award & Al Huntsman Award

Nominations due 31 July 2026
<https://montanamsgs.org/awards/>

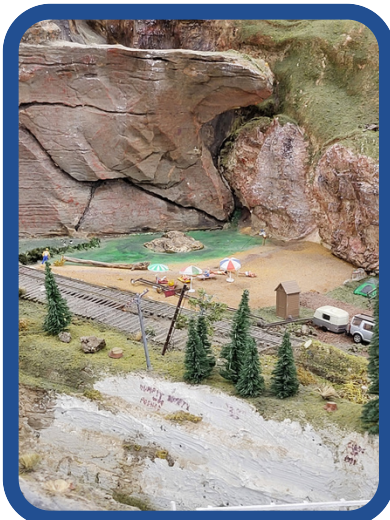
Great Falls Genealogy Society

GFGS has been busy the last couple of months with some field trips. The first one was in June with a behind the scenes at The History Museum. It was awe-inspiring to see the collection they have that is open to research. We saw everything from clothing, objects and of course those precious documents we all look forward to finding.



In July we had a member-only talk and tour of the Montana Museum of Railroad History located at the Montana State Fairgrounds. If you have been and walked through the very large model train exhibit, you should know it was built by one man in Cascade. After his death his family donated it to the Railroad Club. In one day, they cut it into manageable pieces that fit in a trailer and moved it from his shop to the current location.

The tour started at 8am and they finished that evening at about 8pm. As you look closer at the exhibit you will find unique little people and events, think "Where's Waldo."



On August 15 we will have our next installment of our 3rd Saturdays Programs with Troy Hallsell from Malmstrom AFB speaking about the history of the base and the ICBM mission.

Our Family Search digitizers will be ending their project towards the end of summer, and it will be sad to see them go. But they have done some tremendous work while they have been here.

GFGS has started a project with Croxford's Funeral Home. We are scanning their funeral records for both our library and providing them with a copy of our scans. So far, we are about to 1936.

Stacey Corcino, GFGS President

Lewis & Clark County Genealogical Society

Hello from Helena!

On June 27th, some of our members participated in Montana's History Fest with a genealogy table at the Capitol rotunda. We shared examples of reference books, pedigree charts, researching websites, and example family histories and promoted use of our genealogical library. We also displayed articles our members wrote about their Revolutionary War ancestors and one member was dressed in period clothing.

Our conference committee continues making final plans for the State Conference that we are hosting in September. We look forward to having everyone here, and hope to see you at the Thursday evening social so we can take you on a tour of our genealogical library and hear about your research interests.

In lieu of our April meeting, we toured the Montana Heritage Center's library and archives. We learned about the new rules that have been implemented to reduce the potential for document damage and theft. We were able to view several historical documents staff had pulled for our tour and learned a bit of history while we were at it.

For our May program, author Olivia Hildahl and her daughter, Sonja Mongar (writer and educator), joined us virtually to discuss the process for making Olivia's first book, *Take It as It Comes, A Montana Oral History*. Olivia started collecting pictures and reminiscing in 1978. She interviewed her parents and other family members. The result was 200+ pages she compiled into notebooks for her children. Sonja rediscovered the notebooks years later and said the stories needed to be published because they were an important part of history. Sonja outlined how to approach writing and publishing a book.

In June, Dodie and Dennis Heffner presented a Hands on Exploration of FamilySearch, Family Tree Maker, and Ancestry. This included demonstrations of Family Search's experimental labs, improvements to the person change log, simple sentence search feature for records not yet indexed, and searching all family trees that are outside of the main FamilySearch tree. Dennis shared how someone can split a family tree in Family Tree Maker (and the pros and cons for splitting a tree). All attendees benefited from their helpful tips for these various genealogical tools.

Have a safe and fun summer!

Denise Martin, LCCGS Vice President

Yellowstone Genealogy Forum

At our April meeting, we had an interesting program on researching ancestors who may have been institutionalized in mental facilities or prisons. We watched a video "Hidden in the Halls and Behind the Walls" by Ann Wead Kimbrough of Good Genes Genealogy Services. She advises genealogists to be gentle with themselves when researching such ancestors, particularly if they may have been incarcerated in a prison.

Another short video from Ancestral Findings.com about the 1880 U.S. Census noted that for the first time more details about residents were enumerated, including medical conditions and relations to head of the household.

Forum members continue to help the public at our genealogy library five days a week at the Billings Community and Senior Center, 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 April, YGF member Heide Reed presented a program on gardening. In May, we hosted the Billings Golden K Kiwanis program about its support for a Ugandan orphanage. In May, we elected officers: Diane Ascherman, President; Jennye Broderick, Corresponding Secretary; Mary Parker, Recording Secretary; Laura Haefer, and Treasurer; Patricia Marchington, Program Coordinator.

YGF has had many notable leaders over the 49 years of our existence, but the tenure of departing president P.J. Smith has been particularly illustrious. Not only was she president for 16 years, she spent countless more hours helping the public with genealogy research, including teaching genealogy classes and researching Billings Cemetery records to update Find a Grave information. Her expertise in computers brought members to our meetings via Zoom.

P.J. ushered us through a devastating boot from our Genealogy Library at the Billings Public Library. She worked with our Librarian Irene Nelson to move our Library to the Billings Community and Senior Center and find homes for our 3,000 books and documents.

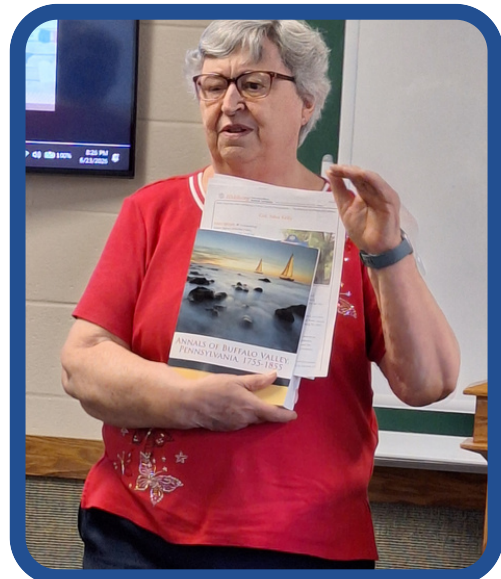
Shawna Valentine, another member who has given many years of service to local and state genealogy organizations, also recently stepped down as our membership chair.

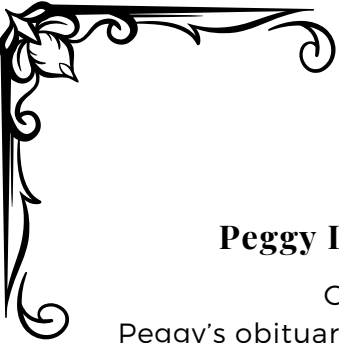
Thank you P.J. and Shawna!

In anticipation of the 250th Anniversary of the United States, Forum members at our June meeting reported on ancestors who fought in the Revolutionary War. Patricia Marchington passed out a helpful list of online resources for ancestors' wartime service.

Mary Pickett Parker, YGF Recording Secretary

At our June meeting, YGF member Sue Keene talked about her American Revolutionary War ancestor, Col. John Kelly, who crossed the Delaware with Washington's forces in 1776.





IN MEMORIUM



Peggy Lee Biekert, 4 April 1942 - 25 May 2026

Gallatin County Genealogical Society
Peggy's [obituary](#) is on the Dokken Nelson Funeral Service website.

Carol C. Elliott, 30 April 1950 - 5 June 2026

Gallatin County Genealogical Society
Carol's [obituary](#) is on the Dokken Nelson Funeral Service website.

Margery Johnsten, 14 June 1942 - 28 March 2026

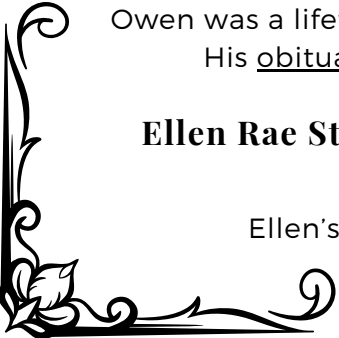
Great Falls Genealogy Society
Margery's [obituary](#) is available through Legacy.com.

Owen Robinson, 11 August 1944 - 20 June 2026

Owen was a lifetime member of the Great Falls Genealogy Society.
His [obituary](#) is on the Schnider Funeral Home website.

Ellen Rae Stocks Thiel, 27 May 1939 - 12 February 2026

Jefferson County Genealogy Society
Ellen's [obituary](#) is available through Legacy.com.





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!