



THE FIRST BEST PLACE PRESS

THE BANNACK ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 1426

DILLON MT 59725

WWW.BANNACK.ORG

“KEEPING THE GHOSTS ALIVE AT BANNACK SINCE 1990”

Summer 2025

BANNACK DAYS ★ 2025

Food Stalls • Live Performances • Cavalry Demos • Gold Panning
Wagon Rides • Stagecoach Display • Doll Making • Candle Making
Shootouts • Sunday Church Service

July 19th-20th

Bannack State Park Photo by Christopher Johnson 25 Miles west of Dillon on Hwy 287

\$5 per Adult
\$20 per Family
Free for Children
5 & Under

Ghost Town
Fun for the
Whole Family!

2024: Bannack Association Board Members

Arlis Vannett: President

Perry Shank: Vice President

Laurie Blinn: Secretary

Kathy Allard: Treasurer

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Jennifer George

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Cindy Griffin

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Donations Needed for Bannack Days & Beyond Candle Dipping & Rag Doll Making

The park is always in need of candle wax (any size or color) and crayons to be used at the candle dipping station during Bannack Days. This is always a very popular activity for families.

We also need cotton fabric and/or cut strips to be used at the rag doll making station during Bannack Days and Kids Day. Strips need to be 1 ½ inches wide and either 42-45 inches or 22 inches long. There is also muslin to be cut in to 12-inch squares. Visitors of all ages will make and take home their very own dolly.

Donations may be taken to Bannack or call/text Arlis Vannett (406-925-2209) to arrange a pickup or drop off in Dillon.

Volunteers Needed:

We are always in need for volunteers and with Bannack Days just around the corner we can use your help. We need to people to assist with gold panning, candle making, doll making, parking cars or directing traffic, set-up on Thursday & Friday July 17-18, and take down on July 21. It is all for a good cause. If you are interested in helping please call the park for an application.

406-834-3413

The First Best Place Press: Bannack State Park is Open Year Round: Summer Hour May—1 Aug. 1. 8AM-9PM

Prez Sez

Greetings from beautiful Bannack! Today I am the visitor center attendant while the staff works with over 100 Junior High students from Butte. They are just one of the many schools that takes advantage of getting their students out of the classroom to learn Montana history firsthand. We host around 1000 students in the spring from schools of all sizes from all over Montana and Idaho. Luckily, today we have a break from the rain and the sun is shining!

Our annual Clean Up Day was a huge success! Many volunteers from all worked hard to get Bannack looking great and ready for visitors. Dave and Sharon Prewett of the Bannack Historic Masonic Lodge No. 3-7-77 once again provided a delicious lunch as a thank you to all who came to help.

There are many projects planned at Bannack this summer. The boardwalk has been replaced and sections added to make it more handicap accessible. Three buildings will be resided: the Church is first, followed by the School/Masonic lodge, and then the Montana Hotel. It's wonderful that these building will be receiving some of the tender loving care they deserve.

John has great plans for several programs that will be presented throughout the summer. These include guided hikes, speakers, and musicians. Look for the schedule on our Facebook page and in this newsletter.

We are happy to welcome back our campground hosts Cal and Jackie Bucklin who will be spending their 8th summer with us. Their expertise and willingness to help visitors and park staff any way they can is always greatly appreciated!

Bannack Days will be here before we know it! It is scheduled for Saturday and Sunday, July 19th and 20th. It will again provide a large variety of entertainment and learning opportunities including musicians, skill demonstrators, food vendors, any many more. Volunteers are still needed to help make this a success. Please call the park at 406-834-3413 if you are interested.

I'd like to wish everyone a wonderful summer filled with family, friends, get-togethers, and travel experiences. We'd love to see you at Bannack!

Yours in Bannack – Montana's First Best Place!

Arlis Vannett, Bannack Association President

**Do you love
Bannack?**

Find out about park
news and upcoming
events by checking us
out online!



@bannackstatepark



@bannackassociation



www.bannack.org

Manager's Report:

In May 2025 the staff and volunteers provided programs to approximately 950 students from as far away as Eureka and Chinook Montana. Our staff consists of only 3, but with the help of volunteers, I am happy to report we are still hosting field trips from around Montana and Idaho.

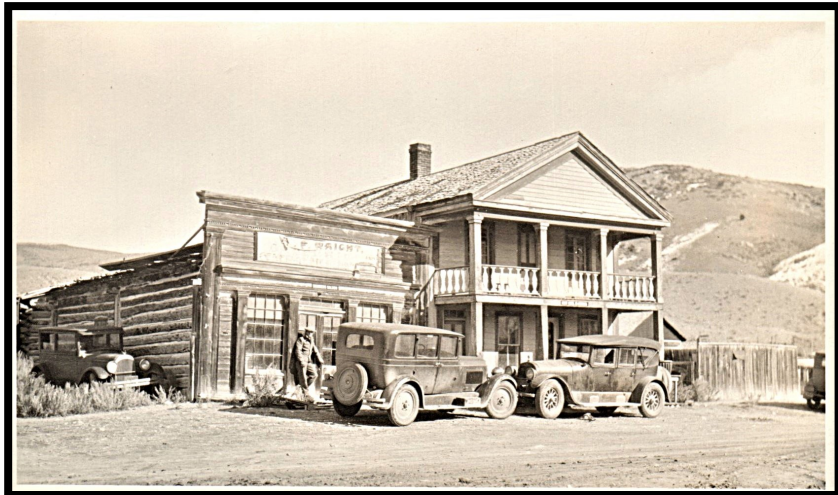
Preservation work on three building will take place this summer. The church, school/Masonic Lodge and Montana Hotel are all being resided and the school/Masonic Lodge is also getting new stairs. The project is needed and has been in the works for some time, but it will also cause some inconvenience. I am still waiting to here about the schedule but you can expect that the individual buildings will be closed for perhaps a month each.

At the beginning of May I was really worried about the creek. I had never seen it as low as it was in early May at that time of the year. I talked with a neighbor and ex-coworker and I got the same response; "this is what the creek looks like in a dry August, not early May." But, the Pioneer Mountains had some good early May snow and the creek is looking pretty healthy and the fisherman are trying their luck on Grasshopper Creek.

The park is now on summer hours and we are open from 8:00 AM–9:00 PM daily. Visitor Center hours are normally from 9 AM–5 PM daily, but may vary depending on staffing. We offer free daily tours and gold panning when staff is available.

If you have any questions or concerns please give us a call.

John Phillips
Manager
Bannack State Park
406-834-3413
john.phillips@mt.gov



Crossword Puzzle Answers

Photo: Ca 1930

Across:

1. State dinosaur (common name) Duckbilled
2. A ponderosa is a kind of... Pine
3. Blackspotted is a kind of... Cutthroat
4. State bird- 2 words Western meadowlark
5. One of state gems Sapphire
6. State tree Ponderosa
7. State grass Wheatgrass
8. State fish Blackspotted

Down:

1. Prehistoric animal Dinosaur
9. One of state gems Agate
10. A kind of wheatgrass Blue bunch
11. State flower Bitterroot
12. State Mammal- 2 words Grizzly Bear
13. A cutthroat is a kind of... Trout
14. State song title Montana

In Search of Opportunity

In the summer of 1862 two wagon trains left Minnesota for the mines of Washington Territory, particularly the Salmon River Mines. Both of the wagon trains choose new routes north of the Missouri River. The rendezvous for the expeditions was at Ft. Abercrombie in western Minnesota with the final destination being Ft. Benton, Dakota Territory. Once there emigrants could travel the Mullan Road in relative security to Walla Walla and on to their final destinations. Plans changed however when the wagon trains reached Ft. Benton and heard news of prospecting going on in the area of Prickly Pear Creek, Gold Creek and Grasshopper Creek. Nearly 200 people joined these expeditions. They were perusing dreams of wealth, security, and a better life. But, what did they find and what did they do when they arrived in the gold fields of what became western Montana?

The first train was under the nominal leadership of Thomas Holmes, a land speculator who had years of experience on the frontier. Approximately 70 men joined the expedition, which departed Ft. Abercrombie on June 1, 1862. They traveled on average 15-18 miles per day and arrived in Ft. Benton on Aug. 9, 1862. Upon reaching Ft. Benton the expedition officially ended. Some continued on the Mullan Road for points further west but most decided to investigate the new diggings in the vicinity of Prickly Pear Creek and Deer Lodge. By the time winter set in at least 17 of the 70 emigrants were in Bannack.

Mark Ledbeater was a member of the Holmes train and pioneer businessman in Montana. While still at the Gold Creek diggings he reported on the happenings of the Beaverhead mines. He wrote on Oct. 26, 1862, that there were "about five hundred men at work; they are getting from five to fifty dollars per day, and some are making as high as one hundred dollars per day. But you must remember this is done by hired labor. The man who has the claim, and can make ten dollars per day, will hire twelve men and pay them four dollars per day, and make of course, six dollars per day off each man, consequently big wages for himself." He also reported "at the Beaver Head the Indians are very numerous. It is their winter quarters - that is, for the Snake and Bannock tribes. They have given the miners more trouble than all the other Indians combined."

In the spring of 1863 Thomas Holmes reported from Bannack, "the mines have been worked all winter, getting out dirt ready for washing in the spring. There has been taken out in one day, with rocker as high as \$1000 to three men, another man took out \$600 in one day, and many are taking out big sums. A 'lead' is opened called the Dakota, which is immensely rich. They think the quartz will yield on an average \$100 per cord...The mines are rich although not very extensive here, they are about four miles in length...Our camp will probably count about 800 miners, all have comfortable cabins...The winter has been very mild, with little or no snow in the valleys. Cattle and horses have lived all winter without feeding...this is great stock country, and some of the valleys are well adapted to farming, which will pay the biggest kind...for amusements, we are not far behind St. Paul. We have a band of Minstrels, and a theater once a week, so you see we have something to amuse us even in this wild country." Mr. Holmes plated a town in the gulch east of Bannack known as New Jerusalem "where streets were paved with gold."

On July 7, 1862 James Liberty Fisk led the second train out of Ft. Abercrombie destined for the mines in Washington Territory. The expedition consisted of 53 wagons, 117 men and 13 women. Near Ft. Union they heard from disgruntle miners heading back to the states and on their arrival in Ft. Benton they heard about new diggings. Eighty-two members of the expedition remained in the Prickly Pear Creek area while they waited to learn more precisely what was taking place around Deer Lodge and Grasshopper Creek. The news must have been promising because 60 of the 130 emigrants of the Fisk train ended up in Bannack before winter.

Mark Ledbeater of the Holmes train, after being in the gold fields for a month must of felt like an old hand when he met some curious members of the Fisk Expedition. He wrote, "I had to laugh at some of the last train from Minnesota. When they saw us up to our knees in mud and water, they exclaimed, "My God, is that the way you get gold." Most of the

members of the Holmes and Fisk trains were “tenderfeet” in the gold fields but there were a few like James Fergus who had been to Colorado, and knew what they were in for.

James Fergus was a member of the Fisk train and reported on the high cost of living in Bannack during that first winter. “Wages for common labor is four dollars a day without board; flour twenty to twenty-five dollars per hundred...beef the best I ever saw 20 to 25 cents per pound...We have now a half a dozen stores, however and prices are more moderate, viz: nails, \$1 per pound; glass, 8x10, \$1 each; sugar \$1 per pound...boots \$15 to \$20 per pair.” In general he reported the cost of living was about 60% higher than in was in the states.

Fergus also described the rapidly growing settlement of Bannack and the impact national events were having on the community. He wrote his wife, “on account of the Indian [danger] we have all built together...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 and can hear them playing out of doors nearly every day...” Fergus was describing an embryonic community, not just another gold camp that quickly disappeared.

Most of the members of the Holmes and Fisk trains tried their luck working in the gold fields, but few if any became rich as a miner. Some became disheartened with the work and living conditions and returned home, but there were many who saw other opportunities in the fledgling communities of southwest Montana. James Fergus had many business interests but became a preeminent stock raiser. N.P. Langford, Ard Godfrey, and Cornelius Bray built a sawmill. John Ault built and ran a hotel. Henry Harrison, for whom the town of Harrison, Montana, was named, took up farming, as did Mark Ledbeater. Between the Holmes and Fisk wagon trains of 1862 were many stalwart pioneers whose names still live on in Montana history.

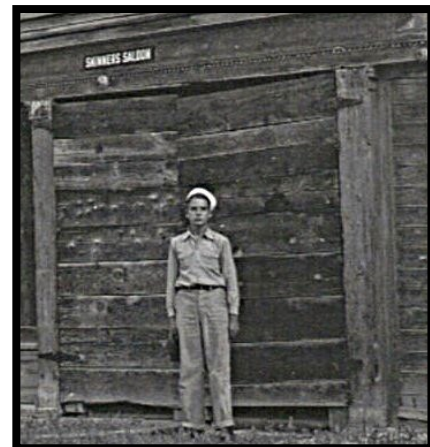
Recognizing the Historic Significance:

In 1925, 100 years ago, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) recognized the historic significance of Bannack and placed historical markers at various places around Bannack. The dedication plaque placed in front of the Hotel Meade now rests in the picnic area and we have 4 other signs in our collection. The DAR has been instrumental in efforts to preserve historic sites nation wide and their recognition of the importance of Bannack culminated in the establishment of Bannack State Park in 1954. The plaque on the left still sits at Bannack commemorating the DAR recognition of Bannack. The picture on the right shows at groups gather around 1 of the signs we still have in our collection.

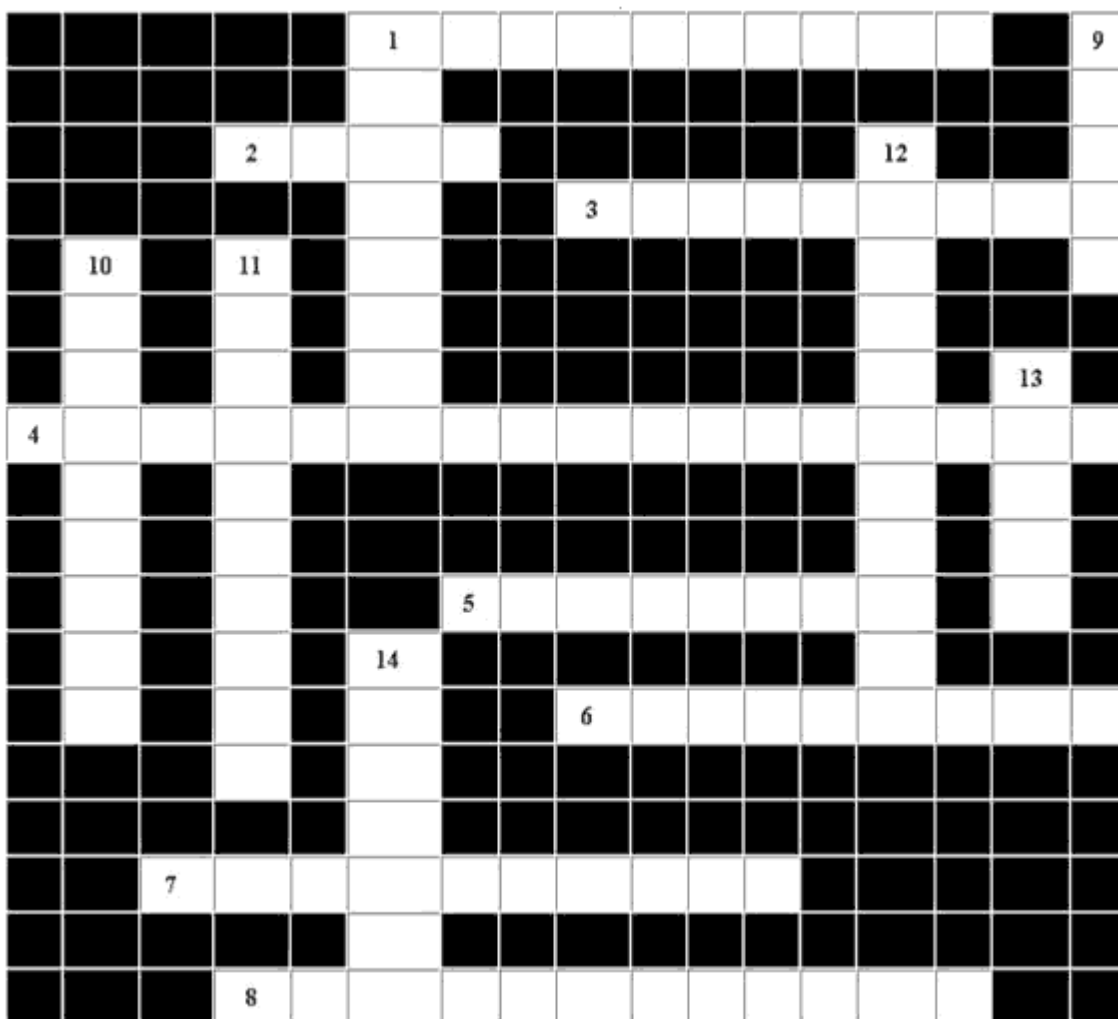




The 4 signs above are in Bannack's collection store at the park. The other 3 signs; "Skinner's Saloon, First Legislative Hall, Gallows are lost, at least for now. The "First Hotel" sign was found in Dillon and returned to Bannack some years ago and it is my hope that the other signs may some day be returned to Bannack.



Montana State Symbols Crossword Puzzle



Across:

1. State dinosaur (common name)
2. A ponderosa is a kind of...
3. Blackspotted is a kind of...
4. State bird- 2 words
5. One of state gems
6. State tree
7. State grass
8. State fish

Down:

1. Prehistoric animal
9. One of state gems
10. A kind of wheatgrass
11. State flower
12. State animal- 2 words
13. A cutthroat is a kind of...
14. State song title

Bannack State Park the First Best Place

Bannack is always looking for more friends. So, help us find some new friends for Bannack State Park. Join, renew, invite, or make a gift of a Bannack Association membership. The Bannack Association; Helping preserve our history for the next generation.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Email (for newsletter by email) _____

- ☐ Individual Membership \$25
- ☐ Family Membership \$40
- ☐ Business membership \$50
- ☐ The membership is a Gift from: _____
- ☐ Donation _____

New membership _____

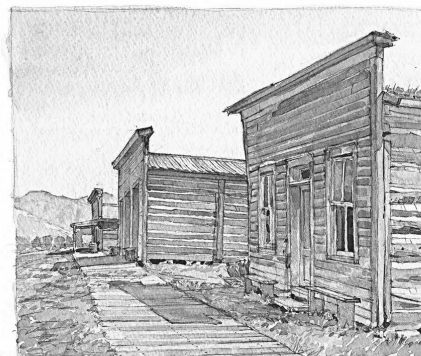
Renewal _____

Make Checks Payable to:

Bannack Association

Box 1426

Dillon, MT 59725



Newsletters are mailed/emailed quarterly. Please keep us informed of change of address or email.

If you are interested in volunteering, becoming a member, or making a donation you can also call the park at 406-834-3413.

The Bannack Association

Box 1426

Dillon MT 59725

Return Service Requested