

JACKSON HOLE

HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

CHRONICLE

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The First Families of Jackson Hole

First Families is a unique on-line exhibit dedicated to the first families who made Jackson Hole their permanent home. The entirety of the research and family photos have been collected by direct descendants of these families. They have been organized and curated here for public consumption for the first time since the original story "First Settlers of Jackson Hole" appeared in the Jackson's Hole Courier in 1946. Authored by Melvina Wilson Robertson, the story was an account of Sylvester Wilson and his family's decision to move from Wilsonville, Utah to Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Melvina was the 12th child of Sylvester and Mary Wilson, and was three years old when these events unfolded. Much of her detailed information is first hand, having witnessed many of these events herself. At the time of publication, six of the original twenty-eight settlers were still alive to read her words, many of them personal friends. Even as a young woman, Melvina recognized the importance of preserving these details, many soon lost to time and invention of modern technology. She considered herself the family biographer and began keeping detailed notes.

Upon her death in 1952, the task of family biographer was upheld and eventually passed to her great-granddaughter, Judith S. Rosbrook Andersen. It was Judith who passed copies of her family's extensive records onto JHSM, and many early details of homesteading in Jackson Hole are finally being retold. The true extent of Melvina's research and the hundreds of extended family members she documented through genealogical records is too vast to share here. Three bound books containing her work are available upon appointment in the Stan Klassen Research Center.

What follows below is an account of what everyday life was like in the first wave of homesteading in Jackson Hole from 1890-1900. At this time in Jackson Hole life was exceptionally isolated. There wasn't even a clear route over Teton Pass; these families felled the first trees to allow their wagons to pass. How they then built and illuminated their homes, how they dressed themselves and what they ate, how they survived the long winter months are all brought to light through Melvina's writing. While many accounts and documents exist with this information, few are firsthand accounts written by the individuals who experienced this lifestyle.

When the dude ranching boom hit in the 1920s, Jackson Hole was still rugged country, however it was very much on the map. Conveniences like kerosene lamps, regular mail service, general and grocery stores, and a rudimentary (but extant) road system allowed locals and dudes alike a comparatively comfortable life. Just twenty years prior, the first general store offering luxury items like flour, shoes, clothing, wash bins and candy opened in the newly-named town of Jackson in 1899. Prior to this, a yearly trip was made over the treacherous Pass that took weeks.



Melvina & Issac Robertson

[Continued on page 4]

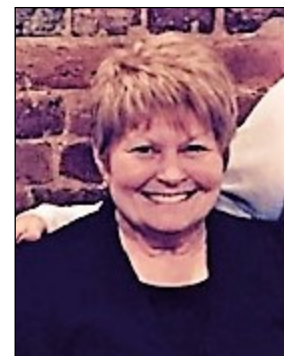


FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK:

Howdy Friends,

I am pleased to announce that all is well at JHSM at the close of my first 30 days serving as Acting Executive Director. The staff and board are preparing for a brisk peak season this summer and invite you to join our museum family (see volunteer opportunities on page 6).

Sharon Kahin, former Executive Director, retired in January to continue her work of 30 years gathering Native American oral histories. Sharon feels called to record these historic stories before they are lost forever, and fortunately, a philanthropist shares her passion and is underwriting the project. Dr. Kahin leaves with our thanks and best wishes for her continuing adventure.



Mother Nature has tested our endurance this winter. Old timers say they haven't seen this much snow in February since 1986 when Jackson got 10 feet in 10 days. Extended minus degree temp days, hurricane force winds, tons of snow that took on 6.3 inches of water weight during 8 days of precipitation heralded the historic storm of early February 2017.

No one escaped The Lady's wrath! Sears' roof collapsed from heavy snow. Firmly packed white stuff froze to thick ice fit for skating on town streets; an 18-wheeler slid into plowed snow blocking traffic at the corner of Gill Avenue and Cache Street. High winds snapped 17 steel utility poles and darkened Teton Village halting all things skiing for several days. Avalanches closed access into Jackson and temporarily blocked roads inside the city limits. An avalanche closed down Snow King Mountain in town: 200 Colter Elementary students, participating in their annual Winter Sports day, were on the mountain skiing, snowboarding and practicing avalanche awareness training at the time - all are safe. Travelers were plagued with delayed and cancelled flights February 7th and 8th while generators maintained minimal services at the airport; the Jackson Hole Daily reported that during the wind storm Tuesday night (Feb. 7) "one commercial airliner taxiing toward the terminal..... (was caught by) a 60mph gust causing the slow-moving jet to spin like a top (on an icy runway)"; fortunately the sun came out February 9th and brought temperatures high enough to thaw runways allowing flights. Post Office boxes were empty, nothing was coming in or going out of Jackson.

February 8th Teton County officials declared a State of Emergency for the Teton Village area where 3,000 were without electricity for days. Feb. 10 Commissioners issued a Disaster Declaration to enlist aid from the governor's office.

~ JHSM SENDS HEARTFELT THANKS ~

to our elected officials who acted responsibly addressing chaos caused by this historic winter storm to set in motion the Teton County Emergency plan quickly mobilizing well-trained crews who selflessly worked around the clock protecting people and property, and to local companies who pitched in wherever and whenever needed repairing broken pipes, furnaces, blocked sewer lines, shoveling walkways and delivering meals to our homebound.

MOTHER NATURE DID HER BEST – JACKSON FOLKS STOOD THE TEST!

From the Past to the Future,

Brenda Roberts

Mission Statement

Preserving and sharing the heritage of Jackson Hole

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Acting Executive Director

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JH Archaeology Initiative

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JH Archaeology Initiative

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SHOP your Museum Store at our website!

Masthead sketch by Robert Rudd:
Joe Pfeiffer's homestead on Antelope Flats Road.

Newsletter Editor: Steve Roberts

MAPPING THE PAST

NORA DEWITT-HOEGER

Over the last several weeks I have been going through our map collection (over 520 at last count) in the Stan Klassen Research Center. I have been sifting through each map, giving them an accession number, inputting them into our online database software Past Perfect and clearly identifying their location in the annex. This way when researchers are interested in a certain map it will appear in their search and we can easily find that particular map they desire. Also as I have been examining each map I have also been sealing them in protective sheets to better preserve them.

As I have discovered, maps are very distracting. Here at the research center we have such a variety of maps to offer researchers from present day Jackson to early Lewis and Clark days and not just topographic maps but architectural blueprints, business directories/activity maps and land claims. Each map tells a story of Jackson's past in a way that no other document can. We have city plan maps that show the evolution of Jackson's streets. Businesses that once existed and now only appear in these maps help us keep their history alive.

Some of my favorite maps to study were early homestead maps prior to the creation of Grand Teton National Park, such as Elk Refuge/Poverty Flat maps from the 1910's that show the early homesteaders names and plots of land. They tell a physical story about where people lived and what Jackson must have looked like. Family members doing research in our center can see where their ancestors first homesteaded, who their neighbors were and the natural features they had available to them. Maps have a lot to offer and I am happy to help keep them preserved for future research. Make an appointment to our research center and check out some of our maps!



Nora examines and catalogs each map in the collection.

Dr. Sharon Kahin retires from the Jackson Hole Historical Society and Museum

The Jackson Hole Historical Society and Museum today announced the retirement of Dr. Sharon Kahin who has led the organization since the Fall of 2012. Kahin has led the development of the museum's Jackson Hole Archaeology Initiative, the remodel of the Deloney site to develop our "Indians of the Greater Yellowstone Exhibit", the remodel of the Cache Street location's Cissy Patterson Gallery, and the remodel of the museum's Coey Cabin to serve as JHHSM's new Merrell Archaeology and Teaching Center.

William Best, current President of the JHHSM, said "We thank Dr. Kahin for her leadership of the organization, and recognize the significant improvement in our collection during her time with us. We wish her well in her coming endeavors."

Dr. Kahin will be working with a private philanthropist and leaders from the Crow, Shoshone, and Shoshone/Bannock tribes to collect oral history interviews, stories and cultural narratives for their schools and culture commissions. In addition, she will be working with a local ethnobotanist to document the tribes' use of regional edible and medicinal plants.

A search for Dr. Kahin's replacement will begin immediately.

—JHHSM Board of Directors' press release, 2/1/2017

Now, convenience was just a day's ride away, and what Pap Deloney couldn't stock, the mailman could haul over the Pass. Before the first post office opened, mail only arrived up to three times a year, or whenever someone would make the trek over the Pass to Idaho.

What was it like to live and work on the first homesteads in Jackson Hole? You can begin reading these story segments below that will appear on our website: www.jacksonholehistory.org.

Sylvester Wilson was born on January 30, 1840 in Nauvoo, Illinois. He was one of thirteen siblings, and traveled with the family to settle in Grantsville, Utah in 1852. Sylvester's father worked as a cattle herder and suffered an early death in 1861. Sylvester was now the head of the family, and after several disagreements with his younger brother, Elijah Nicholas (Nick), they had a falling out. Nick left the family to pursue a life of his own.

Mary Wood was born in England in 1844, nine weeks after her father drowned in the Delaware River in the United States. He had intended to move his family to the country and had worked as a cloth weaver. Mary's mother continued to work in England to save up enough money to travel to the United States. In 1855 the family boarded the *Samuel Curling* in April of that year, and arrived a month later in May. The Wood family then made their way to Utah.

Sylvester and Mary would meet in Utah and later married in 1861. Sylvester had become well-known in the Mormon community and had emerged as a strong LDS church leader. His granddaughter would write of him: "He was a man of strong convictions and had the fortitude and ambition to carry them through." In 1878, he was sent to establish a new community near Moab on Cottonwood Creek and it became known as Wilsonville. When Sylvester and Mary arrived, they had eight children and three more would join them while they were living at Wilsonville. By 1889, a severe drought had forced many of the early settlers of Wilsonville to seek opportunity elsewhere. Sylvester was no different; he sold his land and departed northward for St. Anthony, Idaho.

On May 31, 1889, the Wilson family left Wilsonville with 5 covered wagons and 80 head of cattle. Four hundred miles later, they reached St. Anthony, Idaho on July 23. The Wilson caravan was made up on Sylvester and Mary, their younger children, their married daughter Mary Alice and her husband Selar Cheney, and their married son Ervin and his wife Mary Jane. Mary Jane was five months pregnant and due in September. While the men set up camp and began to gather lumber to construct their new homes, a stranger arrived at their fire. The individual was welcomed for dinner, and it was discovered that it was Nick, Sylvester's long-departed brother.

Nick told the family of a nearby mountain valley with ample hay and plenty of free, open land. He had worked in the valley for the summer, and was on his way back to his own family in Sugar City, Idaho. Within a few days, the Wilsons had arranged to travel over the mountains and into the valley, known as Jackson Hole to establish a new homestead. Sylvester, three sons, Nick, Sylvester's daughter Rebecca and Nick's daughter Kate were chosen to brave the first trip into Jackson Hole. The Wilson family was well-acquainted with the stories circulating about outlaws and bandits, but Nick calmed their fears and said the stories were just that. Nevertheless, Sylvester chose his oldest sons and left the rest to wait in Idaho for their successful return. Rebecca and Kate were meant to cook for the men.

After Sylvester and his sons had made an arrangement with the bachelor Billy Green to raise hay on his Slough Grass Ranch, they returned to collect the waiting family and cattle. Ervin and Mary's son James arrived on September 26, and a month later on October 27, the entire family departed for Jackson Hole. They led six wagons over the mountain, which later became the route called Teton Pass. At this time there was no defined trail and the family had to clear trees to allow the wagons to pass through. It was slow going, as the route was steep and difficult. It took the group two weeks to cross the 88 miles from St. Anthony into Jackson Hole, arriving on November 11.

To most locals, this arrival date would be a surprise. This was very late in the year to arrive and attempt to establish a homestead. There was no time to look for a suitable location, or to gather logs to build a house. There was only enough time to prepare for deep snows, and the families found a warm welcome with the bachelors who had already established themselves in the southern portion of the valley. In the area today known as the Elk Refuge, John Holland and John Carnes (and his wife Millie) were neighbors. Twenty-eight other individuals were living in the valley at the time, but the Wilson caravan was the first to include families. They were also the first to lead intact



Sylvester, Mary and Melvina

NEW UPDATE OF JH HISTORICAL ATLAS

SAMANTHA FORD

We are excited to announce that an additional twenty-three sites have been added to our growing Historical Atlas on our website! These sites include some of the more famous locations in the valley like the Jackson Lake Lodge, and the first dude ranch in Jackson Hole, the JY. We are now expanding our efforts to highlight some of the smaller, family-run ranches like the Circle H and the R Lazy S. We are thankful for the partnerships with the Davis, Stirn, and McConaughy families. They graciously shared their personal stories with us, as well as their family photographs.

A special emphasis was given to a variety of sites and structures that tell the history of the development of Grand Teton National Park itself. The first administration building at Beaver Creek, the Moose Entrance Kiosk, and various campgrounds and visitor services-related areas. The Jenny Lake area was added to the map, with a discussion of the high degree of use this area has seen, and the related homesteads, ranches and campgrounds the area has supported. These sites were included in connection with the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service in the summer of 2016, and the ongoing Jenny Lake Renewal Project.

We welcome any suggestions for additions to the Historical Atlas, please contact our Director of Historical Research and Outreach at: samantha@jacksonholehistory.org. Plans to expand this resource into the areas of Jackson, Wilson and South Park are developing.

Jacksonholehistory.org Website Overhaul

This winter, work will be ongoing to restructure our large online inventory of historical resources. Many special exhibits can be found on our website that are not shown in either of our galleries. These online exhibits share detailed information on the history of Jackson Hole, and the many individuals who have contributed to our sense of heritage and place. The “exhibits tab” will be expanded for a more streamlined experience, with easier access to the variety of resources that are currently available. Check back often, as exhibits are updated and added on a regular basis.

Descriptions of our physical exhibits will be updated, with more detailed information to serve our visitors.

A woman's work on an early ranch was never ending. Her day began about 4:30 a.m. and lasted until about 10:00 p.m., or all night if the children were sick. Besides grinding her own coffee, she baked her own breads and desserts, washed clothes and hauled water, churned, and cleaned house in any spare time when she wasn't sewing, tending sick children, or sitting up with a sick neighbor. When she wasn't busy in the house or taking care of her large family, she was expected to help with ranch chores, and many women grubbed brush, ditched, and rode after stock. I really think that the work of the pioneer ranch woman was underestimated. She had as much to do as any of the menfolk, and often she had more. I don't see how we could have made it without the help of the women.

- John C. Budd, from his oral history, collected in "They Made Wyoming Their Own," by Eunice Ewer Wallace

["First Families" from page 4]

wagons over the Pass. They established the first viable route into and out of this isolated mountain country, and many more would follow the path they created.

- Researched and written by Samantha Ford, Director of Historical Research & Outreach

Explore more about the "First Families" at our website or follow the continuing story in our Spring issue of the Chronicle coming soon!

JOIN THE MUSEUM FAMILY – VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

MOVING DAY-

You may have read in the newspaper that JHSM has recently renewed our Mercill property lease with the county for another two years plus a year. JHSM owns the buildings on the corner of Mercill and Glenwood, and the county owns the land - which is on a list of approved properties for affordable housing. The staff has been working diligently for two years to be ready for MOVING DAY. Now we need YOUR help. There is still much to do – learn on the job with a trained staff member. Please contact Brenda Roberts to sign up or for more info: 307-733-2414.

We need HELP in the following areas:

Winter –

3-D Collection:

Take photos of artifacts
Write descriptions of artifacts
Create list of artifacts for future use by staff
Pack small artifacts in acid free wrapping, boxes and bags
Label containers

Winter -

Education Collection:

Take Photos of items
Write descriptions of items
Create list of items with numbers for future use by staff
Pack items
Label items and containers

Summer –

Living History share/explain pioneer skills in Mus. displays

Script/costume provided
Training provided
June - September
2 to 4 hours per week
Select day Tues-Fri.

Summer –

Furniture inventory

Take photos of furniture
Write descriptions of furniture
Check off inventory list
Clean and label

Summer –

Education Workshop Prep

(As assigned by staff member from Lesson Plans)
Cut fabric or vinyl forms
Copy worksheets
Inventory supplies
Store supplies
Maintain education files (lesson plans)

Summer –

Walking Tour Guides (June 1 – Sept. 30)

Train with Steve Roberts, Tour guide coordinator
Notebook provided: script and photos
Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday – Select your day
1 hour tour around the Square

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These are annual membership fees; you can join for one or two years.

Membership includes:

Quarterly Museum Newsletters; early notices of programs and events
Free admission to our Museums and programs; and a free book
15% OFF regular-priced Museum Store books and merchandise
Call, go on-line, or stop by today to find out more - 307-733-2414

The Colter Stone: A Relic — or Just a Rock?

[This account of the Colter Stone is based on a conversation with W. C. "Slim" Lawrence of Moran, Wyoming, (founder of the Jackson Hole Museum) who knew both Lyons and Woodring personally.]

The first superintendant of Grand Teton National Monument was Sam Woodring, a former Chief Ranger at Yellowstone National Park. Sam loved many things, and museums came high on his list of priorities. A museum at Grand Teton National Monument would be a lasting tribute to his superintendency. The only difficulty lay in locating suitable items for the museum. Since this was to be a fur trade museum, old rifles, shot and traps were a must, and of course, beaver hats. But the museum needed something really unique to be its focal point.

In 1933 Aubrey Lyons wanted to obtain the horse concession at Grand Teton National Monument. It would be a good business move if he could persuade Sam Woodring to give it to him, as he would have a virtual monopoly on riding activities in the Monument. Aubrey knew Sam and his desire for a Fur Trade Museum.

One day Aubrey hit on an original idea. He went out to his neighbor's farm near Tetonia, Idaho and gathered up a small hunk of rhyolite lava. Hurrying home unnoticed, he took his hammer and chisel and began to carve the stone. On one side the name John Colter took shape, on the other the date 1808. Looking at his handiwork he was not quite satisfied. It needed a special touch to make it more appealing. In a few minutes a rough profile of a man with a large nose began to appear on one edge of the stone. Now it was ready.

Aubrey returned to the neighbor's farm and buried the stone just below the surface in a field he knew was due to be plowed. All he had to do was to wait for his neighbor, William Beard, to dig up the stone.

One day several weeks later, Bill Beard and his son uncovered the stone, looked at its unusual shape and decided to take it home and puzzle over it when they had more time. Later at home Bill could make out "John Colter - 1808," but he had no idea who Colter was. He laid the stone by the house and went back to his chores. Not long after, Aubrey rode up to visit Bill. While he was having a friendly chat he noticed the stone next to the house.

"What's that funny looking stone?" he asked.

Bill answered, "Don't know. Just dug it up the other day while clearing a field."

Aubrey asked Bill what he would trade for the stone. Bill told him that a pair of boots he had on would do. Thus the transaction was made.

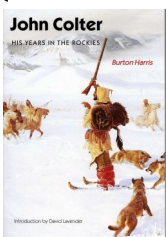
The next day Aubrey arrived at Sam Woodring's office bearing a gift. He told Sam he would gladly donate this valuable relic to the Park Service for the museum. Sam was happy to accept the generous offer and asked Aubrey how he came by it. Aubrey told him the story, beginning at the point where Bill Beard dug the stone out of the ground, and adding that it couldn't be a hoax as Bill had never even heard of John Colter. The stone became the most cherished item in the Fur Trade Museum. To this day it sits in a glass case at Park Headquarters in Moose, viewed by thousands of people each year.

Needless, to say, Aubrey got the horse concession.



One of several copies made of the original Colter Stone; this one is in the JHHSM collection.

- Reprinted from: *John Colter: Journey of Discovery; A New Look at an Old Mystery*, by Paul Lawrence, 1978.



Discover More about John Colter!

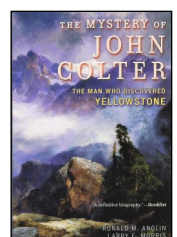
Visit our Museum Store in Jackson or online for these resources:

The classic account written by Richard Burton:

John Colter: His Years in the Rockies

The 2014 book by Anglin & Morris:

The Mystery of John Colter: The Man Who Discovered Yellowstone.





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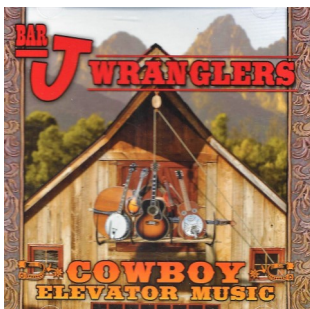
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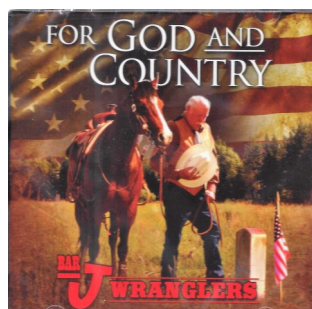
Stop by the store at 225 N. Cache Street (Wednesday-Saturday)
or

See the entire selection online in our new webstore:
Go to www.jacksonholehistory.org and shop the store!

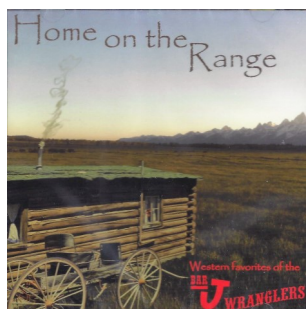
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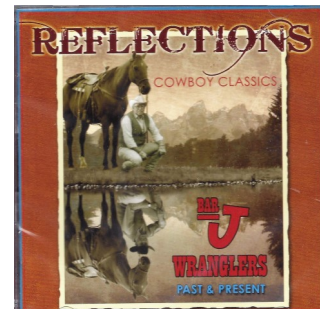
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