

# The Wagon Tongue

Volume 17 issue 2

Madison Valley History Association

April 2019

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** I guess it is spring. What a late winter with snow, cold and gorge ice. The flowers and grass will be super this year. With spring comes the time for the MVHA to get to work at the museum.

On June 1, 2019 the MVHA will hold the annual meeting along with a potluck dinner. At the annual meeting the MVHA will approve a budget and elect new directors to the board. This year there are 3 positions open. Otis Thompson has agreed to run again but John Gecho and Lee Robison have retired. MVHA need to replace those two and John and Lee are thanked for their contributions and years of service.

Two members need to step up to be directors and help the MVHA continue their mission. Just let a current director know that you would like to join the board. MVHA needs our members to step up and help out.

During May we will start cleaning the museum and setting up new displays. Mona Durham will be the scheduler and you can let her know which days you would be willing to volunteer. Sign up for a day or two. Members are needed at the museum during the hours the museum is open. It is fun, a great way to meet new people and a great way to learn additional history of your valley.

Several tentative programs are planned for summer. There is no scheduled meeting for May. The annual meeting will be held June 1 with potluck and an auction. Bring something that you can donate for the auction. July's program planned is a field trip to the Revenue mine area. In August, MVHA will attend the celebrations for the 60th anniversary of the earth quake. For September, MVHA is planning a history of the golf course with talks by several people.

Remember, MVHA is always looking for ideas for programs, for folks willing to give the programs or even ideas for speakers which we can bring in from outside the area.

Keep the Wagons Rolling, your Wagon Master, Larry Love

Don't Mess with Ennis, MT! John Edmonson, one of the horse thieves, asked Mr. Ennis, "What were you fellows following us for, anyway? Did you think we had some of YOUR horses?" Mr. Ennis, his face set in hard lines, replied, "If you are horse thieves you would steal horses from me as quick as you would from anyone else." Thus was exhibited the pioneer spirit of our ancestors which made Montana a great state! In 1884, or close to that time, Walter and Tim Switzer were riding for cattle close to the old Sawtell place near Henry's Lake, Idaho. Suddenly they met five men armed to the teeth with rifles and six-shooters, and driving about 25 head of horses. The leader of the men engaged the Switzers in conversation and inquired about food and accommodations. Both Switzers noticed a well-marked horse in the bunch, belonging to Harry Thompson of the Madison Valley. The Switzers wisely didn't say anything as they recognized the leader of the men was Con Murphy, famous horse thief, badman and crack shot. Recognition of a stolen horse could have brought instant death. About two days later, a posse from Ennis came through on the trail of the outlaws. After meeting the Switzers, they went on in hot pursuit. Information was exchanged and the posse proceeded south to Rexburg, ID, where the gang was spending the night at the house of Brigham Ricks, under the guise of law-abiding citizens. The posse had managed to contact Ricks the night before and developed a plan whereby he would tell the gang that breakfast would be served in his brother's house across the street. The posse men were stationed at strategic points providing a view between the houses. Con Murphy and his crew started for breakfast and were commanded to throw up their hands. They went for their guns instead and a firefight began. The posse was unscathed but George Munn, a member of the gang, suffered a fatal wound. (He is buried in the Rexburg cemetery.) Con Murphy and the rest of the gang surrendered and were returned to Helena to face trial. Witnesses at the trial of Con Murphy and John and Harry Edmonson from the posse were: William Ennis, George Thexton, Theodore Wilkins, John Brice, George Thorpe and Ben Burns. Later other witnesses from the Madison were called; Richard Coad, William Wagner, Charles Anceny and George Hadzor. Con Murphy escaped from the Helena jail and was believed to have committed other crimes. He was eventually hung by the Vigilantes in the East Helena area. Summarized by Duane Thexton from chapters 2 & 3 of Seventy Years a Cowboy by Philip S. Long, Cypress Books, Billings, MT; Copyright 1976. From the Spring issue of the *Pick and Shovel* newsletter for the Sons and Daughters of Montana Pioneers. Otis Thompson provided the issue and suggested this article. Thanks, Otis

**Membership:** New members since January 2019. MVHA thanks the following for joining and for their support.

**Carolyn Johnson (I)** Ennis, MT 59729

**Membership update** Just check your address label on the envelope 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 2019 membership is due during April, May, or June or if you are past due, you will find a membership renewal form included with this issue. Memberships are now \$10.00 for students, \$15.00 for Individual, \$20.00 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.

Thank you to all renewing members who have generously submitted your renewal memberships. The MVHA Board of Directors appreciates all memberships that are purchased and your support as this allows them to have funds and membership to continue the work of developing a museum in the Madison Valley and arranging programs for the community.

If anyone needs a ride to a meeting or program, call 682-5780 and a ride will be arranged for you.

### **Member News**

**Virginia Black** recently celebrated her 90th birthday and with parties at Lion's Club and Nearly New and she is ready for many more years. Happy Birthday, Virginia.

**Bobby Foreman** suffered a stroke a month or two ago and now resides in Bozeman.

### **Memories**

**Jerry Thomas Churchwell** passed away on February 3, 2019. He was born January 3, 1943 in Spokane, Wash to Thomas Jefferson and Margaret Pearl Peterson Churchwell. He grew up in Phillipsburg , MT, graduated from Phillipsburg High School and started his college career at MSU. He served in the Navy during the Vietnam war. He returned home to Phillipsburg in 1969 where he met Lanelle Garoutte and they were married August 23, 1969. They moved to Dillon where he completed his teaching degree. He worked as a teacher and also worked in mining and logging eventually returning to teaching in Ennis, MT. He was a jack of all trades as he taught calculus, trigonometry, physics, chemistry, biology, business, math and computer programming before he retired in 2010.

**Theodore Edmonds Gildred** passed away on Jan. 3, 2019 at his home in Ennis, MT. Ted was born in 1935 in Mexico City, Mexico to an American developer, Theodore and Maxine Gildred. He went to school in San Diego, CA. After graduating from high school, he graduated from Leland Stanford Jr. University near Palo Alto, CA. He served in the Army. He was U.S. Ambassador to Argentina from 1986 to 1989. Ted and a partner bought the Sun Ranch beginning in the 1970s. Years later, in the early 1990s, having sold the Sun Ranch, he created a ranch community, now called Sun Ranch West, across the Madison River on acreage he had purchased shortly after buying the Sun Ranch. He and his wife, Heidi, helped fund the development of the Madison Medical Center.

**Bobby Ruth Smith Bjork** passed away on Jan. 13, 2019. She was born Feb. 28, 1927 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma to Robert Gus and Almira Rebecka Nichols Smith. She graduated from high school in 1943 and graduated from University of Oklahoma in 1947 where she majored in Radio Speech. While working her first job in Chicago, she met and married her husband, Ted Bjork on Sept. 18, 1948. Careers took them to Wisconsin, Memphis, Tennessee and Birmingham, Alabama. In 1979 Bobby and Ted made a major life change and purchased the El Western Resort in Ennis. Throughout her life, Bobby gave thousands of hours of her time volunteering. While in Ennis, her energy and service was mainly focused on the Madison Valley Chapter of the General Federation of Woman's Clubs. She was local president in 1984-1986 and 1992-1994 and started the "Ladies of the Evening Club" for younger, working women who could not attend daytime meetings. She served as State President, District IV President, Western States Region President and International Liaison Chairman for GFWC International. After Ted's passing in 1997, Bobby relocated to Bozeman and spent 13 years there before returning to Ennis for her final years.

**Laird Alexander Stabler** passed away February 8, 2019 in Ennis, Mt. He was born August 20, 1929 to Dwight Wilbur and Dorothy Alexander Stabler in Los Angeles. He lived in Mar Vista and graduated from Venice High School in 1947 and University of California, Santa Barbara where he studied business and graduated in 1951. He served in the U.S. Coast Guard, married Eloise Butler in 1952, was Vice President of marketing for Sta-Lube, divorced Eloise and in 1978 married Patrica Stabler. He was a long time MVHA member and for many years spent time between Ennis and California and after he became ill spent his final

Cont. from pg 2

years in the Madison Valley Manor until his passing. **James Wilson Clark** died peacefully at home in Seattle, WA on March 7, 2019. He was born in Ennis, MT on March 3, 1946, the 5th of eleven children of Wilson and Grace Clark. He attended school in Ennis and graduated from Ennis High School in 1964. He went on to receive his BS in Physics from Gonzaga University in Spokane, WA and his Doctorate from University of Washington, Seattle, WA. He married Elaine Weston in Seattle in 1977. Jim worked at Boeing as a software developer supporting projects such as the 787. Remaining attentive to care for the earth, he chose to walk, ride his bicycle, or use public transit in every situation possible. His sister, Frances Clark Young is a long time member of MVHA.

++++  
This winter of 2019 was a more difficult winter season than many of the recent years and brought Jack Kirby to remember this story he wrote in 2010 about February of 1949...70 years ago.

**February 1949** by Jack Kirby

In 1949 there were 13 family ranch operations south of Indian Creek, 2 west of the river and the rest scattered between the river and the Madison Range. Most did not have easy access to the highway and expected to be occasionally snowbound.

The winter of 1948-49 I spent at the Kirby Ranch, 35 miles south of Ennis, helping my dad feed cattle and with other ranch chores. The winter had been exceptionally snowy with lots of wind and since we were hauling loose hay from the haystacks on the bench, lots of snow shoveling had been necessary. Even though we were using horses and a hay rack on bobsled runners, many trips we had to shovel our way up the hill and then clear more snow on the way down.

February 4<sup>th</sup> came on a Saturday night and, of course, my presence in town was a necessity. Due to the drifting and low visibility on the Armitage Flat I did not travel home at night. I usually stayed at Cloe Paugh's home, in the basement room I had lived in during high school. That night more snow and wind closed the road at the "26 Mile Hill". This was the downgrade 26 miles from Ennis where the highway dropped down toward the Hippe Ranch at Wolf Creek. The Highway Department had a one way snow plow mounted on

a 1½ ton dump truck. There was one stationed in the valley with Joe Wood as the only employee. He operated on a 40 hour weekly schedule so anything that happened after Friday afternoon was dealt with Monday. By this Monday it would have taken much more than a simple snow plow to open the hill. Therefore, the end result was that I was snowbound in Ennis.

My dad had several unused hay stacks in the bottom meadows that were easy to access with out shoveling snow. He also had a tractor loader for clearing driveways and corrals. With milk cows, chickens, and a storeroom full of groceries they were in good shape to be snowbound at their location.

Ennis was cut off from the rest of the world in all directions. The high school ski team (Bill and Titus Bry, Aldrich Saier, and Dean Matzick) were ferried to Norris in a Montana Power "weasel" to attend the State Ski Meet Gil Hansen used cross country skis to go to Virginia City and pick up yeast for his bakery. A native of Minnesota, he was experienced in cross country skiing and had the necessary equipment. The Ennis Cafe, operated by Eleanor Bennetts, kindly allowed me, and several others, adequate credit for our meals. With no deliveries coming in, we did express concern to her citing the decline in the number of cats that frequented the areas behind the cafe.

As time passed there did not appear to be any break in the weather. The whole northern half of the country was at a standstill while wind and more snow closed highways and railroads. Harold Helt and I worked on a solution to several problems. The existing telephone line ended at the Kirby Ranch. Further south, the Olliffe family, Jerry and Winnie Womack, Andrew Schuster, the Halverson's at the Cliff Lake Post Office, Maurice Staggers, and the Neely Ranch were without communications. Ed McAtee offered us the use of horses and tack to try to reach these families. At daylight the morning of February 21, Leonard McAtee trucked us to the top of the "26 Mile Hill" with 3 horses, saddles and a pack saddle for the trip. The accumulated mail for all the families plus the Sun Ranch and

Continued from Pg 3

Shelton's were loaded unto the pack horse. As we led our horses over the drift covering the road, we noted that the snow was packed so hard that hoof prints barely showed. We followed the highway where there were bare spots, used ridges when necessary, cut several fences as needed and arrived at the Kirby Ranch at dark. By highway, the distance was 9 miles, but how many more we traveled would be hard to guess. After spending the night at the Kirby's, Harold rode on to the Cliff Lake Post Office, checked with the Womack's and Olliffe's and returned by evening. All the families were in good shape having plenty of food and other supplies. These were experienced people, used to being snowbound during various winters over the long years they had lived in the Upper Valley. The next day Harold returned to the "26 Mile Hill" leaving the other two horses with us until the road would be opened.

The snow and wind had let up after the 20<sup>th</sup> leaving clear skies and temperatures in the 20 30 range. By February 27 the Highway Department managed to open the roads as far as the mouth of the Upper Madison Canyon. They bypassed the "26 Mile Hill" by opening an old dirt road to the east, abandoned when the highway was rebuilt and paved in the early 30's. A bulldozer, operated by Bert Lockhart, spent a week clearing the big drift from the hill. When the pavement was reached the measurement from the centerline to the top of drift was over 40'.

Writing this now, in the winter of 2010, I am impressed with the equipment and accompanying manpower that keep our highways clear and relatively safe. The increase in the amount of traffic now necessitates this. In 1949 there was no paved road across Reynolds Pass and traffic via West Yellowstone was infrequent. There was no regular attempts to keep the road from Ennis to Duck Creek open before the end of World War II. School busses did not operate south of Cameron, either on the state highway or county roads. Thank you, Jack, for sharing this story

\*\*\*\*\*

As we watch the remnants of the March of 2019 melt away and as we go from the

February of 1949 to February 2019, the subject of our Madison gorge comes up and boy, did we have a big one this year.

The Wagon Tongue was able to get this article by **Toni Bowen of Arrow Real Estate** about the gorge.

*Did you know that...* **some people believe the Madison River is the only river in North America to "gorge" this way?** Just what is "the Gorge?"

This is a main source of conversation around Ennis during especially cold weather. Old timers have great stories of cows getting stuck out on ice flows in the middle of the river and the year the gorge took out the old Varney Bridge. I have been fascinated by this phenomenon ever since we moved to Ennis in 1993. It is awesome to witness and hard to understand. I interviewed some of the natives and hydrologists as well, trying to find out the cause. In the winter of 2010, Greg Lemon, Editor of The Madisonian, our local newspaper, wrote an article that pretty much describes what causes the Gorge. He said, "It happens nearly every year. When the temperatures drop near zero and the wind howls mercilessly, the Madison River begins to freeze up. Around Ennis, when the Madison River will gorge becomes big topic of conversation. "Have you seen the river?" someone will ask. "Yeah. She's froze up down by the lake," will be the reply. "Betcha she gorges in by the end of the week." If you search the Internet for Madison River gorging, amongst the stories of big trout gulping salmon flies, you're apt to find a variety of pictures and stories about ice choking the river around Ennis and pushing water out into nearby fields, over-flow sloughs and pastures. Along with the anticipation come the rumors and legends about the uniqueness of the Madison River ice jams. Some say it freezes from the bottom up because the wind blows so hard. But the fact is many rivers around southwest Montana freeze in a similar fashion, said William Locke, professor of environmental science at Montana State University in Bozeman. "It's actually pretty common," Locke said. "Take for instance the Gallatin River," he said. "The most common form of flooding on the lower Gallatin is the result of ice jamming." "However, the speed the ice on the Madison River and the depth the ice reaches are impressive," said Pat Clancy, a former fisheries biologist in Ennis. Every year Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks close the Ennis and Valley Garden Fishing Access sites because of the ice gorging. In a 1921 article in "Proceedings of the Society of Civil Engineers," written by J.C. Stevens about the ice-jamming phenomenon on the Madison River. "It has been stated by local authority that

*Continued on pg 5*



No.	Title	Date
1	Hal Pasley Part 1	13-Mar-08
2	A Brief History of Norris (Power Point presentation by Ann White)	18-Sep-08
3	Hal Pasley Part 2	20-Nov-08
4	John Lounsbury: Nez Perce in Yellowstone	2-Feb-09
5	Sandy James	21-May-09
6	Gary Forney: Discovery Men	18-Jun-09
7	Jeffrey Stafford: Sterling & Hot Springs Mining District	19-Nov-09
8	Jacqui Moratta: Women of the Bozeman Trail	21-Jan-10
9	Toyia Hatten: Montana Herbs	18-Mar-10
10	Don Black: Women of the Madison	16-Sep-10
11	Gary Forney: People vs. Thomas Cover	22-Oct-10
12	David Kelley: Hanging Trees & Soiled Doves	18-Nov-10
13	Highland Mary Mine & Indians with Joe Smithson	21-Jan-11
14	Indians with Joe Bettenger	24-Feb-11
15	Larry Kiefer and Ben Tone	4-Apr-11
16	Branding in Montana	19-May-11
17	Blacksmith Shop	23-Jul-11
18	Conversation with Ennis & Jeffers Founding Fathers Decendents	16-Sep-11
19	Don Black: Madison Valley Sports	20-Oct-11
20	Grizzly Bears in the Madison	18-Nov-11
21	Otis Thompson: Thompson Family History	25-Jan-12
22	Ringdocus (The Beast)	26-Jan-12
23	Michael Burns: Spokane and the Round Horse Barn	19-Apr-12
24	Mystery At the Museum (TV excert on the "Beast")	2-May-12
25	Moonshine on the Madison	21-Jun-12
26	Tom Satterly: History of Butte	15-Nov-12
27	Don Black: The Madison County Oil Company	18-Apr-13
28	Skiing at Jack Creek with Tom Erdie	28-Oct-14
29	Gary Forney: Dawn In El Dorado	28-Oct-14
30	Barbara Hubner Smith	31-Oct-14
31	Larry Love: Angle's Hardware	31-Oct-14
32	Dan Northway & Talc Mine	5-Dec-14
33	Montana Centennial Train 1964-1965	16-Jan-15
34	The Mainwaring family with Keith Mainwaring	19-Feb-15
35	A. M. Wells	19-Apr-15
36	Rocky Mountain Demon Wolf (from Destination America TV)	27-Apr-15
38	Corrina Christensen: Ennis Drug Store	20-Jun-15
39	Tom Donovan: Hanging Around Big Sky	16-Dec-15
40	Joe Smithson and Early Madison Valley Residents	26-Jan-16
41	Ken Robison: Yankees & Rebels on the Upper Missouri	21-Apr-16
42	Ruthann Knutson: Montana Indians Today	20-Oct-16
43	The Cowboy Legend DVD	7-Dec-16
44	Cardiac Rehab with Peggy Shumsky	19-Jan-17
45	Ken Egan and Montana 1864	27-Feb-17
46	John Gecho and History of Cameron	4-Apr-17
47	Mary Jane Bradbury as Jeanette Rankin	22-Jun-17
48	Hughie Call by Lynn Mahan	11-Oct-17
49	Jack Kirby, Esther Armitage Warburton, Don "Kid" Neville	19-Oct-17