

"WORLD'S LARGEST COLLECTION"  
CHARLES BELDEN  
WESTERN PHOTOGRAPHY  
Old West and Indian Items  
PAINTINGS — SCULPTURES

# District Historian

DECEMBER 2023

NEWSLETTER OF THE MEETEETSE MUSEUMS

## Reflections on Collections



By Alexandra Deselms, Interim Director & Director of Collections

Somehow, another year has come and gone. While this year hasn't quite gone how we thought (with the roof and a longer-than-expected hiring process), we've also had some successes (our first WyoGives fundraising campaign and getting more volunteers and Elizabeth). We're looking forward to more success next year with having two full-time staffers again (and hopefully a new roof – fingers crossed!). We are so glad for all our volunteers who have worked at the front desk and/or helped in our native plant garden and weeding this year! It does free us up for other projects and is much appreciated!

Now that Elizabeth has gotten settled in, I've been able to turn some time towards collections work, although I'm still greatly behind. I've still been doing a lot with building maintenance planning and repair, grants, and fundraising, but I'm hoping to have time in January and February to get more collections things done, including (finally) a Collections Committee meeting on items that have been offered this late spring, summer, and fall.

I've been able to make a start in getting back to my re-inventory project to verify our collections' locations. It certainly helped when I participated in what I call "Bring Your Parents to Work Day!" While Mom helped with gift store inventory and the front desk, Dad assisted me in re-inventorying more of the collections storage rooms in the Bank Museum. It goes much faster with two people to review the items on the shelf and match to the inventory documents, especially for the high shelves and heavy boxes! We currently have about a third of all collections on exhibit and in storage re-inventoried – and it's only taken me four years! Since it's been a project to slip in between other projects, at this rate, I'll finish the re-inventory just in time to need to start it again.

In my re-inventory project, I've found lots of scrap material and pieces. I am trying to find the related paperwork to know if they are collection or education items to put them before the Collections Committee for deaccession (if they are collection or education) so that we can accept other, more complete items that can better tell Meeteetse's stories.

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*Merry Christmas! The  
Meeteetse Museums will be  
closed for the year starting  
December 19.*

*Happy New Year!  
The Museums will be closed  
for annual cleaning January  
and February.*

*See you in March 2024!*



# *Letter from the Outreach and Engagement Director*

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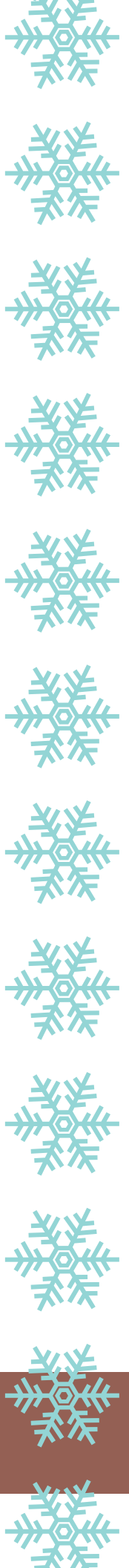
By Elizabeth M. Foss, Public Outreach and Engagement Director

Change is a difficult thing, full of the unknown and anxiety over the future. Even so, change is a constant in our lives, there is no escaping or avoiding it. And, of course, change can bring about something greater. Six months ago, I was living in the valley of the sun, specifically Mesa, Arizona, where 40 degrees fahrenheit is considered freezing and summers easily reach 110 degrees. At that point, I was on break from teaching middle school social studies at a small charter school, and though I was trying to make it work, deep down I knew it was not for me. At the end of the school year I began looking for a change, seeking a career that would more directly let me use my skill sets built up throughout my college career. Turning to past jobs I enjoyed, I found that the position that brought me the most happiness was my time as a visitor services representative with Deadwood History, Inc. My experience working in Deadwood, where I interacted with visitors from all over the globe and gave historical tours, led me to apply to the open position here at the Meeteetse Museums. In a blur, I was being interviewed on Zoom, was offered the job, and let the school I was teaching at know I would not be returning. The move to Wyoming was so welcome, I nearly cried when I crossed the border back into this state—the Arizona heat never agreed with me, and I was tired of the city traffic. I fell in love with Wyoming while earning my Masters degree in History from the UW, greatly helping ease my transition from Arizona.

In my first five months here at the Meeteetse Museums, I've found so much meaning in the work I've done for the Museums. Public history, that is, history done beyond the walls of the traditional classroom, has always interested me. In contrast to teaching a history class at the secondary education level or a course at the college level where you have the same students for months or years at a time, in public history there are more opportunities to work with a wider audience, from tourists who will visit only once in their lives to the repeated interactions with the community at large. So far, my favorite outreach experience from my time at the Meeteetse Museums has been the Outdoor Education lab the school organized to kick off the new school year. I had the class groups acting as water scientists, examining and describing water samples I collected from around Meeteetse. I learned much from this outdoor lab, including that backup activities are necessary for the class groups who immediately grasp the activity and fly through it!

My return to researching and writing history for the Museums has been great fun. From my batty blog post about ties between Buffalo Bill Cody and Dracula, to my recent article on Chinese Immigrants in the Member's Newsletter, to my history-focused social media posts, I've been having a ball writing for the Museums. I am very much looking forward to picking up the next season of Meeteetse Stories, our podcast, though I am having trouble narrowing down which topic I want to start with! My social media posts on the Meeteetse Museums' Facebook and Instagram pages have been a learning opportunity on how to bridge the academic writing style I generally default to with writing in a more accessible, easy to digest way suited to social media.

Overall, I feel very lucky to be here at the Meeteetse Museums doing work I genuinely enjoy, and I look forward to my future in Meeteetse! I hope your holiday season is filled with happiness!



# 2023 Recap

The year has flown by and we have a lot to show for it! Here's what we've been up to at the Museums!

Funds Raised

**\$42,960.67**

through 1st  
WyoGives

Funds Raised

**\$506**

at Labor Day

Funds Raised

**\$652**

from Miles of  
Quarters

Funds Raised

**\$5920**

through Giving  
Tuesday

Visitors

**3843**

to the  
Museums

**\$44,024**

awarded from  
2022  
IMLS Grant for  
Oversize Book  
Scanner

**10**

events

**50**

Members

**4** Grants Applied  
for

**2**

Grants  
Received

**1**

Grant  
Application  
Pending

New Posts

**2**

on the blog

## Visitation

Visitation for this year continued to pick up following a slow two years after COVID-19. Unfortunately, the long winter and rainy summer did impact visitation, causing events to be postponed and one even cancelled. Despite these challenges, 3843 people visited the Museums.



## Public Programs

This May through September, 213 people engaged with the Museums through our public programs, including several of our distance-members through the donated OWL hybrid system. We hosted 7 events this summer, published one podcast season this spring, and published 2 blog posts and YouTube videos.



## Education

This year, the Meeteetse Museums added 2 bison trunks to our traveling trunk program (3 total!) which include lesson plans. Thanks to our membership program, we can ship the bison education trunk to schools anywhere in the state for free! Contact us to reserve today!





## Accession Spotlight

Each year the Meeteetse Museums is approached by members of the community looking to donate their family history to the Museums so it can be shared with a wider audience. Here's some highlights from this year.



HELEN BARLINGS'  
DRESS,  
circa 1940s-1950s  
2023.0009.0001



CHARLES 'CHUCK'  
CURTIS' 1948  
MEETEETSE LETTER  
SWEATER  
2023.0006.0001



1990S FOREST SERVICE  
FIRE PACK  
2023.0004.0001

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[View online  
collections](#)

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### Reflections on Collections cont.

We've been applying for other, matching grants, but we should hear about our big NEH roof grant soon; that will determine how and when we proceed with our new roof. If we don't receive the NEH grant, we'll be focusing on other fundraising and grant possibilities, which will still get us to a new roof but will unfortunately take longer. Thank you for your patience, support, and understanding as we work toward replacing our roof and safeguarding our collections.

The big news this fall was the arrival and installation of our oversize book scanner, paid for with grant funds from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) specifically for small museums. It was a lot more involved than we anticipated – with the crate size and scanner weight requiring more logistics than our average delivery. We rearranged our office to find the best place we could – you'll be able to see the scanner through the office interior window to understand why this project was bigger than we thought! We actually borrowed equipment from the Buffalo Bill Center of the West to make the installation happen since the scanner is so large and heavy; we so appreciate the equipment use! We are starting to get familiar with the scanner and anticipate doing more in the new year. We will also be sharing it with any area museum or library needing to scan bound (especially oversize) materials. There's already a couple of institutions who are raring to go! We anticipate getting an intern next spring / summer to focus on getting a lot of our bound material scanned and online for visitors near and far.

As always, if you believe you have an old loan with us and haven't been contacted in the last few years about it, please contact me. And please take a look at either PastPerfect Online or the Digital Public Library of America to see the new uploaded records for objects and photographs from the collections! We hope to add more soon.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

# Thank You!

This year would not have been possible without help from the community near and far. The Meeteetse Museums would like to thank:

- Our members for their continued support and our new lifetime and business members for their extra support
- Our WyoGives and Giving Tuesday donors as well as those who gave throughout the year
- Front Desk Volunteers Betsy Burns, Barbara Rinehart, Claudia Prentice, Karin Nielson, and Deb Deselms
- Onsite and Remote Collections Volunteers Pam Johnston, Deb Deselms, and Jason Deselms
- Handyman George Weiser
- Snow Removal Crocket Roberson
- Cleaning crew Sheridan Trask and Bethany Taylor Winzenried
- Museum Assistant Melanie Riley and Youth Worker Steely Faust
- Personal Fundraising Coach Chany Ockert for her advice through the JumpStart Fundraising Year program
- Those who assisted with the Scanner move: Mary Jane Luther, Sandy Mueller, Michael Oliver, Jason Deselms, Joe Thomas and hands, George Weiser, and the unnamed gentleman who came across from the Wea Market when unloading the borrowed equipment. We especially want to thank Amy Phillips, Jordan Davis, and Danny Michael at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West for the equipment loan.
- Board Members Dr. Lawrence Todd, Lili Turnell, Mary Jane Luther, Lynn Sessions, Michael Oliver and Dusty Taylor
  - Jim Allen for his years of service on the Museum Board
- Foundation Members Louis Abarr, Linda Seaton, Margaret Baker, and Steve Roshon
- David Cunningham and Amy Phillips for their continued service and advice

And the following organizations for grants

- Wyoming Arts Council
- Wyoming Community Foundation
- Wyoming Energy Authority
- Institute of Museum and Library Services

And anyone who fell subject to our short term memory loss!



# Roof & Other Fundraisers



## Miles of Quarters

We raised \$652 for the roof fund through this summer's Mile of Quarters, along with a few donations this fall! That is 2,608 quarters of the 63,360 quarters needed to make a mile. We may participate next year to see if we can make it further along our mile.

Thanks to all!



**MILE OF  
QUARTERS**



## Labor Day Auction

We raised \$506 through the Silent Auction items and donations at Labor Day. Proceeds were split between the roof fund, collections care, programs/education, and the Foundation's endowment fund.

Thank you for your support!

## Giving Tuesday

Thank you for your support on Giving Tuesday and other end-of-year donations!

We've added \$5920 to our roof fund.



Roof Fund: \$28,242

Awaiting notification on Grants

# Wish List / Letter to Santa

With the decrease in mill levy funding, staff transitions, and roof leaks, we've felt some hardship financially and having enough staff (and time) to get things done. We can use help purchasing items for advertising and programming as well as assistance in a variety of roles. For purchases, we've listed the cost, expected outcome, and shares so you don't have to worry about the entire cost.

**Dear Santa,**

Thank you for our members, visitors, volunteers, board members, donors, grantors, and supporters. With the help of these individuals, families, and organizations, we think we've done very well this year. But to continue to do better next year, we'd like to ask for the following:

**Rack Cards:** Our rack cards last year were very popular. We had some donations for them and paid for them as a cost-match to our 2022 summer programming grant. We would like to update and continue to distribute them around the state and its borders. Last year, the cost for 5000 was \$578.44. We would like to ask for shares of \$50 (or more) to help pay for 2500-3000 rack cards to continue to bring more visitors in.

**Lawn care:** We know -- it's hard to think about summer with the snow. But it will be here before we know it. With such a small staff, we don't have time to mow our yards. So any amount to help to pay for our mowing service (or a volunteer to do so) is always appreciated. More of a gardener? Inquire about helping with the flowers (planting, watering, maintaining), watering the grass, or related beautification and maintenance summer work. This work does not need to be completed during Museum hours.

**Snow removal:** We have begun to hire out the snow removal on our half-block so our small staff has more time for collections, grants, programs, and exhibits. Donations of \$20 shares would help us easily continue to pay to have the snow removed.

**Event Chairs:** The metal folding chairs we currently have are getting old and can be uncomfortable to sit in. We would like to purchase 60 Lifetime Classic Folding Chairs in white. We have a match up to \$1000 for this! With better chairs, we hope to make our presentations more enjoyable. The current estimate is \$2159. We'd appreciate donations for shares of 5 chairs at \$200.

**New Roof and Building Maintenance Fund:** We are writing grants and fundraising for our new roof, but every little bit helps match grants and get our new roof here sooner. The sooner we are confident our roof won't constantly leak as snow melts, the sooner we can remove the plastic sheeting protectors, re-install and update exhibits, and install new exhibits! We've also become aware of other building maintenance needs and are working towards completing these projects, including exterior painting. Interested? Contact us so we can start planning spring maintenance work. Not close enough to volunteer or not able to get on a ladder? Consider a donation of any amount to help defray costs for painting and other supplies.

**Volunteers:** (see Page 10)

**Sincerely,**

**Meeteetse Museums**

# Seeking Volunteers

With two very busy staff members, we need help to complete numerous projects at the Museum, now more than ever. Both in-person and virtual volunteer positions available. We ask all visitors to fill out a form that can be picked up from the Museums or emailed out to help determine schedules, projects, and have your contact information.

## NEEDS

### Summer Front Desk Docent - Bank Museum

Due to staff shortages, the Museums have not been able to have the Bank Museum open much. We seek volunteers to greet guests as they walk into the First National Bank Museum so we may have it open more regularly in the summer. Volunteers may read, work on crafts or other projects, or help staff with research or projects, so long as you can quickly stop to greet visitors. We ask volunteers to have at least 3-4 hours of availability at a time.

### Virtual Exhibit Volunteer

As we wait for a new roof and funding to produce new physical exhibits, we are trying to offer more virtual exhibits. One currently in-progress is the "Meet Meeteetse's Veterans" virtual exhibit, building on the work of Kathleen Holtzer and the Museums' first season of its podcast, "Meeteetse Stories." We are also looking to create a wildland firefighting virtual exhibit and a law enforcement virtual exhibit, among others. Volunteers for this project must be familiar with computer usage and have reliable internet. This position can be entirely virtual.

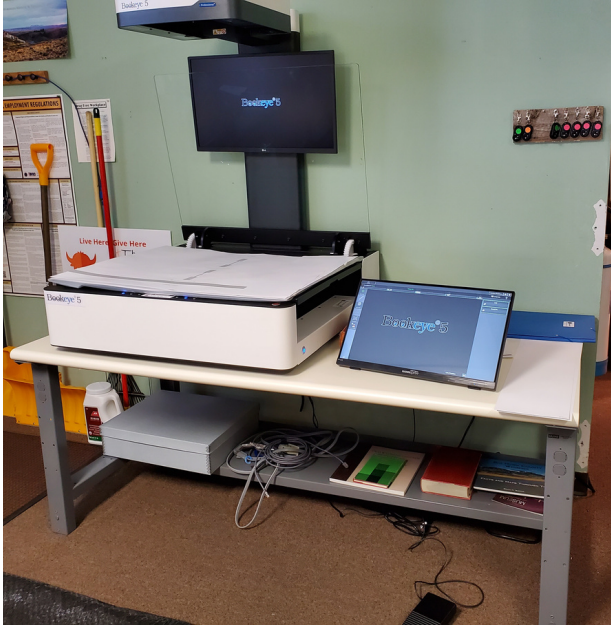
### Local History Researcher

The Museums are building chronological histories of local businesses, buildings, and people in Meeteetse's past. Volunteers working on this project must be willing to work with the Town of Meeteetse and other museums and archives in the area. This work can be completed outside of the Museums with regular check-ins.

Welcome to the Board of Directors,  
Dusty Taylor!



We announced in the August newsletter that we have been awarded an IMLS Inspire! Grants for Small Museums grant to purchase an oversize book scanner to digitize the Belden scrapbooks, bank ledgers, and other bound material. The scanner was purchased in October and arrived in its crate and on its pallet in mid-November. We borrowed lifting and transport equipment from the Buffalo Bill Center of the West to move the crate containing the scanner to the newly purchased and installed 500 pound capacity table in the office. The scanner was installed by the company on November 28, and we received training the same day. We are just starting to familiarize ourselves and work to begin scanning the Belden scrapbooks and other bound material.



An intern will be arranged for spring / summer 2024 to increase digitization efforts. We will be sharing the scanner's capabilities with other museums in the Bighorn Basin, including the Park County Archives, the Homesteader Museum, and the Washakie Museum as well as the Center of the West in thanks for their equipment loan.



Thanks to Mary Jane Luther and Sandy Mueller for their transport help; Michael Oliver for helping with the table installation; Jason Deselms for helping us clear a path to transport the scanner into the office; and George Weiser for helping us return items in the path to their locations. We also appreciate the willingness of Joe Thomas and his ranch hand to be "on-call" for moving help if the loaned lifts didn't work to move the large scanner pieces from the crate to the table.



# FALL EVENTS



Members-Only Zoom with Jason Baldes on Wind River Reservation's Bison



Donor Evening at the Museum



The Museums participated in the Cody Christmas Parade on Nov 25, 2023, but we forgot to get a picture of our entry! (If you have one, we'd love to see it!) Farrah Ferret did enjoy riding on the tailgate, though, as seen in this picture.



# MPMA 2023



Conferences like CWAM and MPMA allow staff to stay current with the Museum field, see other museums, get new ideas, discuss problems and solutions, network for partners, and put Meeteetse's name out there! It also helps rejuvenate us and inspire us for the year. At this year's MPMA, sessions on oral history programs, institutional and succession planning, and the ethics of interpretation provided new ideas for our small staff and budget. With CWAM in May 2024 in Worland, we anticipate helping our Washakie Museum colleagues with hosting support.

Getting our name out in the museum community helps the Museums gain recognition and support. Alex helped keep Meeteetse's name known in the region by serving on the MPMA Board as the Chair of the Registrar's Committee, a group within MPMA focused on collections, from 2019-2023. Conferences help keep us on the map!

## *The Importance of Conferences*

