

MONTANA
PRESERVATION
ALLIANCE

Testimony to the Long Range Planning Subcommittee on
HB 5
3 February 2005

Good morning Mr. Chairman, and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I am Chere Jiusto, Executive Director of the Montana Preservation Alliance. Based in Helena, we are the statewide nonprofit organization fostering the preservation of our historic places and cultural heritage.

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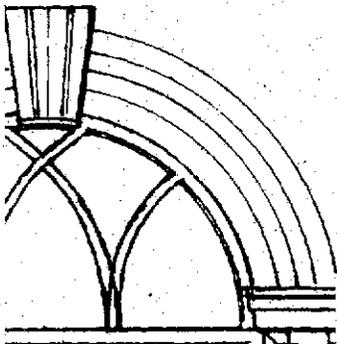
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At MPA, I work with owners of historic properties across the state, both public and private, to seek ways to preserve heritage places whenever possible. We have carried out this mission for the past 18 years, and have a solid track record of helping to find alternatives for buildings at risk due to abandonment, lack of funds, lack of options or vision for reuse.

The task of breathing new life into a historic building isn't always easy, and takes commitment of funds, expertise and energy. When done well, it's worth it - handsome old buildings gain a new lease on life, our heritage remains intact, and it leaves us with a valuable asset. Like this awesome, beautiful capitol that we are all so very proud of.

Throughout Montana, we have many state-owned properties, including many landmark buildings in desperate need of rescue. The short list includes the Montana Veteran's Home at Columbia Falls, some of the university buildings, the Stedman Foundry Pattern House here in Helena, the Warm Springs complex and the Boulder River School administration building. A couple of these have the dubious honor of making our Most Endangered List in recent years, and I would like to share this list with you. As you can see the list is full of buildings that we should all hope to see rejuvenated.

In our work, we reach out to every corner of our state, and I can tell you that across Montana, people have gotten the concept that rehabilitating heritage buildings not





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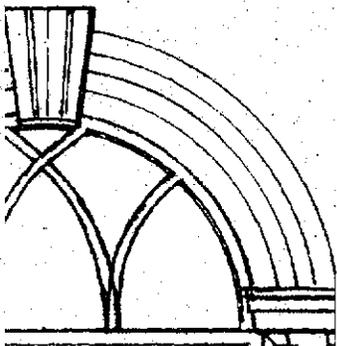
only preserves history, it's a good investment. And a proven tool for revitalizing local economies, which in turn creates jobs, new investment and a threshold of activity that leads to more dollars being spent locally.

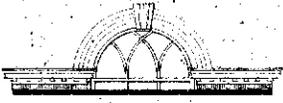
We see this working from

Tiny Ingomar where the local schoolhouse is now the Bunk & Biscuit Inn to Red Lodge's Hawkeye grain elevator now an office building, to Lewistown's historic school, which became spacious residential apartments, to Livingston's East Side School in process to house city offices, and finally, Billings NP Railroad Depot converted to restaurant and community space, and the heart of a stunning downtown renaissance. Where buildings in just as tough shape as the Boulder headquarters, with almost as many pigeons, are now being redeveloped.

These are just a few examples of what can be done with some imagination, and a diligent effort to find funding and a profitable new use, even during a time of a relatively flat state economy. In each case, there was a will, and people locally found a way.

I'll offer one small example of commitment for a state-owned property, the Red Bluff Stage Stop. This building sat vacant and unused at MSU's ag experiment station for decades until we brought the university and the local community together for a daylong meeting on how to save this building. People came from Norris, Ennis, Pony and as far away as Missoula, Bozeman, Helena, Butte and together we brainstormed. The result? Phase one: Weatherproof the Building. Accomplished several months later, with new roofing supplied by MSU, donated labor by Bradford Roofing of Billings, and a cost of less than \$1,000. Phase two: Secure its Future. This phase lies ahead, and people from the workshop donated over \$1,000 as seed money into a Red Bluff building fund. MSU is considering options including sale of the building to the community or a new owner who will restore it.





MPA

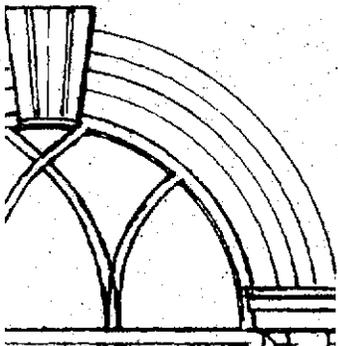
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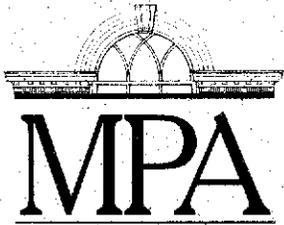
This session we are asking for state leadership in developing coherent policies for how state agencies utilize and caretake historic properties. For too long, we have witnessed viable historic buildings left to deteriorate, with no attempt to secure the building envelope. Agencies were not asked to think beyond maintaining their programs, and often, for want of a minimal investment up front to mothball historic building, thousands, even millions of dollars in damage have occurred to buildings that were relatively sound when state programs moved out of them. This kind of demolition by neglect is a heartbreak at best, a squandering of public resources at worst.

In the hope that our economic forecasts may be changing, we are asking you, our legislators, the governor and this administration to put off demolishing any more significant historic buildings and to join us in thinking about the future of state-owned heritage properties. High quality historic buildings and intact communities can be the engine for local economic development. This is the proven concept behind Representative Lindeens' bill to launch a Montana Main Street program for preservation-based community revitalization.

The state itself could take a more entrepreneurial approach we might see more historically-housed programs such as the National Center for Appropriate Technology in Butte, or the National Health Institutes' Rocky Mountain Lab in Hamilton. Senator Moss has proposed a bill that we heartily support to establish a task force to study state policy on heritage and preservation, and the potential links to economic vitality.

All of this leads up to a simple plea. Give the buildings you are being asked to demolish a reprieve, endorse the notion that the state can and should do better in promoting preservation of its historic properties, and lets dive in and see just what these buildings can do to foster a better economic outlook for communities such as Columbia Falls, Libby, Boulder, Norris and more.

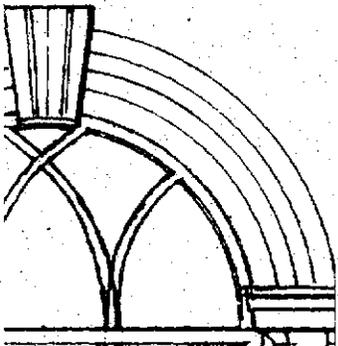




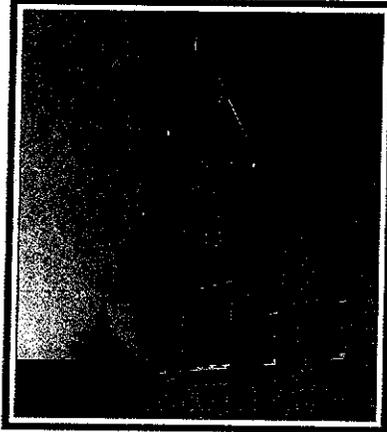
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Thank you for your interest and all of your efforts on behalf of Montana heritage.

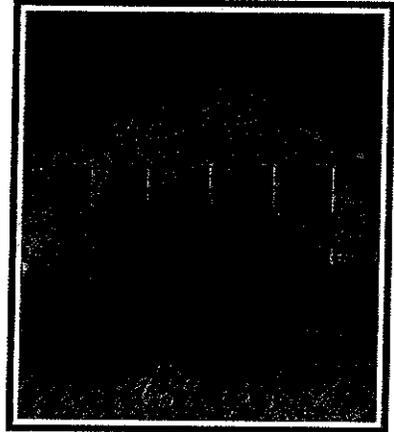
Chere Justo
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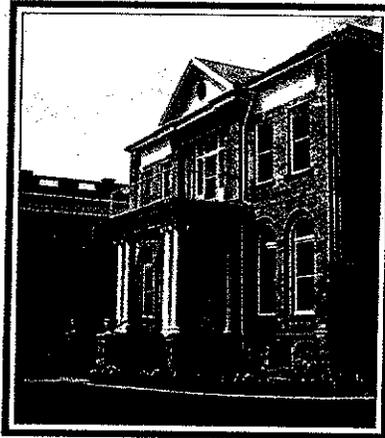
ENDANGERED PLACES 2002



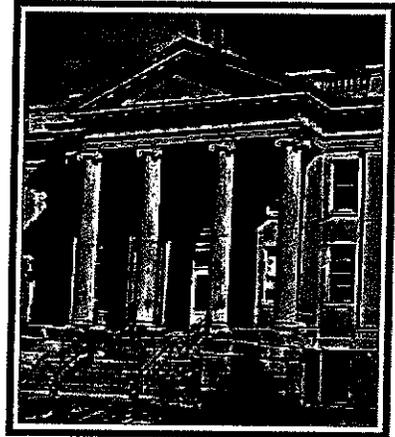
United Methodist Church
Willow Creek, Montana



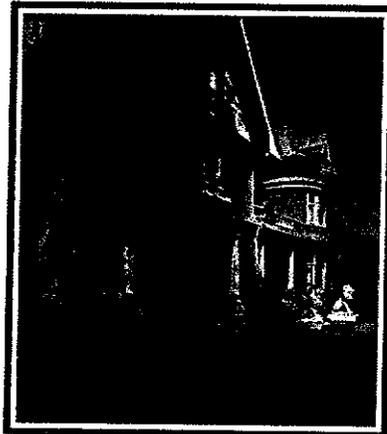
Red Bluff Stage Stop



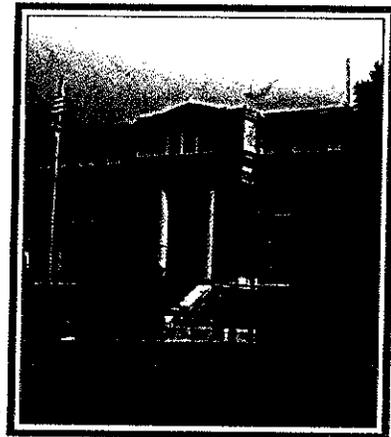
St. Francis Rectory
Missoula, Montana



Bishop Gilmore School
Helena, Montana



T. Byron Story Mansion
Bozeman, Montana



Stillwater County Courthouse
Columbus, Montana

MONTANA'S MOST ENDANGERED HISTORIC PLACES

2002

Historic Church Properties

Churches were founding institutions in the annals of Montana history, as the territory and state took form. While ministering to people's spiritual needs, religious orders and missions also offered much-needed social services to Montana's burgeoning population.

COUNTY CHURCHES

Nestled into quiet valleys or leaning into the prairie winds, the country churches of Montana have withstood many tests of time. Long after homesteaders pulled out and mining camps shut down, the churches remain to mark a time when bygone settlements were thriving and the local church was the center of community. Population has shifted in the state, and many rural communities that once supported these churches are in decline. As congregations dwindle and churches fall into disuse, creative options and local commitments are needed to rescue these beautiful buildings before they are lost.

RED BLUFF STAGE STOP

In the mid-1860's, the tiny gold-mining community of Red Bluff was born, drawing hundreds of hopeful miners to the area. Amidst the grime and clamor of mining and milling operations, this stone stage stop and hotel was built, probably during the late 1870's. The town existed only a short time, but the stage stop lived on to mark the settlement's short, energetic history. In 1956, the property became part of Montana State University's Agricultural Experiment program, and sadly, the stage station has fared badly in the years since then. Used now for limited storage, the stately old stage stop has been allowed to deteriorate to an alarming degree. Today, only the pigeons and mice spend their nights in the old sleeping rooms. If the college does not make repairs soon, this building will become a classic example of demolition by neglect.

T. FRANCIS XAVIER PARISH BUILDINGS, MISSOULA BISHOP GILMORE SCHOOL / ST. HELENA SCHOOL, HELENA

Schools, hospitals, and orphanages were all opened under religious auspices long before the government was able to meet these needs. Today, in Helena and Missoula, this legacy is in immediate danger of being destroyed. Classes were last held in St. Helena School in the 1970's, and the school's fate is teetering as the parish considers its future. Designed by Montana architect C. S. Haire, it is one of the finest Neo-Classical buildings in the state. In Missoula, the block associated with St. Francis Xavier parish contains the 1892 church, 2 historic schools, and a rectory, designed by the city's most prominent architect, A. J. Gibson, ca. 1910. Today, pressure to demolish one or all of the auxiliary buildings for parking turns its back on the wonderful heritage of these imposing buildings.

STORY MANSION

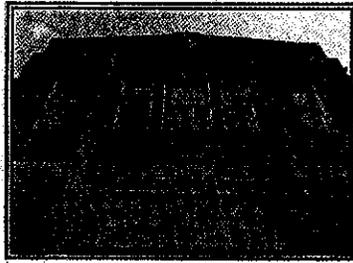
Built in 1912 for T. Byron Story, a member of one of Bozeman's founding families, the Story Mansion is a striking example of Tudor Revival architecture, and one of Montana's most outstanding residences. The mansion was sold to the SAE fraternity during the 1920's, and has been home to the young men of SAE since that time. The home is now in need of critical repair, and SAE plans to sell the property and move elsewhere. Development pressure and the cost of renovation threaten this building today as preservationists work with public groups and private individuals to see that the Story Mansion and its spacious grounds continue to grace Bozeman's oldest neighborhood for generations to come.

MONTANA COURTHOUSES

During the late 19th and early 20th century, Montana was organized into 56 counties. Newly-built courthouses, temples of American democracy, opened their doors and invited county residents to participate. Within those walls people found the public institutions upon which Montana society was constructed - government, justice and education. The courthouses range from the simple false-fronted Daniels County courthouse to imposing Romanesque buildings of sandstone and granite, yet today they share one thing in common: most are now aging and many are in serious need of repair. At the start of the 21st century, Montana counties must step into the future, expand services, upgrade telecommunications and provide accessibility to all. Montana leaders are challenged to find solutions and preservationists must join in; these stately buildings are keystones in state and local history that we simply cannot afford to lose.

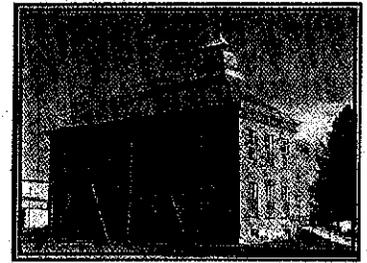
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MONTANA'S MOST ENDANGERED PLACES 2004

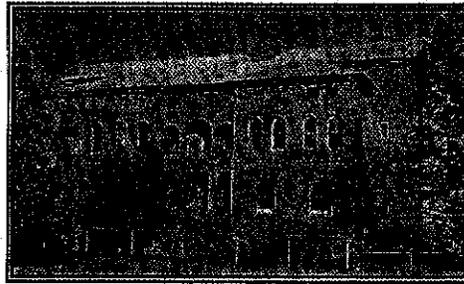


Libby High School

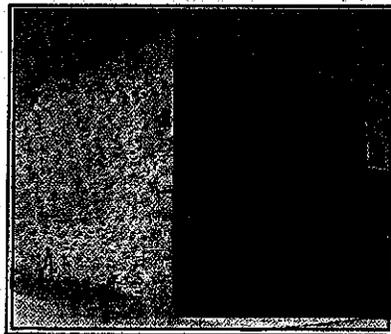
HISTORIC MONTANA SCHOOLS



Trask Hall



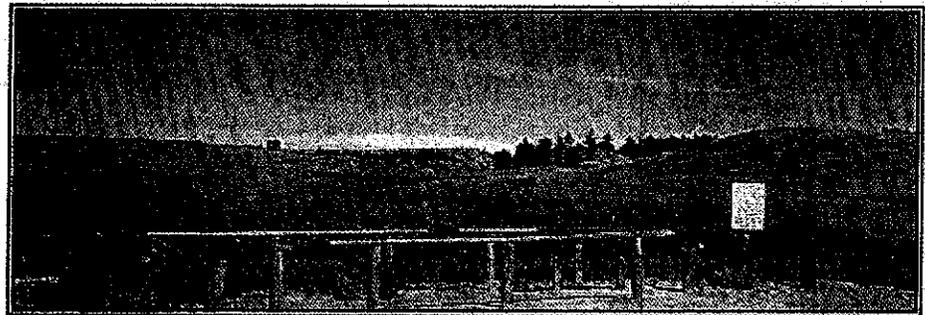
Administration Building ~ Boulder River School



Stonewall Hall



O'Rourke Building



Rosebud Battlefield

MONTANA'S MOST ENDANGERED HISTORIC PLACES 2004

Libby High School - Libby

Libby's historic high school is the community's most prominent architectural feature — a stately 2½ story brick building designed by architects Whitehouse & Price of Spokane in 1919. Positioned at one end of Libby's commercial strip, the school is a significant resource and holds tremendous redevelopment potential. In February and March 2004, the Libby School District was persuaded to consider a local proposal for demolition of this historic community asset. MPA has worked with the Friends of the Libby High School to shape a redevelopment plan, and this summer will be a defining moment for the school and the Libby community. MPA hopes that an imaginative solution which preserves the building for generations of use to come, will be found.

Trask Hall - Deer Lodge

Trask Hall has served as a cornerstone for education in Montana for over 125 years. Constructed in 1878, Trask Hall is significant as the first college in Montana. Since its inception as the Montana Collegiate Institute, eleven years before statehood, Trask Hall has had an association with Montana education for its entire lifespan. While the local school district has done a remarkable job of preserving the building, Trask Hall is slowly falling into disrepair and is in need of renovations to help meet modern educational requirements. The school district prefers to preserve the building, but they are unsure where preservation funding and resources may be located. MPA seeks to support the district in its continued use of this valuable resource.

Administration Building - Boulder River School

The Old Administration Building was built in the 1890s and designed by architects of state renown, Charles Suite and John C. Paulsen. It is a grand example of Italian-Renaissance Revival architecture, rarely built to such a scale in Montana. The Montana Developmental Center (MDC) in Boulder has lobbied the State Department of Administration for funding to demolish this rare jewel. In a recent meeting with the State Historic Preservation Office, MDC expressed pessimism, stating that they are not optimistic about finding a new occupant that could co-exist next to the patients and programs of the adjacent facility. Regardless of the mission of their agencies, Montana state officials are stewards of many of our state's significant historic resources. MPA will encourage officials to join with preservationists to protect keystones in state and local history.

Stonewall Hall - Virginia City

Stonewall Hall was the location of meetings of the Montana Territorial Legislature during the years Virginia City was capital - 1865 through 1875. It served as the Territorial Capitol Building, and according to the National Park Service, it is the only surviving Territorial Capitol Building in the Northwest and one of the few of its type in the Western United States. Currently, Stonewall Hall is not owned by the Montana Heritage Commission, but by the Sue Ford Bovey Testamentary Trust, and administered by the Wells Fargo Bank. Sadly, neglect has taken its toll. The Stonewall was apparently offered to the Heritage Commission, but the offer has not been accepted due to the expensive nature of this rehabilitation project. It is feared that, due to its deteriorated condition and liability, the Stonewall might be demolished. MPA joins preservationists already active in Virginia City seeking a solution to save a critical element of our history.

O'Rourke Building - Butte

In the heart of the Butte National Historic Landmark District stands the O'Rourke Apartment Building, one of the most substantial apartment houses in the city. Built in 1908, the O'Rourke was designed by Butte builder W. A. O'Brien and is an example of the high-style architecture that dominated Butte during its heyday as the nation's copper capital. Last spring, Butte-Silver Bow local government issued a dangerous building abatement order, citing loose masonry and fire codes. Concerned that the order was a first step to demolition, the local preservation heroes at the Butte Citizens for Preservation and Revitalization (CPR) stepped in. The CPR has done tremendous work to stabilize the building; now the O'Rourke's fate depends on obtaining a structural assessment and new owners who will turn the property around. The O'Rourke can be put back into active use, but much depends upon City acknowledgment that continued demolition within the historic district is robbing the community of its heritage.

Rosebud Battlefield State Park

Rosebud Battlefield State Park, the site of the historic 1876 Battle of the Rosebud between the U.S. Army and combined Sioux and Northern Cheyenne warriors, is a cultural and historic treasure, one of the best preserved frontier battlefields and significant in the history of our nation's conflicted relations with native people and cultures. The Battlefield meets all the criteria for National Historic Landmark status, and an application for this designation is currently in process at the direction of the National Park Service. The rich resources of the battlefield site face an immediate and significant threat from coalbed methane development within park boundaries. Mineral permits have been leased, and the prospect to drill for minerals under the park could surface at any time. A listing in our Most Endangered Historic Places will continue our attention to the threatened cultural and historic places of eastern Montana and be an opportunity to promote national recognition and action on behalf of this important historic treasure.

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