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Above: From left to right: The Beaverhead County Courthouse (Meade Hotel), A.F. Wright Mercantile (Skinner’s Saloon), The Bannack Hotel (Goodrich Hotel is considered by some to be the first commercial hotel in Montana) no longer stands in Bannack. The building was dismantled by Charles Bovey and the façade (if not more) was incorporated into the Fairweather Inn in Virginia City.

Annual Clean-Up Day: May 12, 2012
Bannack State Park is looking for volunteers to help with the annual clean-up day. If you are interested in helping please contact the park at 406-834-3413. We will work from about 9am—3pm and lunch is provided. In order for the staff to plan the day and get as much done as possible it is important that we know how many people to expect, so contact the park sometime before May 5 if you are interested in helping.

Above: Smith Ball arrived in Bannack in 1862. In January 1864 he was shot and wounded by Joe Pizanthia as he tried to enter his cabin to capture him. Ball was a long time Beaverhead County resident and served as both Sheriff and Justice of the Peace. (Photo: Beaverhead County Museum)
Here we go again. The Bannack Association is looking forward to another productive and fun season. The annual dinner in January was a great success and I was happy to see so many of our members attend.

At the Association Board meeting in February we elected the officers for 2012. This year our officers will be;

- Linda Mazejka—President
- Otis Anderson—Vice-President
- Terri Presson—Treasurer
- Craig Gilbert—Secretary

The other board members include Shannon Gilbert, John Phillips, Helen Sorel, Arlis Vannett, Diana Gilbert and new this year we welcome two new members Judy Vaccaro and Lisa Green. We also like to thank Loreen and Jerry Burtts who serve on the calling committee to make sure all board members are informed about our next meeting.

We are going to have another busy year including a dance to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Bannack. The dance will be held in the new multi-use shelter in the group-use area, but as of now the date has still not been decided. We will keep you posted. Other events this year will be Clean-Up Day (May 12), Bannacks Days (July 21-22) and the Ghost Walk (Oct. 19-20). If you are interested in helping with any of these events or any other time please contact me at 406-834-3425 or the park at 406-834-3413.

Remember the newsletter is available via e-mail now and if you are interested in receiving it that way e-mail John Phillips at johnsphillips@yahoo.com or by contacting the park and they will make sure you get added to the list.

Best to You All,
Linda Mazejka, President Bannack Association

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LIATIS Foundation—Houston, Texas
David & Molly Niven—Golden, Colorado
Ingrid Akerblom
Ruth & Garth Haugland
Jack & Sandra McKee
Montana Paint Inc.
Connie Nicholas
Roy & Dianne Pace

Left: Nathaniel Langford arrived in Bannack in the fall of 1862. Langford was one of the lobbyists who went to Washington D.C. in 1864 to help secure the creation of Montana Territory and his *Vigilante Days and Ways* is considered one of the standard texts on the Vigilante/Road Agent saga.

( Photo: Montana Historical Society)
Greetings from Bannack

We have had some mild weather this winter with very little snow. The ice-skating season was fairly successful but due to the weather conditions the skating rink is closed for the season. Also, due to the mild winter we have had higher than normal day use. Remember Bannack State Park is open seven days a week and after March 11 our hours will be from 8:00 am – dusk.

The Hanging Reenactment was held January 7th and was a great success with over 150 folks in attendance. We appreciate and want to thank you to all the re-enactors who had taking time out of their busy schedules to make this program such a big success.

We are in the process of sending out Bannack Days applications so if you or someone you know is interested in volunteering or participating in Bannack Days, please give us a call. The applications will be also available on the bannck.org website in the next week or two. Please note: Completed applications are due back to us by April 1st.

I am pleased to announce that the Group Use Shelter project has been completed besides the landscaping. We are tentatively planning a dedication ceremony for this structure April 28th at 11:30 am. This ceremony will be open to the public so if you are interested in attending please show up. If you are interested in renting this facility, please call the park at 406-834-3413 to make your reservation.

I am pleased to announce that we have a new AmeriCorps Member serving at Bannack. Josh Hansen has been selected to fill this position. For those of you who may not know Josh, he is the Grandson of Dale Tash, one of the former Manager’s of Bannack State Park. If you are in the area, please help us in welcoming Josh to Bannack. I will also mention that we have started recruiting a summer AmeriCorps Member position for Bannack. If you or someone you know is interested please get on our web site for details at stateparks.mt.gov Montana residents and out-of-state residents are encouraged to apply.

As always, we appreciate your support of Bannack and we hope to see you soon.

Park Manger
Dale Carlson

UM Western Students at Bannack:

Left: Gary Webb is from Dillon and majoring in Environmental Interpretation at UM Western. Gary is developing a brochure on the geology of Bannack.

Right: Josh Hensen is from Dillon and majoring in Environmental Interpretation at UM Western. Josh is a member of the AmeriCorps program and will be working at the park until the end of the summer.
On January 1, 1862 a severe blizzard blew in and raged for two days and even though temperatures dropped to 40 below zero the spirits of everyone attending the dance at Johnny Grant’s place remained high. The revelers danced all night and slept all day until finally on January 3 the weather broke and the attendees left for home. For those who celebrated the new year at Johnny Grant’s and those who had settled in the remote outposts of what became Montana, little did they realize just how momentous 1862 would prove to be.

By the time the first immigrants arrived in the Gold Creek area in June 1862 they found the Stuart brothers, and perhaps 30 others mining. They had set the first sluice boxes and christened the new diggings “Dixie.” Throughout the summer immigrants poured in but most of the new arrivals had never heard about the diggings around Gold Creek, rather they were bound for the discoveries in what is now Idaho and British Columbia. Unfortunately for most of these folks it was too late. The new diggings were already over crowded and the good claims taken. So, they took to the hills and gulches to seek there fortunes and throughout July and August new strikes were made in and around Gold Creek, Prickly Pear Creek and the Big Hole area. With news of each strike men would rush from one location to the next but most of the discoveries proved to be exaggerated.

When Edwin Purple and his companions arrived at Ft. Lemhi, near present day Tendoy, Idaho, in the middle of July they found 400-500 people camped there. News coming from the Salmon River mines was discouraging so, many decided to see what was happening around Gold Creek. One such party led by John White was unsure of how to reach Gold Creek and found themselves in present day Beaverhead County, Montana. As they moved along they prospected until one day they found themselves on Willard’s Creek (now Grasshopper Creek). They decided to try their luck and low-and-behold on July 28, 1862 they found what they were looking for, gold. Now, the rush was on.

Within weeks discoveries were made up and down the gulch and when James Morley arrived on September 8 he reported some 300 men were already working and many more were on their way. It was a frantic scene. Men rushed about staking claims and at times they were forced to defend their claims “at the point of the bayonet.”

Many thought the mines would be exhausted within 2 or 3 months so rather than building cabins the miners lived in their wagons, tents and wikkiups. It didn’t take long for the miners to realize that this was no flash in the pan and that they needed to prepare for winter. According to Edwin Purple “cabins were at first built in two rows small in size and low and close together...to form a Block House...for defense against the Indians.” Building went on haphazardly until a town site company was organized on October 6, 1862 to lay out the town of Bannack City. Although misspelled the town was named for the Bannock Indians who frequented southwest Montana. James Fergus described the fledgling community in a letter to his wife on Nov. 2, 1862:

> On account of the Indian [danger] we have built together on the vallies...the Secesh whiskey rowdies [are] on one side of [Grasshopper] creek and the civil Quite Union men on the other we have regular streets and several families I saw some little shavers playing hide and seek in prospect holes today... Speaking of our cabin let me describe it it is 17 x 19 ft inside [with a] door and a place for a window... fireplace in one end beds in the other with room for our flower and provisions under them..."
The town was taking shape and by the end of October there were some “450 men and a few women” in the gulch according to Fergus.

Above: This sketch was done by Englishman Robert Halliday in the winter of 1862-63. It is probably the first image of Bannack. James Fergus sent a copy of the picture to his wife in January 1863. (Montana Historical Society Photo).

One thing that weighed heavily on the minds of those living along Grasshopper Creek was Indians. How would they react to this invasion of territory they considered their own? The first real test came on Oct. 3 when the famous Piute Chief Winnemucca came riding into the settlement with some “200” followers. Granville Stuart called them an “insolent treacherous band” and prepared to go to the mines “to help if it became necessary.” On the other hand James Morley described them as “peacefully inclined.” “Indian or no Indian,” James Fergus was after gold and he was bound for the Grasshopper diggings. The prevailing attitude was the Indians had to give way one way or another but at least in this instance things turned out peaceable. Fergus wrote:

...the miners had made arrangements with the Indians (about 1500) buying the privilege of mining by giving them three oxen, some beans, flour, sugar, tobacco, pipes, etc...

It was still not safe to travel alone and throughout the fall there were several reports of stock being stolen and individuals being killed by Indians, but by late fall the sheer number of people settling in ensured the safety of Bannack City.

Wages were high, as much as $4-$5 a day for unskilled labor and for miners with good claims the reward could be much higher. Capt. James Fisk was informed that about a 1000 people had settled into the gulch in December and that “claims [were] yielding from fifty ($50) to one hundred and fifty dollars ($150) per day per man.”
While these claims were probably the exception rather than the rule the possibility of striking it rich or even making $4-$5 a day when the average man in the U.S. made less than $1 per day fueled the rush. Wages for women were high as well. James Fergus reported a woman could earn as much as “$25” a week washing, mending or cooking. While the wages were appealing the tenderfeet who worked Grasshopper Creek were often shocked at the expense of living in an isolated community like Bannack and discouraged by the hard work of mining.

While some miners did make good money others saw an opportunity to “mine the miner’s,” and get the gold out of their pockets. William Sturgis built a saw mill after purchasing a blade and some iron from Ft. Owen. John Ault, built a hotel. Harry Hensted and Andrew Luje opened a meat market and bakery. John Mannheim opened a brewery. The Stuart brothers opened a butcher shop in October and when they closed the following spring they had cleared about $3000. Henry Pond built wheelbarrows. There was a tailor, shoemakers, blacksmiths and wheelwrights, and a barber who operated out of the Goodrich Hotel and saloon. The saloons of Bill Goodrich, Durant & Perie, Jack Gunn, and Cyrus Skinner did brisk business selling “lighting rod whiskey for .25 cents per glass in gold.” One enterprising man from Minnesota, Thomas Holmes, intended on capitalizing on the rush by selling lots in a town he laid out several miles down stream from Bannack known as New Jerusalem.

While the saloon and alcohol were the center of social life for the majority it wasn’t everyone’s cup of tea. Neither of the Stuart brothers imbibed but they enjoyed dancing and described “fine balls attended by all the respectable people.” Granville reported there was “something over thirty white women” in town and only “7 were unmarried,” so you can imagine there was a lot of competition for a dance. Certainly, there was another class of woman in town, the women who worked in the saloons and hurdy-gurdy houses, but they probably wouldn’t be welcomed at the “fine balls.” While the winter of 1862-63 proved unusually mild, which allowed the miners to work all season, there were other popular diversions for that rare day off. Euchre was one of the most popular card games and traveling minstrel shows made the occasional appearance.

Bannack is probably best known for the crime and violence that have come to dominate its story rather than being the first significant gold strike in Montana or serving as the first territorial capital but in 1862 according to Edwin Purple “order, peace, and good fellowship” reigned. On the other hand, Emily Meredith’s description of Bannack in the winter of 1862-63 corresponds much more neatly to the popular image. Meredith wrote;

“I don’t know how many deaths have occurred this winter, but that there have not been twice as many is entirely owing to the fact that drunken men do not shoot well. There are times when it is really unsafe to go through the main street...the bullets whizz around so, and no one thinks of punishing a man for shooting another.”

I can not rectify the statements of Purple and Meredith but I would argue that the rush that started in Bannack in 1862 culminated with the creation of Montana Territory in 1864. While, it is true that the discovery of gold at Alder Gulch in May 1863 ended the rush to Bannack the town did not die, with the introduction of improved mining methods and technology the town struggled to survive for more than 75 years.

Check It Out:

The Bannack Association is now on facebook. You can view and share photos and find out what is happening at the park.
Excerpts From A Trip Up the Missouri River: 1862


May 23: “Reached Fort Randall...Three hundred soldiers stationed here. Many Indians about the landing...Took in thirty five cords of wood to-day...”

May 25: “Reached the Great Bend of the Missouri at nine A.M. where thirty two of the passengers walked across, four miles. Distance around called forty miles.”

June 7: “Waited until eight this morning for ‘Key West’ to come up. In the meantime had a great deal of excitement shooting buffalo, which were swimming the river in large numbers...Secure two fine ones and a calf, the latter alive. Took ‘Key West’ in tow and ran until sunset...”

June 9: “The June rise now gives us ample water. At ten o’clock saw forty buffaloes swimming river ahead of us. Our sportsmen shot several and the boat secures three of them...At twelve passed the mouth of the Yellowstone and reached Fort Union...”

June 18: “Passed mouth of Judith River at five P.M. and ran to the foot of Drowned Man’s Rapids...Here ropes were thrown out and about one hundred men undertook to help the boat over by hauling along the shore, but when about a half mile up one of the two ropes broke and let the boat back to foot of rapids...”

June 20: Reached Fort Benton this P.M. about four o’clock. A bad accident occurred by which four of the deck hands were drowned, in passing the rapids two miles below Ft. Benton. There were seven men sent out to head of rapids to fasten a rope and in returning the yawl capsized by being forced against the bow of the steamboat...This cast a gloom over all on board. We were flattering ourselves on our safe and prompt voyage, but, when in sight of our destination this melancholy accident occurred...”

It was a Nice Day for a Hanging:

On January 7, 2012 the members of the Just-Us Re-enactors commemorated the 148th anniversary of the hanging of Sheriff Henry Plummer and his deputies Ned Ray and Buck Stinson. It was a beautiful warm day at Bannack and nearly 150 visitors attended the commemoration. We would like to thank Stan Smith and the crew for their hard work and invite you all to the 150th anniversary of the hanging in January 2014.

Above: James Morley arrived in Bannack in Sep. 1862 and his journal remains one of the best primary resources we have documenting life in Bannack and Alder Gulch. His journal ranges from the mundane to the dramatic and is available at the Montana Historical Society in Helena. (Photo Montana Historical Society)
WE'RE DIGGING FOR NEW FRIENDS OF BANNACK!

It's nice to have a friend. We need friends, too! Lots of them! So help us dig for new friends of Bannack State Park. Invite them, or better yet, make them a gift, of membership in the organization that's been a true friend of Bannack for over 20 years... the Bannack Association! Membership is cheap. The reward is great. And they'll love it!

Name: ____________________________
Address: __________________________
City: __________________ State: _____ Zip: ____________
Phone: ( ___ ) _______ - _______ Email: _______________________

☐ Please email my newsletter to me instead of delivery through the USPS.
☐ Please call me I want to Volunteer!
☐ Individual Membership: $10
☐ Family Membership: $15
☐ Business Membership $20
☐ Let me help some more. I have enclosed a gift for use by the Association.
☐ The membership is a gift from: _________________________________
☐ Pay by Credit Card ___ Visa ___ Master Card # __________________ Exp Date: __________

Total Amount Enclosed
$ __________

Please Note: If paying with a check from outside the U.S., please write U.S. Funds only on the check or add an extra $15 for processing. To Pay by phone, please call: Bannack State Park at 406-834-3413.

The Bannack Association
Box 1426
Dillon MT 59725

Return Service Requested