

On the **Community** panel the vignette of a woman canning fruit references not only the work of homemakers, but also the important role of home extension agents. The telephone operators



personify Montana cities' and towns' clerical workers and women as labor union members: the first union of telephone workers in America was organized in Montana. Thousands of Montana women joined voluntary associations that supported women's education,

here represented by members of the Montana Federation of Colored Women's Clubs giving out a college scholarship. Education is also depicted in the vignette of a Native woman teaching botany. Botany was one of the few sciences that welcomed women, and Native women's knowledge of the medicinal and nutritional uses of Montana plants was, and continues to be, important to both Native and newcomer communities.

Women across the state have pioneered the social institutions now considered part of the fabric of community life. **Women Build Montana** honors women's diverse roles in family life and as artists, educators, health care providers, scientists, businesswomen, farmers, ranchers, and activists. The mural honors these women as Montana "community builders."

**Funding for the Montana Women's Mural was made possible entirely by the generosity of private donors.**



## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

The generations of women in my family have set examples and carved paths for my mom, my daughter, and me to have the life and experiences we live today. That is what this project is about. This piece is about the generations of women in Montana who built families and contributed to their communities, to the economy, and to politics by working together to build strong communities for generations to come. It is not about one single important woman, but about all women. It is a broader picture of women. Hopefully, any woman can look at these images and see a piece of herself in them. HADLEY FERGUSON



**MONTANA**  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

225 North Roberts Street  
PO Box 201201  
Helena, MT 59620-1201  
(406) 444-2694  
mths.mt.gov

This document was produced by the Montana Historical Society and was printed at state expense. Information on the cost of this publication can be obtained by contacting the MTHS.

# Women Build Montana

THE MONTANA WOMEN'S MURAL  
AT THE MONTANA STATE CAPITOL



The 2011 Montana State Legislature approved Senate Bill 59, sponsored by former State Senator Lynda Moss and former Representative Diane Sands, which called for the creation and installation of a mural in the state Capitol to honor the history of Montana women as community builders.

Through a competitive process **Hadley Ferguson** of Missoula, Montana, was chosen as the mural artist. Hadley Ferguson (b. 1976) has worked on public and private art commissions since graduating from the University of Montana with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in 1999. Ferguson's previous commissions include Heart of Missoula Murals, a historical reflection on the City of Missoula; murals at the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula; and Missoula Catholic School Heritage Project, which portrays the history of Missoula Catholic Schools.



Women Build Montana: Culture

For the Montana Women's Mural project, Ferguson conducted extensive research in collaboration with Montana historians to determine the mural's subjects. Hadley chose to paint two panels to form the mural; each contains a central scene, surrounded by four corner vignettes. The panels, located on the east and west walls of the grand stairway on the third floor of the Capitol beneath the barrel vault, continue the overall theme of art in the statehouse, which tells a narrative of Montana history.



Set in the late nineteenth century in a western Montana landscape during the spring, the central scene of the first panel—titled **Women Build Montana: Culture**—depicts Native women having

come to a homestead to trade for goods. In keeping with the theme of Montana women as community builders, the scene portrays a meeting ground in which women acted as traders and cultural brokers.



Montana women, both Natives and newcomers, often lived quite near each other, trading knowledge and offering support, as well as goods.

The central scene of the second panel—titled **Women Build Montana: Community**—is set in the fall of 1924 in an eastern Montana town. While women won the right to vote in Montana in 1914, that right was not extended to Native women until 1924 with the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act.

The scene marks the tenth anniversary of Montana women's suffrage and acknowledges the year in which Native women gained citizenship and the right to participate in formal state politics.

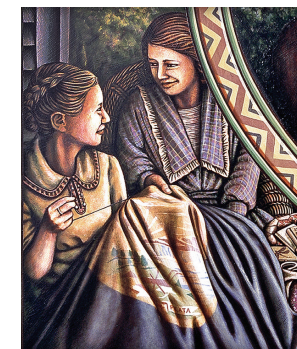
The eight vignettes surrounding the two central panels are designed to show Montana women's cultural, social, and economic contributions to their



Women Build Montana: Community

communities and at the same time bridge the nineteenth-twentieth century divide. They depict women and children engaged in the paid and unpaid labor that helped build Montana.

On the **Culture** panel, women are digging bitterroot, an important food source for Native peoples and the plant that would become the Montana state flower. The two Euro-American women stitching a Montana flag, inspired by a historic account, represent the mixing of domestic arts and formal politics. Children harvesting sugar beets represent



the Mexican-American families who contributed to the economy and community of eastern Montana. The Native mother and daughter beading and preparing a hide illustrate the teaching and learning of traditional arts across generations.