

Great Falls Rising

Monthly Newsletter

February 2022

With the holidays behind us, Great Falls Rising is focusing on other events such as elections, keeping COVID at bay, and informing everyone that the 50th anniversary of the Constitutional Convention and Ratification of the Constitution is coming up. Great Falls Rising hopes that everyone can participate in all of the activities that help keep our Democracy viable and safe.

GFR FEBRUARY GATHERING: THE NEED, CONSTRUCTION, AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 1972 MONTANA CONSTITUTION: Celebration by Great Falls Rising of the 50th anniversary of our progressive and citizen-oriented Montana State Constitution will be held by Zoom on **Wednesday, February 23rd at 6 pm**. Our speakers will be those who were delegates to the Convention, loyal and committed citizens who saw the need for changing our very outdated 1889 constitution and those who were instrumental in implementing the constitution once it was ratified by the 100 delegates. It promises to be a very informational and entertaining evening. The link for the zoom will be sent out in a couple weeks. Please send it to friends who might be interested.

There will be several events celebrating the 50th anniversary and Great Falls Rising will be keeping you abreast of all of these. One is a program at MSU on March 22nd and another is the big celebration in Helena on June 15th and 16th. There will be others. It's a BIG deal.

SPOTLIGHT ON COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER - ARLYNE REICHERT: Fifty years ago, I helped hammer out a new Montana Constitution. I'd lost my bid for a seat in the state legislature the year before - perhaps in part because my campaign cards had my name and qualifications on one side and a recipe for Chicken Delight on the other. That failed election paved the way for a much more enduring role in Montana government.

If I had won that seat in the legislature, I could not have served in the Constitutional Convention. The State Supreme Court had ruled that elected officials, including state legislators, could not serve as delegates. That wise move meant there were plenty of fresh faces among our 100 delegates. There were business owners, a honey farmer, a librarian, five ministers, and yes, a smattering of lawyers. As a member of the Montana League of Women Voters, I'm proud that organization had strong representation among the 19 women elected.

Though the election was partisan, our seating was alphabetical. This simple act of "eliminating the aisle" led to great communication, collaboration, and enduring, if unlikely, friendships.

This hard-fought, hard-won document was written in less than sixty days in the winter of 1972, and signed by every delegate. It has more than stood the test of time. It's been cited as a model document by other states, and has defended the rights of ordinary Montanans like us for half a century.

Fifty years after its passage, the Montana Constitution is worthy of celebration. With some help, that's what supporters of our fine document and the surviving twelve delegates intend to do in Helena this June.

There has never been a more important time to defend Montana's Constitution. Our right to a "clean and healthful environment" helps keep Montana The Last Best Place. Our Constitution eliminated secret votes and back-room meetings by elected officials: we have a right to know, a right to participate, and an enhanced right to privacy.

We're very fortunate to have this Constitution...let's do everything we can to keep

it and live under its provisions. I'm honored that Great Falls Rising is helping to celebrate this milestone with this informative (and hopefully entertaining) program about Montana's Constitution.

WINTER TRAILS DAY...FREE! Get Fit Great Falls, in coordination with the U.S. Forest Service, is proud to bring back Winter Trails Day 2022 on **Saturday, February 5th** at the Silver Crest Winter Recreation Area. It is a great way to get out of the house and enjoy the beauty of Montana winter. The day offers snowshoeing and cross-country skiing, all for free! There are scheduled snowshoe hikes throughout the day that cater to people of all ages and experience. Folks who have never snowshoed are encouraged to come up and learn with our experienced volunteers. No matter your age or experience, there is a hike for everyone.

There will be a guided cross-country ski tour at 10:30 am for a limited number. Reservations for this tour must be made at Bighorn Outdoor Specialists (406-453-2841) who will lend their skis free of charge. You must visit the shop to be sized for boots and skis. Bighorn will have their ski equipment available the rest of the day for those who want to try cross country skiing after their snowshoe hike.

Snowshoes are provided free, thanks to the US Forest Service, Wild Montana, and Montana Discovery Foundation. Space for the snowshoe hikes is limited. Registration is required and opens at 6:00 pm on Wednesday, January 26th. To obtain more information and to register, go to getfithikes.eventbrite.com.

All participants must be dressed warmly with layers and bring their own food and drink for the day. We recommend carrying a small day pack on the trail. A face covering is recommended when fitting snowshoes and skis and in areas where social distancing is not possible. For more information, email getfitgreatfalls@gmail.com or call Clark Carlson-Thompson, 406-788-5728.

FROM OUR NEIGHBORS AT THE CHOUTEAU COUNTY LIBRARY: Thursday, January 27th was Holocaust Remembrance Day. The day before, a school board

in Tennessee voted to remove the graphic novel Maus ([Maus - Wikipedia](#)) from their schools. This is censorship. This is removing the horrors of a very real event from schools. If you as a parent feel that your child shouldn't read something, that's your decision. Removing it from the hands of others is wrong. We are proud to have Maus available. It is a powerful testament to a horrendous period in time.

To help combat censorship, we are starting a Banned Book Club.

Starting **Monday, February 7th** at 5:30 pm, and on subsequent Mondays, we will meet at the library in Fort Benton (1518 Main Street) and discuss books that have been banned, burned, or censored. This is a wonderful opportunity to read and learn more about controversial books. You'll be surprised as to what is even considered controversial. All are welcome.

AA ORCHESTRA FESTIVAL HOSTED BY GREAT FALLS PUBLIC

SCHOOLS: Please join us for two great evenings of music as we host the AA Orchestra Festival here in Great Falls. Orchestras from Helena High and Helena Capital will be joining our music students from CM Russell and Great Falls High for this event. Students will rehearse for two days in two full orchestra configurations with guest conductors will be Luis Milan (University of Montana) and Jeremy Woolstenhulme (Northview HS, Georgia). Monday night's concert will feature the individual orchestras as they play selections for each other, and Tuesday will feature the mass orchestras under the direction of the guest conductors.

When: **February 7th and 8th, 2022** 7:00 pm concerts

Where: GFHS Auditorium

Cost: FREE Admission

RIVER'S EDGE TRAIL CONNECTOR PROJECT: The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) is proactively investing in safe, pedestrian-friendly infrastructure in Montana to reach its Vision Zero goal. River's Edge Trail Connector Project will provide a much-needed missing link in the River's Edge Trail system by constructing a pedestrian trail near the Missouri River in Great Falls along River Drive.

The River's Edge Trail Connector Project will move the River's Edge Trail from between Broadwater Bay and 1st Avenue to alongside the river. This project will replace the trail section that is highly confusing for users due to its route behind the police department and the water park. Moving the trail will improve safety for pedestrians and trail users, as the current section crosses busy streets and an active railway in two places. The proposed trail alignment along the edge of the river eliminates those crossings.

MDT is teaming up with the City of Great Falls, the River's Edge Trail Foundation, and TD&H Engineering to accomplish this important project.

An in-person public open house will be held from **4:00 pm to 7:00 pm on Thursday, February 10th, in the Missouri Room of the Civic Center**. The event will be an open house with no formal presentation, and the public is encouraged to attend at their convenience.

A virtual public open house will be held on **Zoom on Tuesday, February 15th, from 5:30 pm to 6:30 pm**. Attendees can expect a brief slideshow presentation followed by a question-and-answer session and an opportunity to provide comments. Registration is required. To register, visit <https://bit.ly/RETPublicMeeting> [bit.ly].

In addition to seeking general public comment on the project, MDT also seeks public comment on each specific design alternative. Those wishing to comment on the project should contact Ella Currier at ellac@strategies360.com or [406-465-7198](tel:406-465-7198).

GREAT FALLS PUBLIC SCHOOLS HIGH SCHOOL ART SHOW: The public is invited to a free showing of our high school students art works.

Where: Dark Horse (lower level of Celtic Cowboy)

When: **Thursday, February 10th** from 4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

Please join these students as they display their art projects.

CASCADE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE CITIZEN'S ACADEMY: The CCSO's Citizen's Academy is back this spring and open for applicants. This nine week class will start **Tuesday, March 1st**. You must have your application in no later than 5:00 pm **February 11th**. Learn all about how the Office runs as well as the daily lives of Deputies and Detention Officers. You can find the application here: [CCSO Citizens Academy Application.docx \(live.com\)](#)

ELECTIONS IN GREAT FALLS FOR 2022: EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW: Updated from our very popular article last year, information for all the elections being held in Great Falls this year is included, listing important dates and information for each election. Visit the article on our website at: [Elections in Great Falls for 2022: Everything You Need to Know – Great Falls Rising \(greatfallsrisingmt.org\)](#).

JANUARY VIDEOS YOU MAY HAVE MISSED: In case you missed the January 20th program featuring Tom Moore, Superintendent of GFPS, and Jamie Marshall, Chair of KEY (Kids Education YES), an excellent presentation on the use of federal and state COVID related funds and the explanation of OTO - One Time Only, not to be repeated funds for this time of pandemic. Click here to view this program: [Great Falls Rising - Public Education in Great Falls: A Community Perspective - YouTube](#).

There was an excellent presentation this past month from the League of Women Voters – Helena and the Lewis & Clark Library in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Montana State Constitution, “What Can Your Constitution Do For You?” Click here to watch: [Helena Chapter of League of Women Voters and Lewis and Clark Library present the Hon. Jim Nelson - YouTube](#)

WELCOME TO BLACK HISTORY MONTH: Great Falls Rising is highlighting the woman for whom we have adopted a section of highway just north of Cascade to maintain in her memory.

Mary Fields – From Tennessee to Montana

Quick Facts

Significance: First African American woman to work as a Star Route Carrier for the US Postal Service

Place of Birth: Tennessee

Date of Birth: Early 1830s (Exact date unknown)

Place of Death: Cascade, Montana

Date of Death: 1914

Place of Burial: St. Peter's Mission, Montana

Mary Fields enjoyed certain freedoms living on the western frontier, but she was never fully accepted due to her gender and the color of her skin. She lived most of her life on the fringe of different communities.

There are many legends about Mary Fields, an African American pioneer in late 19th century Montana. These myths have been exaggerated in the century since her death, yet oral and written accounts describe her as one of the toughest, most resilient residents of Cascade, Montana.

Born enslaved in Tennessee in the early 1830s, she lived in bondage until the end of the Civil War. After emancipation, Mary traveled around the southern United States, finding work on steamboats along the Mississippi River. She eventually made her way to an Ursuline convent in Toledo, Ohio.

As the lived experiences of enslaved people were seldom documented, we know little about Mary's early years. Most of what we know comes from the convent records in Toledo. According to Sister Kathleen Padden, archivist for Toledo's Ursuline Convent, Mary arrived in Toledo by train in 1870 and worked for the nuns at the convent, washing laundry, managing the kitchen, and maintaining the convent garden and grounds.

During the years Mary lived at the convent, several of the nuns had departed Toledo for St. Peter's Mission in Montana, now a historic site listed on the National

Register of Historic Places. Here the nuns ran a school for American Indian girls. We know that Mary moved to Montana in 1885, but she did not document why. Some secondary sources claim that Mary made the journey to St. Peter's to care for Mother Mary Amadeus, as the two women knew each other before their time at the convent – indeed, Mother Mary Amadeus was related by marriage to the family that had enslaved Mary Fields in Tennessee. It is likely that Mary relocated to St. Peter's Mission in Montana because the nuns needed more support running the school and the grounds. While Mary Fields was an important figure in running the daily operations at the mission, she was not fully accepted as part of the community there.

When Mary arrived in Montana in 1885, there were about 150 people living at the mission, including American Indian and white students as well as the staff. By cultivating a large garden and hunting game, Mary worked to ensure that all staff and students were fed. She also coordinated the delivery of supplies to the isolated mission. She lived on the property but refused to be paid for her work. Mary did not document why she refused wages – perhaps it was out of altruism. Whatever the reason, it gave her a new freedom – she could come and go as she pleased and accept other employment opportunities. Mary finally had control over her own labor.

Mary had a complicated relationship with the leadership at the Mission. She did not adhere to the gender norms of the time. She dressed in male clothing and took on physically laborious jobs customarily done by men. About a year after Mary's arrival at the mission, rumors spread in the nearby town of Cascade that she had engaged in a duel. The local bishop responsible for the mission banned her from St. Peter's. Both Mary and the nuns were upset by the news. Records indicate that while the nuns and Mary did not always agree; they had come to rely on each other.

Leaving St. Peter's, Mary moved to the nearby town of Cascade where she was the only African American resident from 1886 through 1914. Her relationship with the other residents of town was complicated. Mary resisted racial stereotypes. She refused to take on work traditionally performed by Black women, such as working as a domestic servant in a white home. Instead, she found her own employment

opportunities.

In 1895, Mary obtained a contract to be a Star Route Carrier for the United States Post Office Department. A carrier was an independent contractor who used a stagecoach to deliver the mail. Mary's route ran between St. Peter's Mission and the town of Cascade. She delivered the mail for eight years without missing a day of work. Traversing the 34 mile round trip, Mary endured the harsh weather, bandits, and wolves of northern Montana. When the snow was too deep to drive the stagecoach, Mary trekked the route with snowshoes, delivering the mail on foot. Even though she was well into her 60s, Mary never let the hardships of the job prevent her from completing her route. She was the first African American woman and the second woman to receive a Star Route contract from the United States Post Office Department.

After retiring from her postal route, Mary established her own laundry business in town. She died in 1914 and is buried in Cascade.

1. Due to the requirements of the Catholic Church, all Orders of Nuns are structured similarly, but each group was founded at a different time and place, making them each unique. The Ursuline community was founded in Italy by St. Angela Merici in 1535 in honor of St. Ursula. St. Angela believe nuns could live holy lives without living in a convent.

2. The first woman Star Route Carrier was Polly Martin, who drove a mail wagon from about 1860 to 1876 from Attleboro to South Attleboro, Massachusetts.

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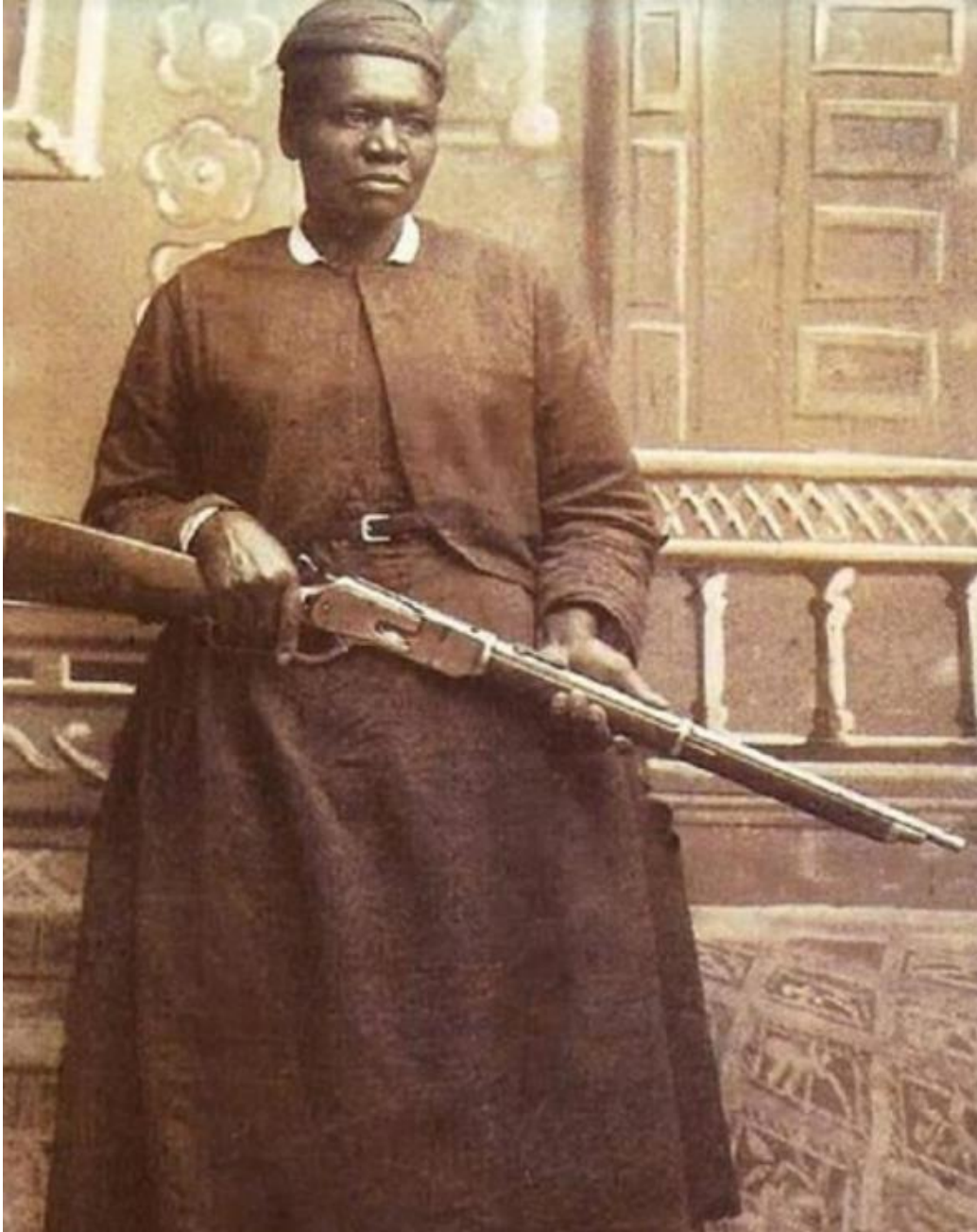
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The content for this article was researched and written by Dr. Katherine Crawford-Lackey.





We encourage everyone to continue wearing masks in public and avoiding large crowds. We hope for you to continue being safe and healthy.