STATE OF THE MUSEUM

With Thanksgiving in the air, I, like many, start pondering all the things I’m grateful for. Classically, the top of the list is graced with family and friends, but not far from that is the opportunity to be a part of this wonderful organization: the Museum. I feel fortunate to be able to work alongside Hannah, our Volunteers and Board. They are the important key to what makes the Museum such a productive and wonderful place.

It’s thrilling to be able to work alongside with other nonprofits and businesses supporting their historic endeavors. My heart fills with joy every time I see a spark of excitement light up within a child as they learn more about their local history on a school tour. It’s also very gratifying hearing remarks by visitors as they explore the Museum and discover the unique History that we share within our exhibits.

I’m extremely thankful for all the support from our Donors, Sponsors and Members. Because of you, we are all able to get to do what we love and uphold our commitment of: History Creating Community.

FROM THE FRONT DESK

You simply cannot miss our Holiday Open House December 16th from 3:30 to 5:00. In addition to sharing merriment and getting your pick of a fresh assortment of books in our gift shop, you'll be the first to experience our brand new exhibit, The One Who Went to Market. As an enhancement to our gift shop space (don't worry, our great historic merch isn't going anywhere!), this exhibit will explore the evolution of the shopping experience throughout Bonner County history. From the consumer's viewpoint, we'll share the shifting quirks that have made shopping a fun experience through the decades, through the renowned curation of Heather Upton. As a visitor from New York City recently said, "I've traveled all over the world, and this is one of the best small museums I have ever seen. I am truly impressed." Experience our newest exhibit firsthand through the eyes of the Curator on the 16th. We'll also be featuring several children's books that will make the perfect holiday gifts, and authors will be there to sign them!

Cover photo: This photo of the Pietsch house on Euclid, decorated for the holidays, was recently donated to the collection by Tim Cochran. Each time the house has changed hands, the owners have passed on historic photos and information to the new residents. When Tim handed over the reins to a new young couple, he continued the tradition, giving them the gift of a rich understanding of their new home.
For over fourteen years, **Nancy Fontaine** has been part of the heart of the Museum. Bringing warmth to our Research Room with her personality and legendary cookies, we always look forward to seeing her every Tuesday and Friday.

One of the many endeavors she took on was overseeing the cataloging of our postcards and photographs, a never-ending project she has pursued with quiet and steadfast dedication. Her attention to detail ensures that these resources will be useful to the community for generations to come, and her kindness in sharing her skills means her efforts can be seamlessly passed on.

Nancy also served on the Board for years and was our liaison to the Tractor Club. She was an incredible support to us and many other organizations within the community.

As she enters a new chapter in her life on her family’s farm in Bonners Ferry, I know she will continue to enrich the community up there with all of her knowledge and talents.

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**REMEMBERING ROYAL SHIELDS**

Royal Shields has been an integral part of the Museum since the beginning. He helped in the design and build of the Museum. He served on our Board and was the support behind many of our structural projects, for exhibits and exterior installations. He was always open to listening to my creative and complicated exhibit ideas and found a way to make them come to life. The last project we were lucky enough to have his help on was the restoration of our historic cabin, just a few months ago. He will be greatly missed, but will always be remembered through his amazing work and care that he put into our community. These are just a few of the many ways Royal left a lasting impact on the Museum:

- An architectural rendering of the Museum, which Royal helped design in the 1970s
- The Hoodoo Valley water wheel Royal installed with Gov. Don Samuelson
- Royal’s last gift to the Museum: new stairs and a protective cedar skirt for the log cabin
A LOOK BACK ON 2021

The Bonner County Historical Society & Museum:
- Welcomed 1,787 visitors to the Museum
- Accessioned 759 new objects into the collection
- Provided school tours to 356 students
- Provided Traveling Trunks to 128 students
- Fulfilled 54 research requests
- Published 17 historical articles
- Curated 3 new exhibits
- Featured in 2 Idaho Public Television shows
- Restored 1 historic log cabin

THANK YOU FOR MAKING IT ALL POSSIBLE

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!
There’s nothing like the feeling of an old house.

Stepping inside a residence with a few decades or more to its history, you can almost feel the emotions, life events and family gatherings that played out inside its walls. Every community has its venerable buildings. And of course, Sandpoint is no exception. Among its crown jewels is the Selle House, located at 412 Second Ave.

The house dates back to 1909, when German-born American immigrant Charles Selle purchased a Sandpoint lot and built the home to give his second wife, Julia, a more comfortable life. But if a family makes a house a home, the story of the Selle House begins far earlier than 1909.

Rewind back to 1849, when Charles Selle was born in Hanover, Germany. His life in Europe was a short one, ending when his parents immigrated to the Saginaw Bay area of Michigan in 1854. He grew up in the region, reaching adolescence and obtaining his first years of experience in the state’s thriving logging industry. Reaching adulthood, he married and had five children, but the first phase of his life ended tragically with the death of his wife.

There’s always a chance to start again, however. And for Selle, that second life likely began in 1896 with his marriage to a widow named Julia. Logging in Michigan was starting to wind down, so Selle turned his eyes to North Idaho, which presented a ripe opportunity for an enterprising logger. In 1898, Charles and his son Gust moved from Michigan to Idaho, where they homesteaded in a region about seven miles northeast of Sandpoint. The area is still known as the Selle Valley to this day.

The move proved a great business decision for the Selles. Between Charles and his son, the family filed two 160-acre homesteads and found themselves with an abundance of white pine and other timber. Money started pouring into the Selle family’s coffers. Their success prompted the rest of the immediate family to join the men in North Idaho, starting with Julia Selle, then followed by the younger sons, John and Henry. Finally, Millie Selle, the youngest sister who previously lived with older sibling Hannah and her husband, moved to Idaho in 1905. Only Hannah stayed behind in Michigan.

As the years wore on, the Selles remaining in Michigan found their own success in agriculture. Sugar beets proved a profitable crop for several years, and when the worth of that crop began dying down, the family rotated in new ones. Indeed, agriculture came to define the Selles in Michigan as much as the Idaho Selles were defined by timber. Subsequent generations continued to nurture the Selle Farm, and in 1983, their land was officially designated a centennial farm by the Michigan Historical Commission — an honor bestowed upon farms in operation for over 100 years.

Only now can we appreciate the full family history that led to a single German family fracturing, then thriving individually hundreds of miles apart. It’s a true American experience, and in good American fashion, Charles Selle longed to give his wife the finer things in life.
So, in 1909, Charles Selle built the Selle house, which stands in Sandpoint to this day and remains an important part of the town’s legacy. Ironically, Selle’s gift was perhaps misdirected. According to a 2000 Bonner County Daily Bee article, Julia Selle was a tough, pioneering woman better suited to a rural log cabin than a charming townhouse. After less than a year, the aging couple, now in their 60s, moved back to their homestead. The Selle House was reserved for special occasions and town visits until 1925, when Charles and Julia gave the home to Julia’s daughter, Martha Laughlin.

Before she moved away, however, Julia planted what became one of the house’s most enduring features: purple rhododendrons. The small rhododendron shrub she planted was over 10 feet tall before it came down in the 2010s, a symbol of an enduring family legacy, one that linked past and present.

You can learn about this historic home and others by picking up a copy of the Sandpoint Historic Walking Tour brochure, available at the Museum or at www.sandpointidaho.gov

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**STEWARDS OF HISTORY: THE COMPLETE PACKAGE**

Hannah Combs
Museum Administrator

When we open holiday gifts, usually the first thing we do is rip off all of the wrapping paper and throw it away. But this wasn’t always the case. In earlier years, great care was taken to package gifts, and the packaging was often saved to provide a safe place to store the gift. Packaging can provide valuable clues about the object’s history.

This pair of silk stockings is a great example. Not only are the stockings in perfect, brand-new condition, but they also have the original tag, which tells us the name of the company that made them and that they were made in the U.S.

The card indicates that they were a gift, probably from a husband or beau, and the illustration style on the card helps us date this gift to the 1920s. The box suggests that one or both parties were Christian, and possibly Catholic.

When opening gifts this season, keep in mind that seemingly insignificant details can help recall a rich story. The only question remains, why were these stockings never worn?

By keeping the original packaging with an object, every time we study it feels like opening a gift, the gift of going back in time. Pictured here: silk stockings in the original gift box, featuring a religious depiction. The notecard reads: "May the New Year bring you Much happiness and Good luck" and is signed "George." Donated to BCHS by the Nedds family.
You’ve probably seen or heard about the new subdivision being built on what was once the University of Idaho property on Boyer Avenue at the north end of Sandpoint. But most of the time, old properties are developed without making headlines. Just northwest of the U of I property, another historic plot is being developed. It was originally the homestead belonging to John T. Elsasser, one of Bonner County’s early pioneers.

When Josh Pilch, the excavator on the development, visited the Museum and told me about the project, I was grateful for the information yet concerned, as I knew this must be one of, if not the, oldest remaining homes within Sandpoint city limits. Demolition was already underway and could not be stalled, but he gave us permission to visit the site.

I teamed up with local architect Reid Weber and writer Emily Erickson to document the home before it disappeared. Working with photographer Kit Mitchell and researcher Dan Evans, we took photos of the house and property and made many notes on its structural details.

Then the investigative work began, using the Museum’s extensive resources, including archives donated by the Elsasser family. We have been piecing together the history of John and William Elsasser, two brothers who made a life and legacy for themselves in Sandpoint, helping build the foundation of what the town is today.

Not every historic home can be saved, but we are exploring ways to honor our historic structures amid the area’s boom of growth and change. Documenting these stories is the first step in creating awareness and an appreciation of our past.

If you drive by today, you will see only an empty lot, but we look forward to bringing the Elsasser story back to life using all of the rich information the Museum can provide.

Scrapping Back the Layers of History

Renovations on historic homes sometimes uncover unusual things. Recently, while working on her house, Katie Edburg uncovered layers of bold wallpaper from several different decades, as well as an intact newspaper from 1915. Though most objects found in the walls are usually too damaged for the Museum’s collection, they can be framed and kept in the home as a fun nod to the house’s past. Let us know what oddities you unearth in your home!
Diligence in Discovery

Recently, Heidi visited the Museum looking for historic photos of her home to guide her during a renovation project. Knowing that the house was nearby the old Milltown, we searched through our archives for photos of Milltown houses, and though we found a few photos of the house across the street, none showing hers appeared. We also searched images taken on her street, with no results.

At this point, I was ready to give up, but Heidi had a different idea. “Do you think it might show up in the background of a photo of the old school?” she asked. It was worth a shot, though perhaps a long shot. Yet lo and behold, a photo taken in the field behind the school clearly showed her house! Though the exterior of her home now looks far different, we were able to confirm its identity using still-extent exterior details from the neighbor’s depicted house.

Thanks to her ingenuity, Heidi now has a reference she can use to recreate some of the character of her historic home.

The Excitement of a Young Historian

It seems like at least once a week my day starts off with the sound of giggling and whispering. As I peer over the edge of the welcome desk, I see little noses pressed up against the glass, then shy smiles once they know they’ve been seen. If they’re brave, like our recent visitor Chloe, they might pull open the heavy door and ask, “Are you open yet?” Before I can finish nodding, they’re off, running across the lawn, yelling, “Mommm! Come on! We can go in!!”

Chloe, a homeschooler in the second grade, visited with her family so that she could gather information for a class presentation. She had decided to choose one object from the Museum that she would tell her class about. The sturgeon-nosed canoe in our The Early Years exhibit was a classic choice. Thanks, Chloe, for getting so excited about history, and for sharing what you learned!
Blue Elderberry

While late spring brings flat, plate-sized clusters of creamy white flowers to the native Blue Elderberry (Sambucus caerulea, formerly nigra), fall is all about pendulous clusters of dark blue berries. Wildlife loves this rapidly growing, multi-stemmed shrub or small tree which ranges from 6-24 ft. tall. A stand-out in wildlife gardens, its flowers attract pollinators, butterflies and hummingbirds. Blue Elderberry provides food, cover, perch and nesting sites for many species of birds. It is also a popular browse food for black bear, mule deer and elk. In the spring, new leaves may be strongly scented and less tasty, but they sweeten and become more palatable by fall.

A good choice for habitat restoration, Blue Elderberry is tough, easy to grow, and can handle a variety of soil moisture levels, including dry sites once established. It is useful in stemming erosion, stabilizing streambanks and riparian areas below 9,800 ft.

Named for a Greek stringed instrument (sambuca) supposedly made from elder wood, Blue Elderberry has many uses. Native Americans blew glowing embers into flames through the hollow stems, hence the common name ‘elder’ from the Anglo-Saxon ‘eller’ meaning ‘fire-kindling.” Twigs and lower branches were used to fashion pegs, spindles, flutes, elk whistles, pipes for smoking, and blowguns. The berries produce black or purple dye and stems can be used to make an orange or yellow dye.

The plentiful berries are at their best after they’ve been sweetened by a hard frost. They are gathered from the wild mainly for wine, jellies, jams and syrup, though due to active alkaloids, hydrocyanic acid and sambucine, these vitamin-C rich immune boosters should always be cooked before consumption.

To learn more about KNPS and the North Idaho Native Plant Arboretum, visit www.nativeplantsociety.org. Blue Elderberry is found on page 76 of the KNPS publication, “Landscaping with Native Plants in the Idaho Panhandle”, available at the Bonner County History Museum.

TUESDAY TREATS

with Nancy Fontaine

Volunteer Nancy Fontaine has delighted researchers and staff with over 500 of her famous cookie recipes during her 14 years with the museum.

ALMOND GLAZED SUGAR COOKIES

Preheat: 400°
Yield: 42

3/4 cup sugar
1 cup butter, softened
2 tsp almond extract
2 cups flour
1/2 tsp baking powder
1/4 tsp salt
1-1/2 cups powdered sugar
4-5 tsp water
Sliced almonds

Combine butter, sugar and almond extract in a mixer, beating until creamy. Add flour, baking powder and salt, beat until well mixed. Roll dough into 1-inch balls, place on cookie sheet, and flatten to ¼ inch thickness. Bake 7 to 9 minutes. Cool completely.

Whisk together powdered sugar and water. Decorate cooled cookies with glaze and sliced almonds.
SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT

Was your family ever on a party line? If so, you know there were never any secrets among those who shared a line. That news often found its way into the weekly News-Bulletin where all news was shared by a “reporter” in each of 26 neighborhoods from Edgemere to Trout Creek and from Granite to the Bronx. Borders could have been blurred. One sometimes found news about their family in the Oden, Pack River, Selle and Crouse Creek columns all in the same edition.

The season in which you were very likely to find your activities in print was Christmas. By the first week of January everyone who subscribed to the paper knew who had come home for the holidays, who had entertained and who their guests were.

Each of these communities had their own school and their Christmas programs were a highlight of the year. Every child participated and every parent and grandparent beamed with pride. Santa was always a visitor. One year Elmer Jacobson made a late entry at Pack River School after a wardrobe malfunction with his suit.

Every church held a pageant with Mary and Joseph being the coveted roles. Sometimes the newest baby in the congregation was wrapped in swaddling clothes and found in the manger. The sheep, cows and camels sometimes stole the show.

Every organization in the community held a Christmas party, whether it was one of many extension clubs, social groups, granges, or fraternal organizations. Yes, even the Gabba Gabba Phi Club in Dover held a party! (Does anyone know if they still meet?)

Memories, especially from long ago, benefit from the filters of time. Hopefully, today’s youngsters are experiencing the spirit of Christmas that we “old timers” were fortunate to know.

THE PERFECT GIFT

In the 1950’s, the arrival of the Sears Christmas catalog was much anticipated. It set things in motion for creating one’s Christmas “wish list.” For those who didn’t live in town, that catalog served as our “window shopping” experience. That catalog was almost in tatters by the day after Christmas.

If you were in high school and you were “going steady” with someone, a Christmas gift was a must. Girls gave boys boxed shirts from Penneys, Larson’s or Jennestad’s. The shirt probably set us back less than $10. However, when a girl’s money came mostly from babysitting for about 35¢ an hour, that was a significant purchase.

An alternate gift would have been a bottle of Old Spice after shave which had been introduced in 1937 as a women’s product. The men’s version came out in 1938. In 2008, the original Old Spice scent was repackaged as “Classic Scent.” The shower gel was sold using the slogan “The original. If your grandfather hadn’t worn it, you wouldn’t exist.” Hmmm. There could be some truth to that.

What to give a girlfriend may have been more difficult for the boys. A sweater was more expensive than a shirt. Gloves were an option. The go-to fallback was Evening in Paris in its signature cobalt blue bottle. A new relationship warranted only an ounce or so but a longer liaison called for their blue velvet lined gift box with cologne, perfume, toilet water, power and hand lotion. Now that made a statement!
HISTORIC HAPPENINGS

DECEMBER 3
Free First Saturday
10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
Sponsored by Ken & Kathy Conger

DECEMBER 16
Holiday Open House
featuring new exhibit
"The One Who Went to Market"
3:30 - 5:00 p.m.

Bonner County Historical Society & Museum
611 South Ella Avenue
Sandpoint, ID 83864

If you enjoy these stories, consider becoming a member of the Bonner County Historical Society...
Membership helps ensure that our collective local history is preserved to the highest standards for future generations to enjoy. And in thanks, you get to enjoy benefits like free admission, guest passes, gift shop discounts, and free research sessions. Win win!

This newsletter is sponsored by the Sandpoint High School Graduating Classes of 1950 through 1960.

www.bonnercountyhistory.org | 208-263-2344 | info@bonnercountyhistory.org