



# The Wagon Tongue

Volume 7 Issue 3

Madison Valley History Association, Inc.  
website: [www.madisonvalleyhistoryassociation.org](http://www.madisonvalleyhistoryassociation.org)

July 2009

**From the Wagon Seat** The MVHA Board was reorganized in June after the annual meeting in May. Otis Thompson took over the reins as the Wagon Master (President), Jimmy Carlson as the Ramrod (Vice President), Duane Thexton as the Scout (Secretary), Neil Kent as the Payroll Master (Secretary), and "Smitty" Overstreet, Larry Love, and John White as the trail hands (the other Board directors.) Larry was reelected to the Board and John White is a newly elected Board director.

Keep "Smitty" Overstreet in your prayers as she recuperates from serious back problems. She is presently residing in the Madison Valley Medical Center and is always happy to have visitors.

One of my first actions as the "Wagon Master" was to appoint Larry Love chairman of the building committee. He was so instrumental in getting the old Hospital Clinic moved to our property west of Ennis that we did not want to lose the momentum that he has begun. Larry will see that this project stays on track. As you drive by our site four miles west of Ennis, you will notice that the building is setting on a new foundation and by the time you read this, there should be a new entrance to the building on the east side and a new roof on the building. Several MVHA members worked one day, cleaning up the inside of the building and tearing the old shingles off the roof. Brian Lovett Construction has been doing the contractor work. As soon as the new roof, porch, and siding are on the building, MVHA members will be called upon to begin our work with remodeling the interior. Many members have been instrumental in getting all this work done and I offer all my thanks to them. I will not mention them individually for fear of leaving someone out, but you all know who you are. Thank you.

The Fourth of July has come and gone. Your MVHA made its presence felt with a humorous entry into the parade. The J.R. Pasley family recently donated the Modern Woodmen of America's initiation goat (from about 1910) to the MVHA and we placed our resident cowboy dummy on the goat and he rode it in the parade. Thanks to Larry Love for pulling our float with his 1950 International Harvester Demonstrator tractor, and thanks to Don "Kid" Neville and Karen Shores who rode with me on the float. Don and Karen were such a hit that we won second prize in the silliest float division and third prize in the local float division. And thanks to all those who helped put this fun float together.

This year is the 50th anniversary of the Madison Earthquake and to celebrate this occasion, our August field trip will be a trip through the earthquake area on August 20. Our hosts will be Jackie and Wally Eagle of West Yellowstone. Watch the *Madisonian* and e mailings for details on this field trip.

The Madison County Economic Development Council (MCEDC) has tentatively set the date for the live auction for "Fish Out of Water" sculptures for the first weekend in September. This project will raise funds to be divided between MCEDC and local charities. The MVHA will be the recipient of one of these sales. Go to the web site [www.madcoedc.org/fish.htm](http://www.madcoedc.org/fish.htm) to check out these sculptures and to place a silent bid if you so desire. The MVHA board has been promoting this project to try to encourage someone or some business/organization to make a bid on the sculpture designated for the MVHA.

With the "beast" still attracting people to visit our museum, attendance has been quite good. The Wildlife Museum is also open where people can see most of the wildlife of Montana in a natural setting. But we do need help to keep the museum open Tuesday through Sunday 10 am to 4 pm. If you would like to help out either with a 3 hour or 6 hour shift, contact Zoe Todd at 682-4360.

If you would like to read some of our earlier *Wagon Tongue* issues, we have Volumes 4-7 posted on our web site at [www.madisonvalleyhistoryassociation.org](http://www.madisonvalleyhistoryassociation.org).

We recently received an anonymous donation of \$1000, so a big thank you to whomever you are. Remember, we need all of you to help us preserve the history of the Madison Valley. Any contributions you can make (time, materials, or money) will be greatly appreciated.

Let's keep the wagons rolling. Your Wagon Master, Otis Thompson

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**Welcome to Membership** The following have joined since the April 2009 issue. Please add to any membership list that you might be keeping for your committee work. If you need a complete list of members, please contact Shirley Love and she will print a complete updated list for you.

**Applegate, Liz and Bill (F)**

#3 Hilltop Trail 682-3288  
Ennis, MT 59729

**Brooks, Kathryn (I)**

5 Jeffers Road 682-4840  
Ennis, MT 59729

**Holland, Gene (I)**

P.O. Box 998 285-6574  
Three Forks, MT 59752

**Reints, Marlene (I)**

81 Jeffers Road 682-4380  
Ennis, MT 59729

**Membership Update**

2009 memberships have been arriving every day. Please check your address label on your issue of the Wagon Tongue and you can tell when your membership is due or if you have not purchased it yet. Your membership is good for a full year from the date that you purchased it. The Board of Directors of your Madison Valley History Association appreciates all the memberships that are purchased as this allows them to have funds to continue the work of developing a museum in the Madison Valley:)

AA

**Memories**

The Wagon Tongue has been getting favorable feedback on the memories of our members and long time Madison Valley residents and natives who have passed on. Please help by sending your stories and memories about deceased members or residents to the Wagon Tongue. Obituaries from the local newspapers will not be reprinted. We are looking for stories that will expand on the deceased lives, genealogy, and contributions, etc. to the history of the Madison Valley. The Madison County Trails and Trials and Progressive Years have helped but not everyone's family history is included there and sometime there are good stories out there that have never been printed. So help out if you have information to share. The Wagon Tongue does not want anyone excluded because of lack of new stories. \*\*\*\*\*

Longtime Alaska resident and Madison Valley native, **Frederick (Fay) Kohls** passed away January 1, 2009 at the Juneau Pioneer's Home after an extended illness. He was 85.

Born on March 16, 1923 to William "Tuffy" Ray and Altha Marie (Baker) Kohls at the Oliver Place, three miles north of Ennis, Montana. He was named in honor of his father's brother, Lucius Fay who went to the Spanish American War at the age of 16.

When Lucius was returning home after the war was over, he became ill with typhoid fever. They wanted to put him in a hospital in San Francisco, but he wanted to come home. When he arrived in Butte, he was too ill to make the trip to Virginia City. His parents, Frederick Fritz and Virginia Belle (Kellog) Kohls met him there, but he died a few days later at the age of 18.

Fay's family moved to Ennis when Fay was four years old and he graduated from high school in 1941. In high school, his activities were principally academic, although he played bass horn with the first Ennis High Band and was a skier. In eighth grade, after Fay was rejected as a dance partner by his prom date (what really hurt, he said, was the agony of his father's requirement that he gain the consent of the girl's father to take her to the prom), he went on to master a variety of dances, including the Big Apple, the Lambeth Walk, the jitterbug, and even the Waltz. Thereafter he became much pursued as a dancing partner by other high school coeds and he was known for his dancing prowess for the rest of his life.

Fred, as he became known, enrolled in Montana State College in 1941 to study mechanical engineering and play the bass horn in the Bobcat Band. He was then called to active duty in the Army Air Corps in April 1943. He spent the next two and a half years in the B-29 bomber groups in the Pacific, including service in combat intelligence units at Saipan and Iwo Jima. After his discharge the day before Christmas in 1945, he returned to Ennis and on August 10, 1946, he along with lifelong friends, Jeff Jeffers and Gil (Buster) Saunders, sailed from Seattle for Alaska, to enroll in the University of Alaska.

A year later, Fred and five college friends dropped out of school for a year to drive the PanAmerican Highway in two jeeps from Fairbanks to Patagonia at the tip of South America. Although they did not make their intended destination, they did reach Buenos Aires, Argentina, before Fred returned to Fairbanks to resume his college studies, graduating in 1951 with a degree in General Science.

After graduation, Fred joined several Alaskan colleagues who formed the Geo-Science Corp. in Maryland to study the physics of the upper atmosphere, marketing low brightness photometers and research in sodium flare and twilight. In April 1957, Fred returned to Alaska, joining the Territorial Department of Public Works and Highways (now the State Department of Transportation and Public Facilities) as a traffic engineer in Anchorage.

In 1962 Fred moved to Juneau and later served as the supervisor of data processing for the Dept of Transportation's road design. On February 19, 1966, Fred married Juneau attorney, Shirley Meuwissen, with Shirley's friend, **(cont. on pg 3)**

**(Memories cont from page 2)**

the late Marjory Hulzer, as matron of honor and Jeff Jeffers as Fred's best man. Their son, Kevin born on November 15, 1967, died in 1983 at the age of 15 from a cancerous brain tumor. Fred retired in June 1983 after more than 26 years of service to the State of Alaska.

by Gordon E. Evans and submitted by Shirley Meuwisen Kohls and from Pioneer Trails and Trials, Madison County, Montana

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Madison Valley resident and native, **Ruth Womack** passed away June 15, 2009 at the Madison Valley Manor at the age of 83.

Ruth was born on her parent's homestead, the Lichte ranch on July 11, 1925 in Abe, MT located along the upper Madison.

In August of 1912, Ruth's father, Clarence W. Lichte, at the age of 21, decided to go to Montana from Ivanhoe, Minn. to look for a homestead. He returned to Minnesota after a discouraging search around Dillon, Mt. In September he came to Bozeman, Mt. and the land office there told him to see a section above Ennis south of Ruby Creek. This area looked promising, so Clarence applied and later settled there.

The first years Clarence spent along the Madison River he lived in a tent with another tent to serve as a barn for his horses. The winter months were long and cold and comforts and conveniences few. Esther Neilsen told of corresponding with Clarence at that time. When writing his letters in the evening, he told how the ink would freeze in his pen.

One time when Clarence's mother, Emma, was visiting, a decision was made as to where the buildings on the ranch would be located. Lumber was brought in from Sheridan, MT. The following spring, Clarence bought cattle and ran them until he enlisted in the U.S. Army, WWI. During Clarence's absence, the home was used for a summer school. The older school boys watered a newly planted tree grove and kept it alive until Clarence's return. Clarence and Esther Neilson from Albert Lea, Minn. were married in July, 1921. Mrs Lichte was a registered nurse, Her profession helped her to care for her children as well as take care of the many emergencies that occurred in the wide spread rural area of what was then called Abe, Mt.

Ruth went to first grade in a one-room school on Ruby Creek and continued her education in Virginia City, MT graduating in 1943. She then got a teaching degree from Eastern Montana College in Billings. This lead to a teaching job at Manhattan, Mt. as a second grade teacher. In 1947 she married Pete Womack under one of the trees in the grove of trees carefully watered on the Lighte ranch. From Pioneer Trails and Trials Madison County, Montana

written by Esther Lichte and Obituaries, *Madisonian* June 24, 2009

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**Memorials for 2009** Thanks to all of you who have given memorials and please think of the MVHA for future memorial giving. Memorials since April 09:

**Martha Sprout** (4 memorials)

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**Madison Valley Earthquake**

2009 is the Anniversary year of the Madison Valley Earthquake which occurred on August 17, 1959 at 11:37pm. Earthquake stories continue with the following:

**My Recollections of the 1959 Earthquake by Otis Thompson**

It was August 13, 1959, and the Thompson boys (Lyonald, Orvil, and Otis) had just finished up with their first cutting hay stacking contracts with Thexton's (Don and Tom) and Girard's (now the Bar-7 and at that time managed by Wilbur Powell). Lyonald would soon be returning to his teaching job at Sheridan High School, Orvil would be starting his first year of college at Western Montana College, and I (Otis) would be returning to high school at Ennis as a Sophomore. This was a perfect time for the family to take a small vacation, so Ward (our father), Maxine (our mother), and four kids (Orvil, Otis, Billy, and Becky-Jo) loaded up our 1955 Ford and headed to Yellowstone Park.

The first day of their trip took us through Yellowstone Park and we stayed that night at a cabin in Cooke City. Early the next morning, we traveled over the Cooke City Highway and on to Billings and then Hardin. We spent the afternoon at Custer's Battlefield and then traveled on down to Mom's sister, Doris Baker, and our three cousins who lived in Buffalo, Wyoming. We spent a couple of days there, and early on the morning of August 17, we loaded up and headed back to Montana.

We took the road from Buffalo through Cody and entered Yellowstone Park late that afternoon. Since it was getting late, Dad decided we would spend the night in the Park. We were not equipped to camp out, so we stopped at the Yellowstone Lake Lodge to see if we could get a cabin. This was a Monday and most of the weekend tourists were gone, so we were lucky enough to get one cabin with two beds and a cot. Us three boys slept in one bed, Mom and Dad in the other bed, and Becky-Jo got the cot.

That evening the family went over to the Lodge where they were having a dance. We watched for awhile and then went back to the cabin about 9 pm and went to bed. I was such a sound sleeper I never knew we had an earthquake that night.

**(Cont on page 4)**

### **My Recollections from page 3**

When I awoke the next morning, there was a lot of commotion at the Lodge and around the cabins. Everyone was excited and talking about the earthquake that happened that night. When we went to the Lodge to check out, another tremor hit and I felt that one.

We heard all kinds of rumors that morning. First we heard that Hebgen Dam had broken and flooded the town of Ennis. Later in the morning while we were at Old Faithful we heard that the dam had broken, but God had spared the town of Ennis by damming up the river with a huge earth slide in the canyon.

We could not call anybody in Ennis to let them know we were all okay since the phones were all tied up. Anyway, it would not have done us any good to get to a phone since we did not have a phone back at the ranch and nobody was left in the town of Ennis to call. So Dad decided we had better head for Ennis. He checked with the Park rangers and they told us we would not be able to get out of the Park to get to Ennis. Just as we were leaving the Old Faithful area, one of the rangers told us that the road to Gardiner had just been cleared and we would be able to get out of the Park that way. So we headed to Gardiner, stopping in Gardiner to look at the elk and buffalo that were penned up there. (Dad always had to stop and take pictures of any elk and buffalo we saw.)

We arrived in Bozeman about 6 pm and stopped and had some supper. We mentioned to the waitress that we were headed to Ennis, and she told us we had better report to the Sheriff's office if we were going through the Madison canyon since the status of the Hebgen Dam and the possible flooding was still in question. Dad stopped and talked to someone at the Sheriff's office and they said they thought it would be okay if we went to Ennis via the Bear Trap canyon. We left Bozeman about 7 pm and when we made it to the Madison river, I know us kids were on the edge of our seats looking out to see if a big wall of water was coming at us. Once we cleared the canyon, I know all of us kids gave a big sigh of relief.

We pulled into the ranch sometime before 9 pm and were we shocked. The ranch, located about 5 miles west of Ennis off the Virginia City Highway (where Mel McKittrick now lives), was like a little city. Our Thompson relatives who lived in Ennis (Grandmother, Uncle Lyal, Uncle Owenford, their families) and many of their friends had packed up and moved to the ranch. Even our maternal grandparents, Jim and Ivel Bogue, who lived in Opportunity, had come to the ranch to see if we were all okay.

Sometime after 9 pm, we were all sitting in the kitchen of our home and another tremor shook the

place. With all the excitement of the day, we all had a hard time getting to sleep that night.

The next morning, Dad and Lyonald went with several other relatives up to the slide area to help in whatever way they could. By this time, everyone had learned that the slide had covered the campground in the Madison canyon and the volunteers would be searching for bodies. Dad would not let me go. He said that was no place for kids. That evening, when they returned from the slide area, Dad and Lyonald told us what they had seen: cars that were demolished and camping gear and clothing scattered about.

What a way to end a vacation. This was the first vacation I can remember we ever took that was several days in length. Later we all joked about how doing something out of the ordinary really "shook things up."

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**From Carl Yeckel:** I was in San Diego, California, about to board a ship bound for Okinawa. Phil and Susie had come out to see (wave good-bye) me off. A call came to Phil concerning the quake. He quickly left for the Valley. As it turned out the only damage sustained on the Jumping Horse Ranch was that created by Jane Yeckel as she drug a mattress through the house so she could sleep in the yard. Elsie Cunningham came up later next morning to help Jane RESTORE (haul out broken dishes and a couple of chairs) the house before Phil got home.

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**From Dixie Robison Marosok:** We were married in August of 1958 and my husband, Jim, enrolled at Montana State College in Bozeman where he could work toward a degree in geology. When spring arrived, we were looking for a summer job and my sister, Jerry Lower, called. She and her husband, Don, worked on the Cedar Creek Ranch for John Uihlein just outside of Ennis. (John was an heir to Schlitz beer). Don offered Jim a summer job and Jerry offered me the job of sharing cooking duties for the ranch crew. We gladly accepted and on the 17th of August, we were living at the Cedar Creek Ranch in the same range of mountains as the earthquake site, the Madison Range.

We had a busy day on Aug. 17th preparing for John Uihlein's 40th birthday which fell the next day. I was expecting our first baby in early September and was tired and anxious to finish and get some sleep. It took some time to settle down after the hectic day and the night was very still and quiet. Just a couple of hours after going to bed, I was awakened by the rocking and shaking of our bed. I woke Jim, saying that a bear had crawled under the cabin. He laughed at me as he was immediately aware that it was an earthquake, and we rushed to look out the window. **(cont on page 5)**

Earthquake (cont from page 4)

The earth was rippling in waves like a windblown lake as the tremors moved through the grass. I will never forget that sight. As we attempted to get back to sleep, I began to experience some early labor pains. We were getting ready to call Doc. Losee when the pains finally stopped and we returned to bed.

The next morning the valley was full of dust and up on the mountains you could see clouds of dirt raising above the trees. Aftershocks continued through the day. As people began arriving for John's party, we learned of the earthquake site and the tragic slide that buried and injured so many campers. We were also told of the closure of the road through Ennis. Thankfully we hadn't needed the hospital since it was on the opposite side of the river and with the road closed, we couldn't have reached it. Reports came in that many people had fled to high ground and some even took refuge in Virginia City across the mountains.

John's party went as planned but all everyone could think of was the earthquake and the tragedy of the rock slide that killed so many people in the canyon campgrounds.

Within three weeks I was in the hospital where Doc Losee delivered our first son, Michael. I had some unusual visitors along with my family. Two or three of the quake victims remained in the small Madison Valley Hospital for some time after the earthquake. I remember a boy, a tall and husky football player, about 17 years of age, whose leg had been badly crushed. The Bozeman doctors wanted to amputate his leg, but Doc Losee, who received extra training as an orthopedist just before the quake, insisted he could save the limb. The boy was walking when I last saw him and I believe he did heal under Doc Losee's care.

Our father, Wayne Robison, was among the early rescuers at the earth slide scene and he is pictured in the book, The Day the Mountain Fell. The Robison ranch, the Green acre, was on the other side of the valley and none of our family had felt the quake with the intensity that we felt it. They related that they were driving home from a movie in Ennis and they felt the car lurch to one side about the time of the earthquake, but thought nothing of it.

The family ranch had a grazing permit just a few miles from the epicenter of the quake in an area called Antelope Basin. A pipeline from Hidden Lake took water from the lake up a steep mile long hill for the cattle on the reserve. When they went up to check the pipeline, it was laying broken in pieces like a bunch of spaghetti straws.

With the river at such a low level, many of the famous Madison Valley trout were stranded in small pools of water. Don, Jim and my father did some fishing with their hands and came home with a good

mess of fish for dinner. Jim had the luckiest catch of the day, a 2 and one half foot rainbow trout.

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Editors note: Thanks for all the earthquake stories. They will become part of an earthquake memories booklet at the museum. Any more earthquake stories submitted will be printed in the July 2010 Wagon Tongue for the 51st anniversary.

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### July 4th Parade by J. Hal Pasley

I take my stool and head downtown  
I hope I find some shade  
To sit and check the entries  
in the July 4th parade  
I find a perfect place to sit  
how lucky can I be  
And then some folks come by  
and stand right in front of me  
I think the show has started  
the announcer's voice I heard  
Speaking through the same old mike  
that distorts every word  
I hear the thunder of their hooves  
the horses fill the street  
Unloading all their breakfast  
on the other horse's feet  
And right behind the horses  
I just fell off my stool  
When I saw this buxom cowgirl  
riding backwards on a mule  
And then a team and wagon  
with a half a load of hay  
And right behind the wagon  
was the entry Diamond J  
A bus so big and bulky  
that it almost filled the street  
The grinning, waving eastern dudes  
had filled up every seat  
And then an antique car goes by  
I've seen this one before  
In fact i've seen it so many times  
it has become a bore  
I hear the drums, I hear the horns  
I hear Saint Louie blues  
The high school band is marching  
with manure on their shoes  
Well here they come  
they always do  
The entry of the day  
They're welcomed by the cheering crowd  
the ladies butt display  
The lady on the black horse  
has a bottom like a tub  
But the one who rides the bay  
has a butt shaped like a ball  
And the little girl who rides the roan  
she has no butt at all  
And then the army boys go by  
they're veterans no doubt  
Their uniforms fit then so tight  
their tummies stick right out

*There is more but you will have to read it at the library or museum!!*

### For Your Reading Pleasure

**Great Montana Earthquake** by L. W. Link

Soft cover 94 page book that is a very good account of the 1959 Madison Valley Earthquake Available at Three Forks Library and possibly interlibrary loan.

**The Night the Mountain Fell: The Story of the Montana Yellowstone Earthquake** by Edmund

Christopherson Short informative little book. Available at Madison Valley Public Library

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### Fish out of Water

MVHA has been selected for the "Fish out of Water" fund-raising project. Our fish is a "historical" fish entitled "Carrying the Legacy" depicting history events in the area by artist Christine Blockledge. MVHA will receive 45% of the final bid on this fish at the auction over Labor Day. Check out the website [www.madcoedc.org](http://www.madcoedc.org) or the MVHA website listed on first page to see a picture of this painted fish. It is the responsibility of the MVHA to obtain a minimum bid to get the bidding started on this fundraiser so talk this up or make a bid so a minimum bid will soon be in place.

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### Looking ahead

**MVHA temporary museum** is open Tuesday through Saturday 10:00am to 4:00pm and Sunday 1:00pm to 4:00pm. Volunteers are needed so stop by the museum to sign up or call Zoe Todd at 682-4360. No one can visit and enjoy the museum if the doors are locked.

**August 20** Field trip to Madison Valley Earthquake sites. Meet at the museum at 121 W. Main at 10:00am to car pool.

Madison Valley History Association, Inc.  
P.O. Box 474  
Ennis, MT 59729

### Madison Valley History Association, Inc. Board of Directors

President: Otis Thompson

Vice President: Jimmy Carlson

Treasurer: Neil Kent

Secretary: Duane Thexton

Director: Larry Love

Director: Smitty Overstreet

Director: John White

Meetings held monthly on the **third** Thursday of each month. Watch Madisonian for details of time and place and program. (Note the change from 2nd to 3rd Thursday)

Board Meetings are held the 1st Wednesday of each month. First Madison Valley Bank

The Wagon Tongue will be published quarterly.

Next issue will be October 2009.

Editor: Shirley Love

Contributing editors:

Gordon E. Evans and Shirley Kohls Memories of Frederick Fay Kohls

Esther Lichte From Pioneer Trails and Trials Madison County, Montana and Madisonian

June 25, 2009 for Memories of Ruth Womack

Otis Thompson My Recollections of the 1959 Earthquake

Carl Yeckel Earth Quake Memories  
Dixie Robison Marosok Earth Quake Memories

J. Hal Pasley July 4th Parade

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