
MAI WAH SOCIETY

Preserving and Interpreting Butte's Asian Heritage Since 1991

June 2012

Restocking the Mercantile

The saga continues as the Mai Wah Mercantile artifacts and furnishings, long stored in Nevada City rustic cabins, were returned to the Butte Chinatown building where they resided decades ago. First, the smaller parts of the collection were moved to Butte-Silver Bow Archives, then the large cases that held the merchandise were moved to the mercantile (story on page 2). Finally, board members and volunteers moved all the artifacts from the archive to the mercantile on Saturday, May 19th where it is being cleaned, cataloged and displayed.

Purchased by Charles Bovey in the '40s, these items were the remaining inventory and personal items in Butte's Wah Chong Tai Company and Mai Wah Noodle Parlor. Their departure from the Mai Wah building came as Butte's Chinatown was dwindling from a peak population of about 2,500 to a few dozen residents. They represent a range of items from clothing, spices, and herbal medicines, to retail furniture and household religious items.

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Curator Janna Norby with a scroll from the Mai Wah mercantile collection.

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Merle & Edith Hoyt Curatorial Chair

The Mai Wah society wants to welcome Janna Norby as the new curator at the Mai Wah Museum. The Museum was afforded the opportunity to create a new curator's position by a generous donation from board member Janet Sperry. Janet was able to make her donation through an inheritance from her parents, Merle & Edith Hoyt. On page 3 you'll find her story of her parents and their interest in all things international.

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Instrumental to the processing of the more than 2,500 artifacts is the Mai Wah Museum's new curator, Janna Norby, who came on board in May. Janna, 33, has been married to Tom Norby since 2006. She has two children, Ethan, 5, and Owen, almost 2, and a golden retriever, Taylor. She's been in Montana since 2003, working for the Montana Heritage Commission (MHC) in Virginia and Nevada City, spending two years as a museum tech and six as the Curator. Prior to that, Janna worked in Petersburg, Virginia with the National Park Service. She completed her graduate degree in 2003 at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC.



Curator Janna Norby processes items from the collection with the help of her mother Judy Hermanson

When it comes to the mercantile collection Janna finds the food the most interesting, "...dried fish, fish bits in bean sauce, nuts, sliced bean curd, noodles, etc. Things that I would never think to eat, but were obviously "regular food". Another super interesting part of the collection are the toys, and celebratory things. I think that for most people, food and fun are the most easily relatable topics. Both are a universal and consistent trend, no matter language, age, history and social strata. I cannot think of anywhere else in Montana that has this type of "ethnic" collection in situ, the original artifacts in the building dating to the 1890's-1900's. It is definitely very unique and exciting. The most amazing thing for me is that I got to be on the giving end of the loan from the MHC and the receiving end with the Mai Wah. Hopefully it will be full circle, and a long term situation...I would love to be able to complete everything, all the work and installation and for it then to be recognized statewide... it truly needs to be in Butte indefinitely!" ❖

A Moving Adventure

"Restocking the mercantile" coined by George Everett, was our rallying cry over the years that kept us focused on our goal of bringing all of the artifacts preserved by generations of people in Nevada City. At times, this seemed like an impossible task but by networking, perseverance and collaboration with likeminded professionals like Dr. Bill Peterson and Janna Norby the Mai Wah Society was able to succeed.

The uphill nature of this task continued even on the day that the large fixtures were retrieved. Saturday February 18th was appropriately wintry but not cold enough. Yes, we had snow, but also melting springs on the grounds of the Nevada City town site where the artifacts were stored. The 26-foot truck was immediately mired in mud and unable to move one inch. Tow trucks were miles and hours away but local resources were close by. A single call from Marge Antolik to Roger Williams and help was on the way with the right equipment at the right time. After being winched out of the mudhole and along the ice covered drive we were able to begin loading.

Snow continued to fall and the return trip was over snow covered roads. Ed Tracy's moving crew finished the job and the mercantile was restocked as if the 65-year artifact hiatus had never happened.



Thanks to all who helped in getting the artifacts back to the mercantile including Cathy Shea at Shea's U-Haul, who generously donated the use of the truck for the second move from Nevada City. ❖ *Jim Griffin*

MONTANA SHARES



The Mai Wah Society is a proud member of Montana Shares, which is a partnership of 42 Montana based non-profit organizations. Montana Shares raises money through workplace donations and an annual raffle. There are 15 fabulous prize packages up for grabs in the 18th Annual Raffle including the Explore Montana, Bountiful Butte, Make A Splash, Sunset Serenade and Pamper Your Pet packages. The drawing will be held on Saturday, September 8th. You need not be present to win. You can buy raffle tickets from any Mai Wah Society board member. The suggested donation is \$10 per ticket or 3 for \$25. For more information go to www.montanashares.org or call 442-2281. There is also a link on the Mai Wah web page www.maiwah.org.

Congratulations to Mai Wah Society Board of Directors member and treasurer, Richard Gibson, who won the Dave Walter Fellowship from the Montana Historical Society. Richard is using the scholarship to research the Chinn Family as part of the Chinn Family Exhibit. The Exhibit is supported by a grant from the Montana Cultural Trust.



We would also like to acknowledge Montana Cultural Trust for their support of Mai Wah operations.

Merle's parents met when they each homesteaded on the prairie near Gate, Oklahoma. Merle was born in 1909 in their sod house. Merle's mother was a teacher and her father was superintendent of schools. Merle always recalled that his Granddad Meeks taught him to respect and honor the Native Americans in the Gate area. In 1913 the extended family took their team and covered wagon over Monarch Pass to ranch near Gunnison, Colorado.

Merle's mother died when he was about 14 years old and he was sent to Isabel, Kansas, to live with an uncle. At Isabel he met Edith Peterie, an Isabel native, who was in his class. They courted for years and were married in 1936.

Throughout their lives, Merle and Edith were interested in learning about other cultures. The Merle and Edith Hoyt curatorial chair at the Mai Wah serves to honor my parents. They instilled in me a desire to appreciate and understand other cultures – their values and social systems. I am pleased to assist the Mai Wah Museum in sharing the story of the Chinese to Montana and our public. ❖ *Janet Sperry*

*Join the Grand Reopening of the Mai Wah
Mercantile, Saturday, August 18.*

Open House 12-4pm

MAI WAH SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

PRESIDENT: Jane Faught

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THE MAI WAH SOCIETY

<http://www.maiwah.org/>

BECOME A MEMBER!

Join today! Your membership has many benefits:

\$100: Newsletter, free museum admission, 15% gift shop discount, \$5 discount on t-shirt purchase, guided tour of museum for 10 people

\$50: Newsletter, free museum admission to member, two museum passes, \$5 discount on t-shirt purchase

\$25: Newsletter, free museum admission to member and two museum passes

To join send payment to Mai Wah Society,
P.O. Box 404, Butte, MT 59703

MUSEUM HOURS

Tuesday-Saturday 10am-4pm (June-September)

Mai Wah Society
P.O. Box 404
Butte, MT 59703

www.maiwah.org

Upcoming Events

Fourth of July Parade: The dragon roars again as the Mai Wah float joins in Butte's 4th of July parade .

Book Signing: Anna Bucher Jones, author of "Ocho Ocho, My Childhood in War-torn Asia" will speak about her book and sign copies (available for purchase at the Mai Wah.) We will be featuring the Chinese dress from the Mai Wah collection that appears on the book cover. Friday, August 3rd from 6pm at the Mai Wah

Grand Reopening of the Mai Wah Mercantile: Be a part of the dedication of the newly restocked Mai Wah Mercantile. FREE admission from noon-4pm for our Open House on Saturday, August 18. Dedication at 1pm.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED: The Mai Wah is looking for reliable volunteers to man the museum front desk and lead tours in the summer. For more information contact Jane Faught at 406-723-3231 or e-mail maiwahsociety@gmail.com


