

Testimony on House Bill 777
House State Administration Committee
March 23, 2005

EXHIBIT 13
DATE 3-23-05
777

Presented by Mark Baumler
Montana Historical Society

The Montana Historical Society supports HB777 and looks forward to being a member of a special Historic and Cultural Properties Commission created to study and propose new state policy recommendations for the preservation of Montana's heritage properties.

The Society has the honor of being involved with the management and care of some of Montana's premier historic sites, including the Original Governor's Mansion here in Helena, Virginia City, the Daly Mansion in Billings and even a historic bridge over the Missouri River near Wolf Point.

The Society is also home to the State Historic Preservation Office, established in 1979 under the Montana State Antiquities Act (MCA 22-3-421 to 442). The SHPO administers the nation's preservation programs – including the National Register of Historic Places, the federal historic rehabilitation tax credit, and the certified local government program of community preservation offices – thereby ensuring that Montana qualifies each year for federal funding under the National Historic Preservation Act. The Preservation Office also exists under both federal and state code to consult with and assist federal and state agencies in meeting their responsibilities to care for and protect Montana's significant heritage properties from unnecessary harm.

With HB777, the Historic and Cultural Properties Commission promises over the next two years to take a fresh, timely, and ultimately critical look at the role of the state in preserving state heritage properties for Montana's future. *Fresh* in the sense that no previous multi-agency and organizational effort of this scope at this level has been undertaken before. *Timely* given the now recognized and respected role that historic properties play in heritage tourism and in the economic and cultural well-being of Montanans. And *critical* as these non-renewable resources held in public trust continue to be threatened and lost at an alarming rate.

The Montana Historical Society believes a Commission to study this issue is appropriate and urges your support of HB777.