By Hannah Combsbridge to another person” or to a feeling.
Reader ContributorTo many people, special objects can
trigger chains of memory that remind us
who we are. A dress may not simply be a

“D13, shelf 4; D13, shelf 4,” I piece of cloth on a hanger, but an object
muttered to myself as I hurried through that evokes a swirl of twinkling lights,
the archives. I needed to pull one more the adoring gaze of a dance partner, even
artifact for tomorrow’s presentation the essence of youth.
before closing up. Though alone in the The more intensely we feel a particular
large building, I was at ease in the bright moment, the more likely we are to make
lights and familiar surroundings. The these connections between the event and
tiny coin I sought was probably at the the objects we associate with it. While our
bottom of a box; the entire shelf would lives are marked by many deeply felt mo-
have to be searched. ments, few are as powerful or unavoid-

I carefully lowered a pot to the floor, able as experiencing the death of a loved
behind it was what looked like a one. For this reason, objects connected to
piece of thick rope, neatly coiled. I death are likely to be held onto and even-
light, and my stomach dropped. I made Some objects in the collection are associ-
myself take a deep breath and laid the ated with ceremonies that honor a death,
noose out on the floor. Its stout knot some are sentimental keepsakes and some
looked bright and fresh, but the ends of are artifacts connected to the event of the

The mysterious noose found by the author
at the Bonner County History Museum
with no known attribution listed for who
donated it or why. Courtesy photo.

noose’s loop. I suddenly wanted very Two of the Native American pestles
much to be anywhere but alone in the in the museum’s collection show the
seum acquire a noose? They were unearthed in the Hope area

There are more than a million objects and may have ties to the Kalispel tribe.
and archival materials in the muse-It is believed that these cracks are the
um’s collection, and they all arrived in result of intentional breakage inflicted
the same way: because an individual during a burial ceremony, symbolizing
believed that the object has value. Dr. that in death the owner of the tool would
Maryam Afshar wrote her dissertation at no longer have need of it.

Washington State University on object Many of us keep objects that belonged to the event of a death. Lt. Jack Thomas
attachment and identified six distinct to a loved one as a way to honor their Crawford, while on a “scramble” mission
reasons people assign value to things memory, but during the 19th century out of Geiger Air Force Base in 1953, was
and hold onto them. But why would they sentimental keepsakes were created from killed when his F-86D Sabre jet fighter
donate them to a museum? remnants of the loved one themself. crashed into the pole yard of the L.D.

Tax benefits aside, most donations According to C. Jeanenne Bell, jewelry McFarland Pole Co. in Sandpoint. The
are made for sentimental reasons or what historian, Victorian women fashioned cre-foreman of the plant recovered a scrap
Afshar calls “self-concept” reasons. ative ways to wear the hair of their dearly of Crawford’s helmet, and it eventually

When a museum accepts a gift from a departed by weaving it like bobbin lace made its way to the museum.
donor, it promises to care for that object into bracelets, rings, and brooches. At its The noose as a symbol always evokes
while it is in the collection. The high level culmination, hairwork jewelry designs be-violent death, but this particular artifact
of preservation is appealing to someone came so elaborate that people would buy sent shudders through me because of what
with sentimental attachments who can’t additional swatches of hair to supplement it didn’t say. According to the museum’s
bear to see family heirlooms neglected or the hair from the beloved; during this database, on New Year’s Day in 2015, the
thrown away. Museums can also help tell period, hair fetched a higher price than noose was found in the museum’s collec-
tory the story of the object and the people to silver in some parts of the country. One tion with no note, with no documentation
whom it belonged, preserving the sense exceptional example of hairwork, an elab-

Dr, Milhaly Cskszntmihalyi, profes-Whitaker and passed down through the within it a story of those who lived and
or of psychology at Claremont Graduate Gorsline family before being donated to died with the objects, as well as those
University, defines the reason people the museum.who held onto them, seeking connect-

most often save objects as instrumental Perhaps the most unsettling are objects tion through them. Whether the story is
materialism, in which the object is “a left behind that have a direct connection well-documented or not, it demands our

Research provided by the Bonner
County History Museum. The Atlantic’s
article “For the Love of Stuff,” and the
book Collecting Victorian Jewelry. At
the museum, we are fortunate to be able
to preserve and share your objects for
a lifetime; consider us if you would like
to donate an object that tells the story of
Bonner County — even its darkest history.

This article is brought to you by the
Bonner County Historical Society and
Museum.