

Testimony on HB
Long Range Planning Committee
February 2, 2005
In Room 350 @ 10:00am
By Betty L Babcock

Honorable Chairman Wells, and honorable members of the Long Range Planning committee, for the record my name is Betty L. Babcock.

My friend & former neighbor, Joe Mazurek and I have been asked to serve as Co-Chairs for what we hope will soon be the new Montana History Center. Special opportunities come to us, sometimes only once in a life time, and this is one of those times. I believe we must "Seize the Moment."

For some time the Montana Historical Society and Foundation have been searching for a location to build, for as most of you must know, they have more than outgrown the building that they are in. The present Capitol Complex covers buildings in about a 10 mile area.

Now there is the opportunity to buy 13 acres within that same area, with parking space and including a building that could be configured to meet the special needs of the MHS. There is no way to measure the value that this would bring to the state and her citizens and especially the generations that follow. It would provide adequate space to meet the mandated goals of the MHS, a place to save, store and show the treasures of our citizens and pioneers of yesteryear. A place of learning, and research for the present and future generations.

The Montana Historical Society is one of the most precious resources we have, established in the territorial days of 1885, it is the oldest historical society west of the Mississippi and has long enjoyed the reputation as one of the finest research institutions in the West. State funds have supported it since 1873.

The Historical Society holds a wealth of resources—from the finest collection of Charlie Russell paintings anywhere, the newly acquired Scriver bronze and art collection, to the diaries and reminiscences of our pioneer homesteaders, ranchers, and to the full and complete record of Montana's State Government. The staff has done a commendable job over the years collecting, preserving and showing that past to the public. Their commitment hasn't changed, but their facility has.

At the present time so many of the valuable displays such as "Frontier Town" had to be dismantled for lack of space, and there are others, plus beautiful, historical and valuable treasures now stored in boxes deep in the archives. That is where Jeff Laszloffy found all three of Montana's Constitutions. Now you can view "The Blessings of Liberty" in front of the Secretary of State's Office. People are thrilled and excited to see things of the past.

By chance and also by choice, I have been involved in several historic events. I served on the first restoration board of the Governor's Old Mansion, on the Lewis and Clark Preservation Committee, restored the Hauser Mansion at 720 Madison, and am thrilled to serve on the Montana Capitol Restoration Foundation that helped restore the Capitol. That confirmed to me how important our heritage is. We don't need to live in the past, but if we can learn from it, we will look to the future with positive expectations and enthusiasm.

Mr. Olsen has given you all of the important details that you will need to know to make this very important decision. This is a non-partisan issue, and we need every one of you to vote yes.

Both Joe and I are former legislators, and we will be very grateful and pleased for your yes vote on this issue. The citizens of Montana will have a wonderful Montana History Center, and they too will appreciate your wise decision and will be pleased and grateful too.

We both thank all of you very much for all the hard work that you do.

That is all I have to report Mr. Chairman. I thank all of you for your time.