

MONTANA HERITAGE



*Commission*



**BIENNIAL REPORT**





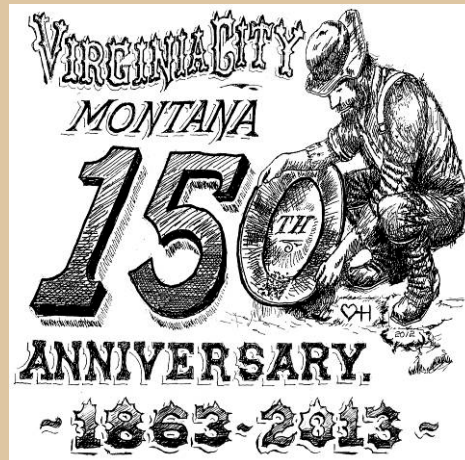
**Biennial Report to the Legislature**

**Montana Heritage Preservation and Development Commission**

**(MHC)**

**Our Mission:**

The Montana Heritage Commission preserves and manages historic resources in Virginia City, Nevada City and Reeder's Alley and promotes the appreciation of history through quality visitor experiences.



## History, Vision and Goals

The Montana Heritage Commission takes pride in managing some of the most valuable and fascinating historic sites in Montana--Virginia City, Nevada City, plus Reeder's Alley and the Pioneer Cabin in Helena. In 1997, the Montana Legislature purchased Virginia City and Nevada City from the Bovey family. Our goal is to promote and preserve these sites while encouraging Montanans and our children to become excited about the rich history of this great state. Virginia City and Nevada City represent the greatest gold strike in the Rocky Mountain West, Virginia City was the site of our first active territorial capital, the MHC offices now occupy the original Montana Legislative Offices.

### Program Goals for 2012 - 2013:

- Develop and implement a business model to help us achieve economic sustainability for operating costs and to contribute to the promotion and preservation of the areas we manage.
- Complete the sale of select real and personal properties to clean up our sites and generate revenue.
- Maintain and expand education and interpretation programs to improve the public enjoyment and understanding of our historic sites.
- Improve the maintenance of existing infrastructure to generate revenue, enhance life safety, and allow public use of our properties.
- Improve marketing and promoting the sites to increase visitation to Virginia City, Nevada City and Reeder's Alley.
- Seek additional public and private funding support through grants, donations, and appropriations to further our goals.
- Complete critical historic building stabilization projects, and address urgent life-safety goals with occupied buildings.
- Continue the conservation and care of valuable historic artifacts.
- Conduct required archaeological research and mitigation for projects effecting state lands.
- Recruit and utilize volunteers to increase efficiency of operations and leverage limited state funding.
- Manage and expand private business leases at MHC properties to generate revenue and provide well-rounded visitor amenities.

## Partnerships

The Montana Heritage Commission (MHC) is a small state agency and partnerships are critical for us to leverage funding and staff resources. Partnerships help us gather expertise and skills to achieve our goals. Some of our partners we have worked with over the past two years include:

- AmeriCorps (NCCC)
- Ancient Order of the Hibernians (Butte/Helena)
- Butte Silver bow Public Archives
- Elderhostel (Dillon)
- Friends of the Cumbres Toltec Railroad
- Madison County
- Mai Wah Society
- Montana Conservation Corps
- Montana Historical Society
- Montana History Foundation
- Montana Preservation Alliance
- Montana State University - Project Archeology
- MT Fish Wildlife and Parks
- MT Ghost Town Society
- National Trust for Historic Preservation
- Rarus Railway
- Ruby Valley Conservation District
- Town of Virginia City
- Trout Unlimited
- University of Delaware
- University of Montana - Western
- US Forest Service
- Virginia City Area Chamber of Commerce
- Virginia City Preservation Alliance
- Volunteers for the MT Heritage Commission
- Washington State University
- Youth Challenge (Dillon)



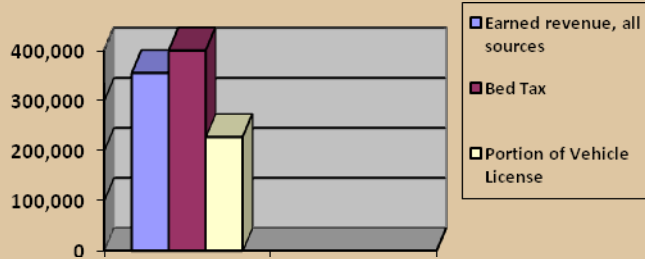
MHC collaborates with these entities and others to share resources, manage state land and cultural resources, offer educational programs, maintain buildings, improve waterways, implement conservation projects, build trails, and leverage funding.

**Income and Expenses**

**Income:**

Statutory Funds and Earned Revenue

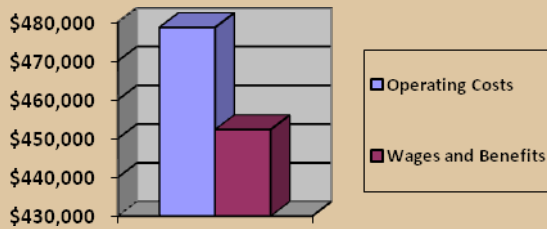
- Earned revenue includes all MHC properties, leases, gate and train fees, rents and private donations.



**Expenses: MHC Operations**

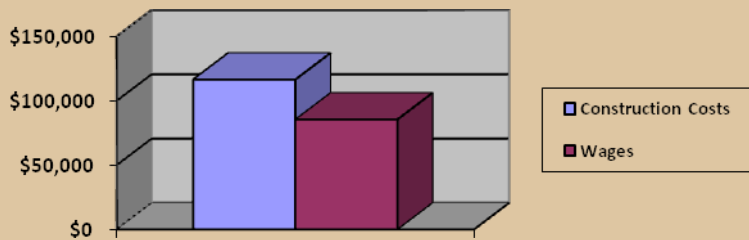
Virginia City, Nevada City, and Reeder's Alley

- Costs include all utilities, professional services, repairs and maintenance, insurance, state administrative and other operating costs.



**Expenses: Long Range Building Funds**

Virginia City, Nevada City and Reeder's Alley

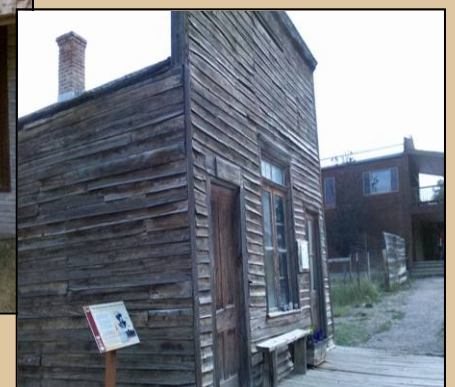
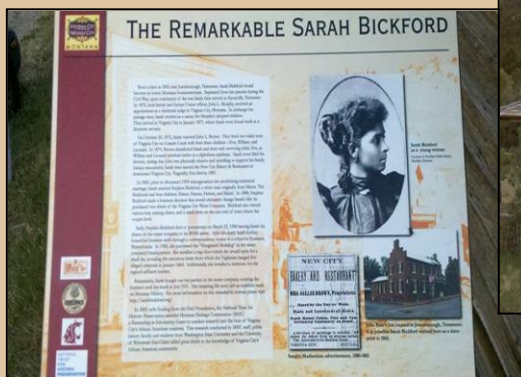


The Montana legislature approved funding to preserve and maintain state historic properties managed by MHC: \$2M in 2007, and \$750,000 in 2009. Wages are for MHC employees only that work on state buildings. Other costs are professional service, contractors, construction materials, and equipment.

## Archaeology



- Project Archaeology, a heritage educational organization based at Montana State University, is collaborating with the Montana Heritage Commission for the third year in a row to offer a course to teachers that focuses on the history/archaeology of Virginia City and incorporates Project Archaeology materials. The course is a 2-credit course (EDCI 588). Teachers will spend four days in historic Virginia City and Nevada City and have the opportunity to do actual archaeology alongside a team of professional archaeologists.
- The town of Virginia City received ten new interpretive signs within the last year. The signs are created to give the public an understanding of the history and natural resources that Virginia City has to offer, as they peruse the shops and restaurants.
- Three signs are the direct result of a grant which was won through the National Trust for Historic Preservation. This was a Partnership-in-Scholarship grant for \$15,000 that allowed the conducting of research and production of interpretive signage for the life of Sarah Bickford and other African American residents of Virginia City such as Jack Taylor, whose home was fully preserved in 2009.



## Collections

*"Virginia City has the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest Americana site in the United States next to the Smithsonian"*  
-New York Times-

As curators, our work has many parts:

- Preserve, stabilize & track collections using museum practices & standards for historic sites
- Catalog the objects, establishing a written & electronic record
- Research the objects & their significance to VC/NC and the rest of the collection
- Educate the public through research & exhibition of these historic objects

Some highlights from the past year include:

- Loan of over 2,500 Chinese objects (original to Butte) from our Nevada City collection to the Mai Wah Society, Butte, MT
- Repair and restoration of the Opera House's c. 1914 Cremona Photo player Organ, the only one known to be in public use
- Over 3,000 objects catalogued by volunteers (and over 500 hours donated) in 2012
- Over 1,000 records entered into an MHC database
- Filming and release of a PBS Back roads of Montana episode featuring our collection of music machines in the NC Music Hall
- NPR interview featuring the Gypsy Verbal Fortune Teller
- Final volunteer project with Friends of the Cumbres Toltec Scenic Railroad included stabilizing and waterproofing the roofs of several of our train cars
- Participation in an NEH funded workshop "Protecting Cultural Collections" to develop a disaster response plan for our institution



Education and Living History Interpretation

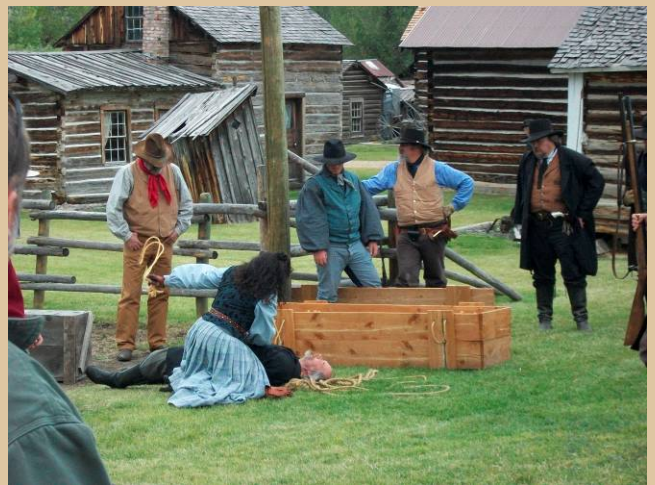
*"Virginia and Nevada City are in the top 5 places every Montana kid should see"*

*-Great Falls Tribune-*

MHC offers a diverse range of educational programs and reaches out to Montana schools K-12. School groups from across Montana visit Reeder's Alley and enjoy guided tours in Nevada City from May-September to learn about Montana history and the territorial capital at Virginia City.

- 22 live interpretive weekends held in the Nevada City Museum,
- Outreach teaching components of Environmental Interpretation with Montana Western University
- Humanities Speakers Bureau Programs
- Interpreter in the classroom programs
- School group History projects in Nevada City
- History Camp - two, one week camps for children that teaches area history and hands-on experiences of pioneer life.

"MHC's Curator and Living History Interpreter Dan Thyer was the winner of the tourism person of the year for 2011 at the Governor's Tourism Conference"



2012 NEVADA CITY MUSEUM LIVING HISTORY SCHEDULE	
May 26-28	The Gold Discovery
Jun. 2-3	The Shooting of Deputy Dillingham
June 9-10	The George Ives Trial and Hanging
June 16-17	Montana Vigilantes
June 23-24	The Civil War in Alder Gulch
June 23	Lantern Tour-9pm
Jun 30-Jul 2	Nevada City 4th of July
July 7-8	Alder Gulch Legends
July 14-15	Capture of Steve Marshland
July 21-22	Vigilante Double Cross.....?
July 21	Lantern Tour 9pm
Jul 28-29	Miner's Court: Claim disputes
Aug. 4-5	Placer Gold
Aug. 11-12	Beans, Bacon & Bannock Bread
Aug 18-19	The Flour Riot
Aug 18	Lantern Tour-9pm
Aug. 25-26	The Women of the Gulch
Sept. 1-3	Jack Slade's End
Sept. 1	Lantern Tour-9pm
Sept. 8-9	Winter Apples
Sept. 15-16	At The Trails End
Oct 26-27	All Hallows Eve

Montana Heritage Commission

For more information call (406) 843-5247  
Or visit [www.virginiacitymt.com](http://www.virginiacitymt.com)





## Business Development

MHC hired a Business and Development Manager in January of 2012 to help increase revenue to become self-sufficient in the operational expenses associated with the Montana Heritage Commission.

- To increase revenue in 2012 we designed a more family oriented environment with the Family Fun Pass. This pass let's families ride on the train, go pan for gold and get entrance into the living history museum. This along with a strong marketing campaign of TV, Radio, Print Ad and E-Commerce saw a strong increase in tourists in 2012.
- We brought e-commerce to the town of Virginia City who has resisted change since 1863. We designed a Virginia City App for smart phones and also designed QR Scan codes to help tourists be able to go directly to our web-site and also point their phone at any building and they can get historic interpretation of that buildings history.
- We have over 37 business relationships with concessionaires in Virginia and Nevada City along with Reeder's Alley in Helena, Montana. These relationships contribute to over 400 jobs for people in Montana.



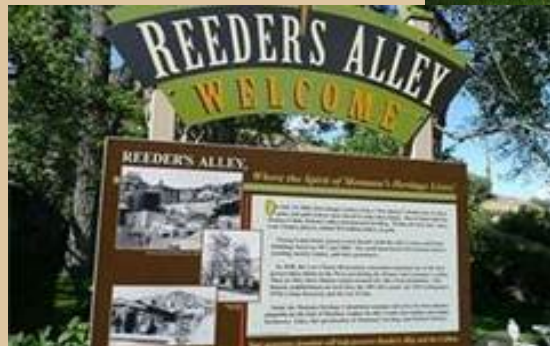
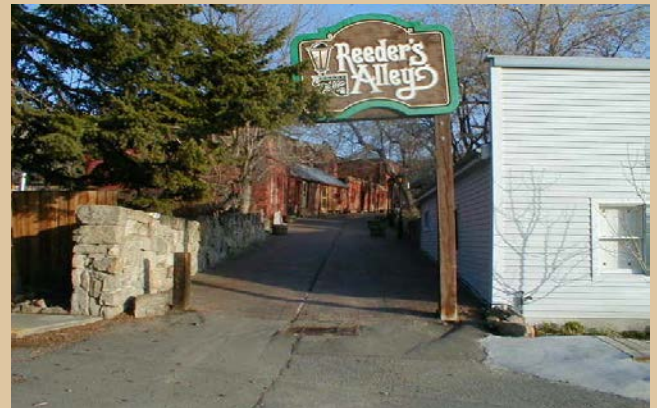
**Download our Virginia City App for Smart phones!**



## Reeder's Alley

Reeder's Alley in Helena was built between 1872 and 1884 by Lewis Reeder, a mason from Pennsylvania. The thirty one-room apartments that make up this quaint brick "village" are nestled against the slope of Mt. Helena, and comprise the town's most complete remaining block of this era. Reeder's Alley is situated in the southwest corner of downtown, and is the oldest intact piece of early Helena. The property is a strong link to the beginnings of a settlement here, offering insights into the lives of miners, the Chinese influence, building techniques of the time, and life of the common men and women who came here seeking their fortune.

The buildings in Reeder's Alley are designated as an historic district listed in the National Register of Historic Places with the National Park Service. Preservation crew at MHC does continual yearly maintenance repairs for businesses.



## Historic Building Preservation and Maintenance

The primary source of funds for preservation work is state long range building funds. Historic buildings have received stabilization and restoration work to keep history alive and to protect the state's investment at our historic sites. State owned real estate and collections at MHC are valued at over \$38 million for insurance purposes. In 1997 the state purchased 248 buildings in Virginia and Nevada City and these building require continual maintenance and repair from our experienced preservation crew.

Some of the highlights of the past year were:

- Restoration of the Richards Cabin-This project was funded by a grant from the Montana Historical Society
- Green front Cabins in Virginia City, extensive work on foundation and structure.
- Sullivan Saddlry Building, repaired structure and roof.
- Chinese Temple and Brooks Cabin re-roofed and exterior restored which are located in Nevada City, Montana.
- Jack Taylor Cabin in Virginia City, Montana restored and preserved with completing major foundation and log repair damage.
- Numerous maintenance and repairs on various building located in Virginia and Nevada City as well as Reeder's Alley in Helena, Montana.

MHC's Archeologist ensures state cultural resources are documented and recorded with ground disturbing activities on state land.

A complete record of building preservation work and archeology reports is available in annual reports provided to the State Historic Preservation Office. Annual preservation reports are available, please email your request to [docmhpc@mt.gov](mailto:docmhpc@mt.gov).



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