SENATE FINANCE AND CLAIMS
EXHIBIT NO. 14
DATE 4-3-05
BILL NO. HB 540

Senate Finance and Claims Committee

My name is Lee Rostad, and as president of the Board of Trustees of the Montana Historical Society, I am here to represent the hard-working members of that board. We are excited about this wonderful opportunity to expand the physical plant of the museum and the research center. As Member Foor states in his letter, "As a long-serving trustee I can tell you that the Montana Historical Society is at a critical point in our ability to be able to carry out the role and scope of our mission. All great institutions that are of our kind and character and have the goals we have are based on great collections. I believe that the principal limiting factor to our success is the lack of space for maintaining our world-class collections. Our library, archives, and museum are literally bursting at the seams."

Shirley Groff writes: "Without the recording and preservation of the past it is impossible to move smoothly and confidently into the future..."

Bill Holt: The Montana History Center Project is a once in a lifetime opportunity for the State of Montana. The Project not only provides needed space to house the State's treasures, heritage and other memorabilia, but allows proper interpretive and educational areas for the public to enjoy."

It is reason enough to have a building that would do justice to the collection and work that the society does and perpetuate the heritage of Montana, but there is the added benefit economically. We would have an exciting tourist destination better than the famed Cody Museum, bringing tourism dollars into the state. The location between Glacier Park and Yellowstone Park assures that the tourist would access the History Center easily. People who are concerned about the economic growth of the state will find this a golden opportunity for commercial activity. I think that the board's commitment to raise the bulk of the money needed is an indication of their firm belief in the right direction of this project. However, it is difficult—no impossible—to ask for support from the public for a state project if the state is not willing to participate wholeheartedly.

I would like to read you some interesting comments from the newspaper. This story is entitled "State of Montana Needs Historical Building."

"One of the first laws to be passed by Montana's first territorial legislature, sitting at Bannack in the winter of 1864-65, was an act incorporating the Historical Society of Montana.

"When one pauses to consider all the problems that confronted those pioneer lawmakers—problems of establishing law and order as well as finding ways and means of putting a new territory into successful operation—it is a matter of wonder that they had time to think of starting a historical society. But they did—and by that very act gave the society and the work it was contemplated it should do an importance in Montana affairs that present day citizens should not forget.

"...The object of the historical society was stated as 'to collect and arrange facts in regard to the early history of this territory, the discovery of mines, incidents of fur trade, etc., Its first headquarters were in Virginia City. Subsequently they were moved to Deer Lodge and then to Helena. In 1893 the property came under the control of the state....."

"Yet a visit to the state capitol in Helena convinces one that we are neglecting if not forgetting our state historical library. It is cramped for room and in-adequately supported by state funds.

"...Our present quarters are inadequate and badly lighted. A good part of the accumulation is in the basement and not accessible to the public. We have many framed pictures which we cannot put up for lack of wall space..."

"...rooms are filled to capacity and overflowing with valuable books, papers, manuscripts, paintings, etc., and cached in obscure corners are relics of Montana's history that are beyond price and cannot be replaced."

"The Montana historical library is said by historical researchers to be by far the greatest in the northwest. It contains 30,000 volumes; nearly a hundred oil portraits of famous Montana pioneers, 1,000 photographs and pictures of historic scenes of Montana; 3,000 bound volumes of Montana newspapers; a vast collection of historical books that area out of print and very rare; probably the most complete history of the American fur trade in existence, including the Hudson's Bay company, ?American Fur Company and Northwest Company from 1800 to 1840; the most authentic and complete history of the Lewis and Clark expedition; entire set of Congressional reports from 1834 to the present day; probably the only authentic history of Jim Bridger in existence.

"...The value of this institution to the present and coming generations is not appreciated by the public, and has been sadly neglected by the legislature in the past, probably for lack of publicity calling its worth to the attention of the people of the state."

The interesting thing about this article is that it was written in December of 1928, when the treasures of our Treasure State were housed in the basement of the Capitol. It took until 1951 to get the present building. We have the opportunity now, to deal with the problem for perhaps another 100 years or more. Let's do it!