

# The Wagon Tongue

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Madison Valley History Association

October 2015

website: [www.madisonvalleyhistoryassociation.org](http://www.madisonvalleyhistoryassociation.org)

Visit MVHA on Facebook: "Madison Valley History Association"

Our mission is to develop a museum to house and preserve collections of artifacts, tapes, photographs and stories of historical importance to the Madison Valley and interpret them through display and education.

**From the Wagon Seat:** Summer's gone, but you would hardly know it on Breezy Bench up North Meadow Creek, since we had our first frost on October 3 and not enough cold yet to curl the leaves of the flowers. Well, frost or not, history wends on. And the Madison Valley History Association has had quite a good summer.

Members had an opportunity for field trips to the "ghost town" of Ruby, Montana, in July and to the Madison Power Plant in August. Ruby is an interesting story because during a couple of decades on either side of 1900 it was the hometown to around 500 people who either worked on the Alder Creek dredges or provided services to those who did. The Madison Power plant was also an interesting field trip because it and the lake formed by the dam has been part of the Valley since it was built to provide power for the dredges on Alder Creek and then to augment other power sources for the mines in Butte. In September, members heard Tom Donovan speak about research he has done for his book "Hanging Around Big Sky." All of these events were very successful. The summer has been successful for the history museum, which closed its doors for the winter on September 14. We had visitors this summer from every part of the United States and the rest of the world. All seemed impressed with what they saw.

The MVHA board continues to work on constructing another building to store and display some of the many artifacts we have. But there have been some 'glitches.' It is a rocky place out there on the VC hill, and you can't get posts deep enough for a pole barn, which was our first plan. We are hopeful the change does not increase budget requirements significantly.

**Thanks to all Madison Valley History Association Volunteers** Everyone who makes the Madison Valley History Association activities possible is a volunteer. From the board members to the greeters at the Museum, and this organization would not function without members who serve by taking time from other things they would like to do to contribute to MVHA. If these volunteers are like me, they get great satisfaction out of helping make things work. But, I still think we need to thank them.

So. Thanks to Mona Durham and Vicky Gordon for calling members to let them know about our field trips and lectures. Thanks also to Liz Applegate for all the service she provides, including designing our flyers and much of our other printed material.

And thanks to all the 63 volunteers who took a few hours out of their time this summer to greet visitors at the Museum. Especially, thanks to Kevin Brenneke and Jynean Skank for maintaining a schedule and asking members to fill it. I am not aware of any scheduled day that the museum did not open.

The selfless service of these individuals is part of what makes the MVHA as successful as it is. Thank you. Of course for the MVHA to continue to improve and be successful, we need more people willing to serve. One creative mind tells one story. Twenty creates a culture. What can you contribute to the MVHA in service to your community? Your Wagon Master, Lee Robison

**History Trivia** "Montana" comes from the Latin and Spanish word for Mountainous.

Montana is the 4th most geologically active state behind Alaska, California and Hawaii.

Montana has seven Indian reservations, covering 13,055 sq. miles or about 9% of Montana land.

Grasshopper Creek was the first major gold strike in Montana resulting in Bannack, the first territorial capital.

When Montana was declared a state in 1889, 15% of the residents had been born in the state.

There are more than 60 ghost towns around the state of Montana. (trivia from Montana Trivia by Janet Spencer)

**Welcome to Membership** The following have joined since the July issue. If you know any of these new members or if they live near you, please invite them to attend the next MVHA meeting and welcome them aboard. Kay Frisbee gave a great gift of memberships to the Madison Valley History Assoc. to her sons. Think of this for your family as birthdays and other gift giving times occur. Give a gift of Madison Valley History!

**Reinoehl, Marie E. (I)**

2750 154th Ave. S. E.

Amenia, North Dakota 58004

**Wasmann, Janie McMillin (I)** 684-5677

P.O. Box 363

Twin Bridges, Mt 59754

**Membership update** Any outstanding 2015 memberships are now due. Almost all of you have taken care of business and the MVHA has received your membership. Just check your address label on the envelop and you can easily tell if your membership is paid or which month you are due. Your membership is good for a full year from the month you purchase it and you are not penalized for submitting early. If your 2015 membership is due during October, November or December or if you are past due, you will find a membership renewal form included with this issue. Memberships are \$5.00 for students, \$10.00 for Individual, \$15.00 for Families, \$50.00 for Businesses, \$100.00 for Patrons and \$500 or more for Benefactor. If you are inviting someone to join or if you want to purchase your membership before it is due, just write name, mailing address and type of membership on a slip of paper and mail with membership fee to MVHA at P. O Box 474, Ennis, MT 59729.

The MVHA Board of Directors appreciates all memberships that are purchased and your support as this allows them to have funds to continue the work of developing a museum in the Madison Valley. If anyone needs a ride to a meeting and program, call 682-5780 and a ride will be arranged for you.

#### **Member News**

Longtime history member, **Dr. Jeff Safford**, was honored in Bozeman in August for the Prime Award for folks over 65 for their accomplishments, talents, and contributions to Southwest Montana. Dr Jeff has been a speaker for our history programs and has provided articles for the Wagon Tongue on the Hot Spring mining area in North and South Meadow Creek. Congratulations, Dr. Jeff.

**Otis and Jo Thompson**, long time MVHA members and Otis is MVHA board member, attended the 121st annual Sons and Daughters of the Montana Pioneers held in Ennis Aug. 7th and 8th. Otis received a nice donation from the Society for our history association. Thanks, Otis for representing MVHA.

**Dottie Fossel** was honored in the Volunteer 2

Spotlight in a recent Madisonian. Dottie is a very active history member as well as chairperson of the Madison Valley Medical Center Board of Trustees, Madison Valley Woman's Club and founding member and cochairman of the Jack Creek Preserve.

**Les Gilman**, although not a member of MVHA, and who gave the MVHA a tour and history of Ruby was also a featured volunteer in the Madisonian.

**Dave and Jerry Wing** had a big event in their lives this summer as their son, Bert Lower, married Jody Lynn McCurry. The newlyweds are making their home in Harrison.

**Anita Ames** was featured volunteer in the Madisonian. She gives back to the community by being a senior companion for the last 14 years, delivering meals for Meals on Wheels and volunteering at the food bank.

**First Madison Valley Bank**, a benefactor for the MVHA, celebrated 50 years of business in the Madison Valley with a luncheon for the community on August 22. Peter and Jinny Combs, long time MVHA members up until their respective passings, opened the bank in 1965. the 50 year celebration of the bank was the featured *Lifestyle in the July 30, 2015 edition of the Madisonian*.

**Hal Pasley**, an honorary MVHA member, will celebrate his 105th birthday on Nov. 12, 2015. Hal is very determined to be part of the Madison Valley history for a long time! Hal is a valuable resource for our history information and has solved many of our history questions. Hal was featured in the [Madisonian's Lifestyle page for September 3, 2015](#).

**Devona Owens**, MVHA board member and secretary, had a knee replacement surgery in September. She is doing physical therapy now and is recovering very nicely.

Editor's note: Member news of our members is welcomed. The editor finds as many news items as possible by visiting with members and reading local newspapers but I am sure some are missed. Please get any story or item to the editor. History and stories are being made every day.\_\_\_\_\_

#### **Memories**

**Avis Mae Grauman** passed away on January 27, 2015. She was born on May 25, 1931 to Joel C. "Clifford" and Irene Goodwin. Due to a family tragedy, she was raised by grandparents, Solomon "Reid" and Mae Pasley on the family farm in Jeffers. She went to school in Ennis and graduated from high school in 1949. After graduation, she married Hiram "Tom" Grauman and they moved to Whitehall and bought the Jefferson Valley Grain and Feed Store from Tom's parents in 1950. From there they moved to Soap Lake, Wash and ran a hardware store and in 2004 they moved back to Montana and settled in Missoula.

**Arlene Angeline (Schappert) Brown** passed away on June 29, 2015 at the Madison (continued pg 3)

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Valley Manor in Ennis. Arlene was born in Rockville, Minn. From there she was working at a cafe in San Francisco, CA and met a handsome sailor, Harold Wesley Brown and they were married in April, 1946. Harold then enlisted in the Army and they traveled the world in his Army career. In 2002, the Browns moved to Ennis where they became involved in volunteer work.

Arlene volunteered for the Madison Valley Woman's Club's Nearly New Shoppe. She worked in the back room..called the Black Hole and then the Treasure Room. She worked very efficiently and quickly and we called her our "Energizer Bunny". She could work circles around women much younger than she was and kept everyone on their toes.

**Lyman "Leon" Obernolte** passed away August 5, 2015. He was born in Loma Linda, Calif. to Lyman and Ethyl Obernolte. Leon and his wife, Eileen, retired to Ennis and became involved in the community. After Leon's illness started, he spent his last years at Generations.

**Isabelle Jeffers Harstad** passed away on August 13, 2015 in Great Falls, MT. Isabelle Eleanor Jeffers Harstad was born in Battle Creek, Michigan, in 1918 to Mary Isabelle (Belle) Jeffers and Austin Pierpont (Jeff) Jeffers. Austin was the youngest son of Myron D. Jeffers and Florence Ellen Switzer Jeffers, two of the earliest pioneers in Madison County.

After Austin returned from fighting in Russia as part of an alliance force just after the end of World War I, the family came back to Madison County and homesteaded on the Fan Mountain bench. Isabelle and her younger sister Virginia attended the one room school at Jack Creek; they raced with the Hoag and Hayden boys when no one was watching. During blizzards, she would stay in Jeffers with her Grandma Jeffers, a dignified lady who was always kind to her. When she reached high school age, Isabelle went to St. Agnes in Albany, New York, near the home of Belle's parents.

Isabelle was a sensitive and introverted child. She liked being on the ranch, but she really loved the more civilized, predictable life of Albany. She and her grandfather, Alan Gilmour, would go to movies and plays together, and she always loved Broadway plays. She felt like the country mouse with her eastern classmates, and watched carefully to learn how to fit in. She was reserved, and developed a kind of dignified manner which would relax when she got to know people. Her formality was at odds with her equally strong sense of humor and love of fun, so she could be quite different in

different circumstances, depending on how comfortable she felt with those around her.

Always a bright and curious girl, Isabelle was raised in a family that valued education, so she came back to Montana for college and graduated from the University of Montana with a major in Spanish. One of her professors, Mike Mansfield, became a friend, and they kept in contact over the years. She read a great deal and was interested in new ideas which she liked to discuss with others.

After college, Isabelle came back to Ennis and worked in her mother's store, the Valley Trading Post. She met Duff Harstad who was teaching at the high school, and they married in 1942. Duff was in the Army during World War II, and they moved from post to post, always a challenge for such a shy Montana girl. After the war, they settled in Bozeman, where Duff taught music in the elementary schools. They had two daughters, Virginia (Ginger) and Ann.

Isabelle was active in Gray Ladies at Bozeman Deaconess Hospital and Daughters of the King at St. Luke's Episcopal Church. She contributed to the church bazaar each year by making beautiful crafts which took a great deal of time and care. She had a well-developed aesthetic sense, and appreciated art and music. Her home always reflected her artistic approach to life.

When Duff went back into active duty in the Army in 1961, Isabelle was faced with making a home in a new place again and again. She learned to cope with the hierarchy and rapid change of military life, and soon found that she would encounter friends from previous posts at her new home. She kept many friendships over the decades.

In 1978, Duff and Isabelle retired to Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, where they were active in their church and had a wide circle of friends. As always, there were many gatherings at their home, and much laughter. One example of Isabelle's sense of humor occurred when there was a houseful of family for Thanksgiving weekend. The seven adults and six children were around the table playing cards when Duff told Isabelle that she did not have a good poker face. She disappeared and came back wearing Duff's balaclava with only her eyes visible and sat down as though nothing were unusual. She could laugh at her own expense, and that quality put others at ease.

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“extras” and “gonabees” lived because rent and other things were less than in Hollywood and yet close to the studios.

I enjoyed working for Wes and his Dad as I was my own boss as long as I kept the produce rack in shape and the shelves full. Wes's Dad was old and had a stool at the counter and cash register to take the money so I could keep up with the stocking of the shelves. Wes was not there much so I ended up doing the ordering and cleaning also. Wes had a small metal airplane. I forget its name (Luscome??) and would take me flying when it wasn't too busy but he used to dive down at boat fishermen and pull up which would allow the plane to turn upside down for a second or so. I thought it was a lifetime and I mean MINE!

Entertainment was also accessible and I was susceptible, so I decided it was time for me to get out of there. That was the best decision I've ever made.

In 1941 my sister, Roberta, and I decided to get out of the city and go to Montana and see our cousins. Their ranch was 27 miles South of Ennis and operated by our cousin, Bill and Catherine Armitage.

The ranch was first homesteaded by our father, Rommel in around 1910, while he was working for Switzers ranch in Jeffers and he also had a jewelry repair shop in Jeffers. In those days you could apply to to the government for a 160 acre homestead by planting trees and increasing the productivity of the land. My dad's brother, George, then came out from Helena and applied for another 160 acres homestead next to Dad's which was a good start in the ranching business. My Dad soon sold out to George and moved to Yakima, Washington and later moved to Redlands, Calif. where he worked for the Brookside Dairy and bought some land in San Timoteo Canyon where I was raised. Uncle George and Bill eventually ended up with around 6,500 acres that extended from the U.S. Forest Service mountain lands to the Madison River.

Bill and Catherine had just gotten married before Roberta and I reached Montana. The neighbors decided to give them a chevarie party that amounted to all of them coming up to the house after dark and start honking and hollering to get them out of bed and then we all had a good potluck meal. That is where I met Grace Hippe at Mildred Kirby's insistence, as they were

neighbors to Bill and Catherine.

I started working for Bill as soon as possible after we arrived in Montana. I was offered to stay in the bunk house and I thought that would be fine but that was another experience as the sheets were so dirty and “junk” all over that I had to clean it up before I could sit down. The resident was suppose to keep his abode clean and do his own washing, but evidently he didn't. I stayed upstairs in the main house until I got the bunkhouse cleaned up a little. The school house, where my mother taught when she first came to the Madison Valley, was converted into a hired man's home. The man, wife and small baby lived there and were very nice people. He played the guitar and after work if it was not too late, I would go over to his house to visit and sing until it was time for me to go to bed. I got up early to go to breakfast and work and I needed my rest.

I believe Roberta and I arrived in Montana around the first of June 1941. My first job was cutting alfalfa hay for Bill. One thing I learned about Montana was the weather. If it was a beautiful morning, I would take my rain coat as I knew it would rain in the afternoon. If it was raining in the morning, I knew I would work outside in the afternoon.

I was lucky to get Grace to marry me on October 9, 1941. We went all the way to Butte (75 miles) for our honeymoon.

I was still working for Bill Armitage when I got my “GREETINGS” notice from the draft board in Hemet, California.

This was in the fall. The haying and harvesting was over at the Armitage ranch, so I went to work for Mr. Hippe. That is when I got my experience herding sheep, for 1/2 day. Most boring job I ever had! In November 1942, Grace and I headed towards California. We stopped in Layton, Utah to look for work as I didn't have to report to the draft board until later. I applied at Hill Field Air Base and was told they couldn't hire me because I would be going into the service soon. I agreed with them but also told them that we couldn't starve while waiting to go into the Army. I was hired to make crates for shipping objects overseas and sure enough it wasn't long before I was called to report to the Draft board in Hemet. From Hemet they bused us to San Pedro, California where I got my first experience of Army life. (Jess Armitage History to be continued in January, 2016 issue as Jess becomes an Army man.)

