100 best books about Montana list compiled by UM professor

University of Montana–Missoula. Office of University Relations

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/newsreleases

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation


This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University Relations at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Montana News Releases, 1928, 1956-present by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.
Even though it was published almost 40 years ago, "Montana: High, Wide and Handsome" by Joseph Kinsey Howard, was rated overwhelmingly as the number-one best book about Montana in a survey conducted by University of Montana history professor Harry W. Fritz.

Fritz revealed the survey results in a recent speech in Helena to patron members of the Montana Historical Society. The society had sponsored part of the survey, which polled more than 8,200 subscribers to "Montana, Magazine of Western History" for their choices of the five best books about Montana.

According to Fritz, 529 books were named by persons responding to the questionnaire.

Fritz commented that this number of highly regarded books testified "eloquently to the scope and depth of (Montana's) history, to the talent and ingenuity of her writers and to the variety of her experience."


The next five: Thomas J. Dimsdale, "The Vigilantes of Montana"; three

Fritz emphasized that the list is made up of popular choices and was not based on a professional or academic critique of literature, which would probably have been much different. About 10 percent of the survey forms were returned, he said, which is statistically typical and good for a bulk-rate mailed and unstamped return questionnaire.

According to Fritz's tally of the 529 books by general topics, the most frequently named volumes were about Montana's Native Americans in both the 19th and 20th centuries and their clashes with white men. They were followed by books on cattlemen, ranching and cowboy life, general Montana history, mining, vigilantes, the Lewis and Clark expedition, the fur trade, politics, homesteading and travel.

Also making large groups were published local and family histories and reference books, including volumes on Montana fish, fowl, flowers, rocks, trails and bars. Frequently included among the best Montana books were art, photography and poetry collections and cookbooks.

Fritz said that about half of the questionnaires were sent to out-of-state addresses and about half of the replies came from outside Montana, with books on George Armstrong Custer and his "last stand" and Charles M. Russell being the most frequently cited from non-Montana sources.

However, he noted that the top five books were chosen predominantly by Montana residents, though no single respondent named all five.

Fritz's statistics reveal that 45 books actually did not receive votes but were mentioned in passing comments, and 233 books received only one vote.

Comments on the returned questionnaires were usually favorable, Fritz said, but there were criticisms. In his speech to the historical society, he quoted
several disparaging remarks which criticized Montana writers, literature and the topics often associated with the state.

Fritz said that "a certain insularity and provincialism is apparent," in an assessment of Montana literature based on the survey returns, since few of the cited books place the state in national or regional contexts. He also noted that the list contains mostly books written about 19th-century Montana with a comparative few chosen which were written about the last 60 years.

"I know writers naturally prefer dramatic and exciting subjects," Fritz said about the romantic written fiction and history of Montana, "but have we really been that dreary lately?" He added that obviously there is still a lot of writing to be done about Montana and more recent topics and persons.

In all, the survey project cost over $500 for printing and mailing costs, with the funds provided by the A.B. Hammond Trust for Western History Projects at UM.

Several years ago Fritz had conducted a similar survey among professional historians in the United States to list the five best history books.

###

EDITOR'S NOTE: Attached is a copy of the full rank-order list of the 100 best books about Montana. There are only 98 numbered since three editions of "The Journals of Lewis and Clark" were among the top 10.
# THE ONE HUNDRED BEST BOOKS ABOUT MONTANA

Compiled by

Harry W. Fritz
University of Montana

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>AUTHOR AND TITLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Guthrie, A.B., Jr. The Big Sky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Toole, K. Ross. Montana: An Uncommon Land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Glasscock, Carl B. The War of the Copper Kings...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Doig, Ivan. This House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Russell, Charles M. Trails Plowed Under</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Dimsdale, Thomas J. The Vigilantes of Montana...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>The Journals of Lewis and Clark (3 editions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Stuart, Granville. Forty Years on the Frontier...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Cushman, Dan. Stay Away, Joe, A Novel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Huntley, Chet. The Generous Years: Remembrances of a Frontier Boyhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Brown, Mark Herbert and Felton, W. R. Before the Barbed Wire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Garcia, Andrew. Tough Trip Through Paradise, 1878-1879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Langford, Nathaniel Pitt. Vigilante Days and Ways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Van Cleve, Spike. Forty Years' Gatherin's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Montana Historical Society. Not in Precious Metals Alone...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Russell, Charles M. Good Medicine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Abbott, E.C. and Smith, Helena Huntington. We Pointed Them North</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Maclean, Norman. A River Runs Through It and Other Stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Brown, Mark Herbert. The Plainsmen of the Yellowstone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Hamilton, James M. History of Montana, from Wilderness to Statehood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Fletcher, Robert H. Free Grass to Fences: The Montana Cattle Range Story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>McCracken, Harold. The Charles M. Russell Book...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Coburn, Walt. Pioneer Cattleman in Montana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Johnson, Dorothy M. The Bloody Bozeman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Toole, K. Ross. Twentieth Century Montana: A State of Extremes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Sharp, Paul Frederick. Whoop-Up Country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>Brown Mark Herbert and Felton, W.R. The Frontier Years...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>Toole, K. Ross. The Rape of the Great Plains...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>Burlingame, Merrill G. The Montana Frontier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>Wolle, Muriel Vincent Sibell. Montana Pay Dirt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>Federal Writers' Project. Copper Camp...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>Montana Historical Society. Montana, Magazine of Western History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>Schultz, James Willard. My Life as an Indian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>Stewart, Edgar I. Custer's Luck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39.</td>
<td>Alderson, Nannie and Smith, Helena Huntington. A Bride Goes West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.</td>
<td>Willard, John. Adventure Trails in Montana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.</td>
<td>Abbott, Newton Carl. Montana in the Making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42.</td>
<td>O'Malley, Richard K. Mile High, Mile Deep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43.</td>
<td>Guthrie, A.B., Jr. These Thousand Hills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44.</td>
<td>Linderman, Frank B. American: The Life Story of a Great Indian, Plenty-coups, Chief of the Crows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45.</td>
<td>Burlingame, Merrill and Toole, K. Ross. A History of Montana (3 vols.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RANK</td>
<td>AUTHOR AND TITLE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47.</td>
<td>Johnson, Dorothy M. <em>The Hanging Tree</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.</td>
<td>Guthrie, A.B., Jr. <em>The Way West</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51.</td>
<td>Leeson, Michael A. <em>History of Montana, 1739-1885</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53.</td>
<td>Welch, James. <em>Winter in the Blood</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54.</td>
<td>Connolly, Christopher Powell. <em>The Devil Learns to Vote.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55.</td>
<td>James, Don. <em>Butte's Memory Book</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56.</td>
<td>Lang, William L. and Myers, Rex C. <em>Montana: Our Land and People</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57.</td>
<td>Renner, Frederick, ed. <em>Charles M. Russell: Paintings, Drawings.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58.</td>
<td>Schultz, James Willard. <em>Blackfeet and Buffalo.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59.</td>
<td>Waldo, Anna Lee. <em>Sacajawea</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60.</td>
<td>Walker, Mildred. <em>Winter Wheat</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61.</td>
<td>Adams, Ramon F. and Britzman, Homer E. <em>Charles M. Russell, the Cowboy Artist: A Biography</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63.</td>
<td>Hakola, John W., ed. <em>Frontier Omnibus</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64.</td>
<td>Palladino, Lawrence B., S.J. <em>Indian and White in the Northwest.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65.</td>
<td>Shatraw, Milton. <em>Thrashin' Time: Memories of a Montana Boyhood</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66.</td>
<td>Howard, Joseph Kinsey. <em>Strange Empire: A Narrative of the Northwest</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69.</td>
<td>Graham, Colonel William A. <em>The Custer Myth: A Source Book of Custeriana</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70.</td>
<td>Johnson, Dorothy M. <em>Buffalo Woman</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71.</td>
<td>Linderman, Frank Bird. <em>Recollections of Charley Russell</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72.</td>
<td>McGrath, Jean, ed. <em>Butte's Heritage Cookbook</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73.</td>
<td>McNelis, Sara. <em>Copper King at War: The Biography of Augustus Heinze</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74.</td>
<td>De Voto, Bernard. <em>Across the Wide Missouri</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75.</td>
<td>Johnson, Dorothy M. <em>Indian Country</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76.</td>
<td>Linderman, Frank Bird. <em>Montana Adventure</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77.</td>
<td>Murphy, Clyde F. <em>The Glittering Hill</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78.</td>
<td>Sanders, Helen Fitzgerald. <em>A History of Montana</em> (3 vols.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79.</td>
<td>Stegner, Wallace. <em>Wolf Willow</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81.</td>
<td>Ewers, John C. <em>The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82.</td>
<td>Fenson, Dale. <em>Up on the Rim</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83.</td>
<td>James, Will. <em>Smoky the Cow Horse</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84.</td>
<td>Marquis, Thomas B. <em>Memoirs of a White Crow Indian</em> (Thomas H. Leforge)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85.</td>
<td>Price, Con. <em>Trails I Rode</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86.</td>
<td>Vaughn, Robert. <em>Then and Now, or, Thirty-Six Years in the Rockies.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87.</td>
<td>Barsness, Larry. <em>Gold Camp: Alder Gulch and Virginia City</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88.</td>
<td>Bower, B.M. <em>Chip of the Flying U</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89.</td>
<td>Bradley, James H. <em>The March of the Montana Column</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90.</td>
<td>Guthrie, A.B., Jr. <em>Arrive</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91.</td>
<td>Karlin, Jules A. <em>Joseph Dixon of Montana.</em> (two parts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92.</td>
<td>Kennedy, Michael S., ed. <em>Cowboys and Cattlemen: A Roundup</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93.</td>
<td>Koelbel, Lenora. <em>Missoula, the Way It Was</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95.</td>
<td>McClintock, Walter. <em>The Old North Trail</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97.</td>
<td>Sandoz, Mari. <em>The Battle of the Little Bighorn</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98.</td>
<td>Stone, Arthur L. <em>Following Old Trails</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>