With so many things unable to happen, how can we still stay engaged with the Museum!?!

1) The Gift Shop and offices are open Tuesday – Saturday 11:00 to 3:00. Masks, social distancing, and sanitizing procedures are in place. We have a great array of Wyoming suffrage t-shirts for summer wear or gifting. Also WY lasso baskets, history books and more! See photos below.

2) Check our website frequently—www.laramiemuseum.org. We post updates, information, virtual tours and historic characters each week.

3) Come to the beautiful Museum grounds! Wander around, soak up the historic feel, sit on the benches. The grounds men and our wonderful Garden Club volunteers are keeping things beautiful. Even the multitudes of recent storm damaged branches were whisked away quick because of many helpful hands. Come enjoy Laramie summer air here!

4) Come to the Art Fest on the Lawn, Sunday, July 12, 10:00 to 3:00 and plan for our Evening at the Ivinsons’ event, also on the lawn—Saturday, August 15, 2020. If you’re not on our invitation (to be sent in July) list, call our office and we’ll make sure to get you one.

5) Listen to KIMX-104.5 KRQU-98.7 KHAT-92.3 1210AM mornings for new bits of Wyoming history trivia “You Don’t Know Jacque!” sponsored by LPM.

6) Check out Laramie Plains Museum’s Facebook and YouTube posts.

Laramie History in the Time of Coronavirus

Our stunning 1892 historic house museum was the backdrop for some of Laramie High School’s 2020 graduates—another aspect of the students’ and the Museum’s “new normal.” With traditional graduation ceremonies unable to take place because of social distancing requirements during this time of COVID-19, the Ivinson Mansion was the legacy backdrop for students: Sheldon Williams, Katie Peterson, Ruby Novogrodska, Molly Bress, and Bryce Bienz. Novogrodska and Bress were junior docents in their early teen years. At their moms’ requests, we offered the lush museum grounds as a backdrop for this memorable gathering. The students lined up for a mock procession while one mother played “Pomp and Circumstance” on her mini speaker as the graduates walked up to very appropriate social distancing on the Ivinsons’ historic front porch. Betsy Bress, our former curator and mother of Molly, spoke about the pride the parents had in these graduates’ achievements in spite of the confusion and difficulties that wrapped up their high school years. She spoke of bright futures for them and each student ended up saying a few words. One student played guitar and sang a song he wrote about their years together. A joyful, energizing song was played for the recessional as the graduates socially distanced with photos like this one and yearbook signings. They hadn’t been together since the last day of in-person high school in mid-March. The poignancy of the graduates being here on our quarantined historic grounds was respected by all involved and our LPM director said these students will probably end up being our “Visionary problem solvers” because of the curves they have learned to deal with at the end of their high school years.
We started 2020 with gusto and high hopes for enhanced exhibits as we moved forward with long-awaited renovations inside our stunning historic house museum. Kim Viner, one of our favorite authors and historians, gave us a very generous gift at the end of 2019 to LPM and maintenance of its historic Barnum House.

We were not only grateful, we were inspired! We began the new year with vision for repair, replacement and restoration. We had the scarred front foyer oak flooring sanding and restored to its original color. We replaced our old wallpaper with early 2000’s early 2000’s new, and our wallpaper expert, Joyce Powell, and original tiles were scrubbed to reveal their welcoming historic checkerboard at the front door. Our exhibit developers began envisioning the ways they would tell new and varied stories of Laramie history. We asked Kenney Braisted, our chief architect for Heavy Lifting, to have his team take out the precious pieces of our mansion after long years in the same places. The new exhibits started to take on the intricacies of the stories our curatorial team had been dreaming. THEN, it was early March and the warnings about a pandemic virus taking hold around the world were shaking up our vision for our exhibit. It seemed to be the only sure way we could protect our staff and start to control that run away infection. Our docs said they did not feel safe with possibly having visitors from maybe a hot bed of infection with coronavirus taking tours of the Ivinson Mansion. We closed the doors and posted signs, we closed the gift shop and visitors to the Mansion. We could feel our major income problems for the Museum and our personal use, like everyone else, as we looked to isolate safely in our homes through the rest of March.

Minimal staff continued to come in at alternate times to do the work needed to take care of snow, buildings, Collection care, our_ website notices and voicemail messages to halt visitors to the Museum until we could feel safe again. We sought support from our local federal government to open back up our historic house museum are too intimate with twists and turns in the narrow passageways for social distancing. We opened our doors and we are unable to let guests just wander. Fortunately, we’ve pursued other options with online tours and historic character’s stories being posted. [See the back page of this newsletter for the other ways you can keep in touch with this special young and energetic youthful and visitors we usually have in summer!]

We have cut costs with salaries—paying only basic, necessary wages to keep things afloat, much as we did in pre-HELSC expansion years, just taking care of basics. Mid-year figures for wages in 2019 were at 53% of our budget; this year, we have projected costs for salaries at 20% of our 2020 budget. Some of our older employees have chosen to forego this COVID-19 time to do LPM work as volunteers, much as many did in years past. It’s what we do to keep our beautiful history alive and well even in the lean, difficult times. We have also applied for COVID assistance monies to help us through these restricted days. The PPP payroll stimulus was one help we received and we have applied for the recent statewide offer of assistance with revenue challenges too. We have not yet heard back on either.

As other museums were closing their doors and selling off artifacts in these years, Laramie Plains Museum held firm bec...

The Museum at the Big Horn

By Executive Director, Mary Mountain

Laramie Plains Museum in the Time of Coronavirus

Colonel Root has filled orders for nearly all the great mammalogists and zoological expeditions in the world, including the famed P. T. Barnum.

Another article titled “Hair Raising Adventures While Tiger Hunting in Manchuria,” from the Daily Boomerang, February 5, 1901, tells a story of W. H.’s tiger hunt in northern Manchuria (China) in 1888, in search of tiger skins for a London dealer. It is a story worthy of any writer of adventure novels. The story is not only interesting in its action-packed narrative, but one could feel the frustration and fear these explorers faced for the Museum and our personal use, like everyone else, as we looked to isolate safely in our homes through the rest of March. Minimal staff continued to come in at alternate times to do the work needed to take care of snow, buildings, Collection care, our_ website notices and voicemail messages to halt visitors to the Museum until we could feel safe again. We sought support from our local federal government to open back up our historic house museum are too intimate with twists and turns in the narrow passageways for social distancing. We opened our doors and we are unable to let guests just wander. Fortunately, we’ve pursued other options with online tours and historic character’s stories being posted. [See the back page of this newsletter for the other ways you can keep in touch with this special young and energetic youthful and visitors we usually have in summer!]

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It is likely that William Henry Root and his wife Helen "Lizzy" Elizabeth "Sissy" (Burns) Root were known by every Laramie person at the turn of the 20th Century. Colonel Billy Root, as he was often called in the local newspapers (though it is unclear why he was referred to as Colonel since no military record has been found), was an outspoken and highly regarded individual. He also had a reputation for his wit and humor and is credited for encouraging Edgar Wilson "Bill" Nye (1850-1896) in his profession as a humorist and editor of the Laramie Boomerang newspaper.

Helen along with her brother in-law Chauncey Root were well known for operating the Root's Opera House, which earned national fame during its time. Unfortunately, as far as newspaper reporting goes, it seems Helen did not receive as much local attention until after her husband's untimely death in 1903. She was mentioned periodical-ly for participating in social events, but it was usually "Billy" Root's activities and advice that were printed in newspapers. Management of the opera house is usually listed as W. H. or Chauncey until 1903. After W. H.'s death, Helen is often referred to as the manager and other times, Chauncey.

W. H. Root was born some time in 1848 in Louisiana, New Jersey, to Aaron and Sarah Root. He had two siblings (that were mentioned), Chauncey B. Root (born 1851) and Hattie E. Root (born 1863). By 1860, according to the census records, Aaron moved his family to Omaha, Nebraska, where he operated a hotel. According to W. H.'s obituary, the Roots "kept the best hotel in the frontier town, as it then was," exag-gerated in true newspapering fashion. According to Root's obituary, his father Aaron Root (1836-1890) was contracted with the Union Pacific Railroad in 1859 (this date is likely incorrect since the Pacific Rail-road Act was not passed until 1862) to "grade through the Red Desert," a term often used for the Wyoming landscape during the 19th Century. At some point, William joined his father on the railroad though it's unlikely that he helped com-plete the work at age 11 as his obituary says (more evidence that the 1859 date is unlikely).

Aaron moved his family to Chi-cago sometime in the early 1870's where they remained until the late 1880's. It was during this period that W. H. operated as a "bull-whacker" or freighter, moving goods in a wagon pulled by oxen. An article published in the Boomerang on February 5, 1901, says that he was also a "stage driver, a superin-tenant of a district road, a scout, ship, and a hunter." By the mid 1870's W. H. and possibly his brother Chauncey, moved to Albany County, Wyoming. His obituary says that he op-erated Paradise Ranch, located five miles south of Laramie.

The October 15, 1877, edition of the Laramie Weekly Sentinel report-ed that "Billy Root's fiancée arrived from the East last night, rather unex-pectedly, as the announcement of the day of her arrival had failed to reach him. He happened to be at the train, however, with his buggy, in which he took the young lady at one [sic] to the residence of N. F. Spicer, and called in the preacher." The 1893 census lists Chauncey, W. H., and Lizzie living near the Big Laramie River. W. H. is listed as a "farmer," Lizzie is "keeping house," and Chauncey is "cashier in bank."

Chauncey Root was the cashier for the Wy-oming National Bank of Laramie for approximately 10 years, the same bank Edward Ivinson began and was later president.

W. H. Root's obituary claims that he moved to Laramie (actual town in 1877 where he built the building that became Root's Opera House, but ac-cording to a Laramie Weekly Sentinel article on May 11, 1889, the building was the original school house in Laramie, organized by Jane Ivinson and other early pioneers. By 1879 the build-ing was converted into Blackburn Hall (not clear by whom) for use as a public stage and meeting space. In June of 1884, the building was repurposed by the "school and agricultural implement repository." Root displayed his stock of "buggies, carriages, wagons, and farm-implement of all kinds," to Laramie and surrounding areas. By 1885, he was licensed to sell Studebaker wagons and advertisements for other brands are found in all newspapers until 1889. By 1890, W. H. used the building as a holding place for wild animals from Wy-oming to sell back East or across the Atlantic. Many of these animals were sold to wealthy men with large estates. An article in the Daily Boomerang on January 24, 1894, tells of an elk that W. H. captured and took to England by "and placed in Sir Peter Walker's park." The elk was photographed, and the story of its journey across the At-lantic was told in a London newspaper and allegedly published in "leading pa-pers of the world." Another article in the Boomerang September 15, 1891, W. H. advertises "Wanted, six porc- pine, four antelope, 100 prairie dogs." Many other ads between 1890 and 1894 advertise for wild animals W. H. has captured or is looking to obtain.

Not only did W. H. deal in wild animals of Wyoming but he traveled to China and other locales for exotic skins and ani-mals for vari-ous purpose. A Boomerang article pub-lished in Feb-ruary 5, 1901, says that...
“THE TIMELESS GAZE OF CURATORS”

I’d like to tell you that I’m the creative person who came up with the insightful title to this editorial on what is happening for our Laramie Plains Museum as the coronavirus sends a new normal into our museum world, but I must give credit where credit is due. One of this spring’s issues of American Alliance of Museums monthly publication had those dramatic words on its cover as it introduced interviews with and about curators across the country. It was a mystical title that invited me to read and be reminded why we love museums and our curators. I thought you would enjoy to share some of the insight given and might also arrive at a renewed appreciation of these thoughtful caregivers of history, just as I did—especially as they move forward through the COVID-19 restrictions.

Museums tell our stories of community—showcasing the joys, woes and just plain tribulations of our history. Museums really can’t do this as well without curators and we at LPM have had some of the finest women and men working those inspired duties over the years, even as we began as a volunteer-derived organization and subsequently have never been able to pay them what they are worth. Curators have long been regarded as the distinguished, knowledgeable organizers and presenters of collections of history, but Mical Parzen, the chief executive officer of the San Diego Museum of Man, says that his museum felt the word “curator” was far too limiting to what the job actually entails at our repositories of history. “Several years ago we eliminated the position of “curator” at our museum, and we began hiring “exhibit developers”... Because we wanted the look, feel, and content of our exhibitions to emerge out of a multiplicity of voices from throughout the institution and our community... Our exhibit developers wear a variety of hats. They are researchers, project managers, dialogue facilitators, community liaisons, writers, story-tellers, and evaluators—all wrapped into one. They are the shepherds that carry our idea to life as an experience for our visitors.” Our LPM exhibit developers have certainly done all of that and continue to refine their visionary decisions and hands-on work.

Konnie Crook, our lead curator, and Amy Allen, our assistant curator and registrar, are using this issue to tell some of the new collection elements we have acquired, exhibites they’ve newly presented in the museum, and the new online tours and historic character interviews they have been posting.

Dr. Porchia Moore, assistant professor of museum studies at the School of Art & Art History at the University of Florida and former curator of the rotatin African American gallery “Screamed” at the Columbus Museum of Art, says “I see curatorial work as a kind of story telling and information praxis. I view it as a form of social justice practice and activism. Curatorial work is about being culturally responsive and responsible, being able to rapidly respond to issues such as police violence or even the reporting of the curatorial staff. Curatorial work is about being culturally responsive and responsible. So for me, this work is about sharing of information and helping to highlight and uncover suppressed narratives.” Topics of our western history are not always easy or straightforward to exhibit; aside from the wows & up cowboy legends and lore, there are dark tales and shadows that are difficult to share but a critical part of our past. They are the rough edges that our history writers and our curators must reveal in the best ways they know how. What Dr. Moore might refer to as culturally responsive and responsible.

All that said, I am delighted to be able to devote the other half of this June issue to the reporting of the curatorial staff. Amy Allen tells us about the behind the scenes work they have been doing for the first half of the year and Konnie Crook gives you a talk of W.H. Root, one of Laramie’s pioneering men, most often noted for the Root Opera House on 2nd Street, but who had an even more interesting life. She caught up on history with our team and then go to our website: laramiemuseum.org to click on the tours and new tales of individual Wyoming characters they’re posting.

Joyce Powell, one of Laramie’s talented local photographers and a special friend of the Museum, sent me the array of early summer cemetery tours of historic photographers and a special friend of the Museum, sent me the array of early summer cemetery tours of historic photographers and a special friend of the Museum, sent me the array of early summer cemetery tours of historic photographers and a special friend of the Museum, sent me the array of early summer cemetery tours of historic photographers and a special friend of the Museum, sent me the array of early summer cemetery tours of historic photographers and a special friend of the Museum, sent me the array of early summer cemetery tours of historic.