



Spring 2025

Volume XL, No. 2

Acting President's Report



Five months ago when I threw my name in the hat to be a nominee for the Vice President of OCTA at the 2025 Board meeting, little did I expect that I would take on the role six weeks later and now be Acting President of OCTA while Helen mourns the loss of her husband Mike. What a whirlwind!

We all feel for Helen during this time. I have talked to her a couple of times and she is slowly but surely working through her grief. I am glad she is taking this time for herself and am more than willing to take on this additional responsibility for her while she grieves. I am happy to report that we expect Helen to be back as President in March!

In these short few weeks of being Acting President, I am grateful to be surrounded by other OCTA leaders willing to help me succeed in keeping the business of OCTA running: John Briggs, Travis Boley, Kathy Conway, and David May. You all know the extra effort you have been expending to help me. Thank you!

Likely the most pressing concern on every OCTA member's mind right now may be the impact that shifts in National Park Service (NPS) funding and staffing may have on OCTA. As you all know, part of our funding comes from the NPS. Travis and I traveled to Santa Fe in February to visit with the National Trails Office (NTO) staff and meet with Carole Wendler, Deputy Superintendent, and Patrick Malone, Superintendent, of the NTO on the topic. Changes were afoot that day and late in the previous week. Some staff were let go

already. We know our contract will be reviewed for compliance with executive orders and further changes could be forthcoming for the NTO. We will work through the implications of any changes as partners with the NTO as we solidify our task agreement and budget for the coming year. As we know more, we will share.

I am pleased to report that we have received some very generous donations in the last few weeks. While the donors wish to remain anonymous, I want to say thank you to them for their multiple donations. I have personally called to thank them. I should note that Qualified Charitable Donations (QCD) of stock are a good way to keep OCTA fluid in funding and may be a great way to pass on your own legacy to OCTA. Contact OCTA leadership if you want to learn more about how to do stock QCDs.

Please note that the registration for the Salt Lake City Symposium is now available. Thanks to Steve Allison and Travis Boley for their planning on the Symposium. I will see you all there!

Lastly, let me take this opportunity as the Planning Chair for the 2025 OCTA Pueblo Convention to let you know that plans are coming together well. We expect to post registration information in April. There will be some fun new things we will be doing this year including a day of hands-on workshops the Sunday before the convention. I would love to see a good turnout. More details are under the Colorado-Cherokee Trail Chapter report in this newsletter. Oh yeah, I wear the hat of the President for the chapter as well. Too many hats! I hope to see you in Pueblo!

Ethan Gannett, Acting President

PRESERVATION

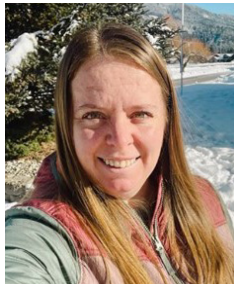


By John Winner

National Preservation Officer

OCTA's Mission is to protect the **historic emigrant trails** legacy by promoting public awareness of trails through research, education and **preservation activities**; by achieving organizational sustainability; and partnering with others.

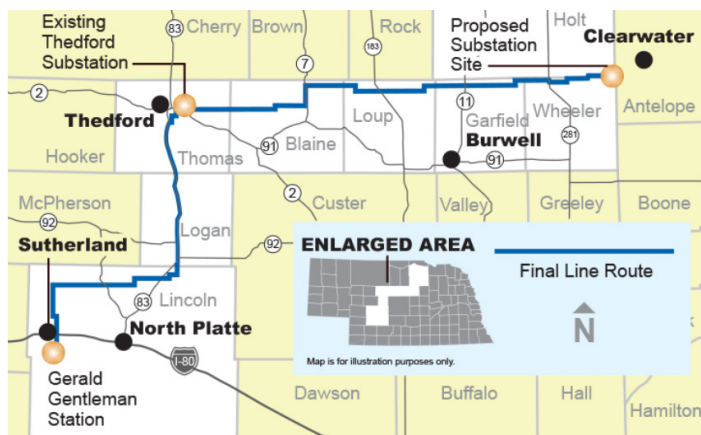
I am pleased to announce that beginning February 3, 2025 OCTA has hired Jordan Thomas as the Assistant National Preservation Officer. Jordan's role will be to help me and the chapters along with the chapter preservation officers to navigate through the many trail threats and sustain the research and development necessary to carry out OCTA's core goals of saving the trails and telling the stories of the mid-nineteenth western migration.



Jordan's under graduate study was at Utah Valley University and Masters Degree in Modern History from Aberystwyth University in Wales. Her Master's thesis focused on emigrant diaries along the California Trail through Nevada. Most recently, she was the Program Manager for the Museum of North Idaho in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

Here is an update on Nebraska's **R-Project** as it continues to move forward despite the many objections. Several from Tribal Councils. As you may recall from prior News from the Plains articles, this is a Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD), proposed new 225 mile 345 kV transmission line and associated infrastructure that would cross directly over, or very near to, pristine segments of the Oregon and California, the Mormon Pioneer and Pony Express National Historic Trails. The project also impacts several sacred tribal sites.

When the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued an



Final Transmission Line Route

Incidental Take Permit (ITP) in 2019, OCTA and others joined in a lawsuit as plaintiffs arguing that FWS violated several federal laws. On June 17th., 2020, the US District Court Judge vacated the ITP issued to NPPD and remanded the matter back to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife for further review, stating, FWS inadequately considered the effects of the R-Project on the O'Fallon's Bluff segment of the Oregon and California Trail; unlawfully excluded potential wind turbine development and a portion of the 'Programmatic Agreement' entered into to address the 'National Historic Preservation Act' (NHPA) was arbitrary and capricious. Section 106 of the NHPA requires a federal agency to conduct a review before making a decision to approve a project that may affect historic property. Agencies should not make obligations that would preclude consideration of the full range of alternatives to avoid or minimize harm to historic properties. **This was a first step victory for the plaintiffs.**

In response, NPPD developed a new ITP application and FWS prepared a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS). NPPD made a token reroute of the transmission line moving it one half mile to the east, but still a direct effect to the historic trails.

There have been numerous virtual meetings and in January 2025, at the urging of Linda Tacey, OCTA's Nebraska Chapter Preservation Officer, FWS conducted an on-site tour of the area including the famous O'Fallon's Bluff site and Sand Hill Ruts Site. A few of Linda's comments: *"There were 25 attendees, people from all over the country, DC to California, many agencies represented. There were seven from Tribal Councils. FWS wanted to go through the Programmatic Agreement (PA) line by line. The Tribes do not want a PA. They just want to use the Section 106 process. It was 'boots on the ground' at all sites. Everyone was impressed with the sites! Landowners were there to give their perspective and I was able to visit with many.*

A new map of the Mormon Pioneer Trail structure setting was presented. Now they have drawn in a pole directly on top of the trail, right in front of the interpretive display. I'm not happy! FWS knows my dislike and said maybe something can be done in the PA." The beat goes on!!!!

OCTA's Northwest Chapter preservation team has been busy keeping tabs on various preservation issues in the Northwest. Here is a report from team member Dave Welch.

NW Preservation Activities:

Development of renewable energy resources along the Oregon Trail in Eastern Oregon continues. The Boardman to Hemingway transmission line project continues with construction to be started in the near future. Mitigation negotiations continue. According to the programmatic agreement Idaho

Power has two years from the start of construction to finalize mitigation.

A solar component is being added to some of the earlier wind turbine projects. These projects will cover much of the surface area below the towers with solar panels thus completing the eyesore while not producing much energy on a cloudy, calm day. Another modification to the earlier wind farms is the increase in size of the turbines themselves. The blades are being extended by about 25% that will increase the sweep area by 56% and the spherical volume by 95%. There are no serious challenges to these projects. On a more positive side, we have been contacted by the Washington State Department of Highways (WSDOT) concerning a realignment of US12 west of Touchet, Washington to the Columbia River. This is the last segment to be converted to a four-lane highway. There is a trail segment over Nine-mile Hill that may be impacted by the new construction. We have been invited to participate in a field survey to assess the impact. Construction will not occur for a couple of years. The corridor through the area has been used by Native Americans, the Hudson Bay Company (and the Northwest Company), military expeditions, and travelers to and from the Whitman Mission. Preservation activities in the Northwest are being coordinated by a committee consisting of Jenny Miller, Wendell Baskins, Leta Neiderheiser, and Dave Welch.

Lava Ridge Wind Farm: President Trump places a moratorium on the Lava Ridge Project.

Magic Valley Energy submitted a proposal for a massive wind farm Northeast of Twin Falls, Idaho. The project would have 250 wind turbines on 100,000 acres, mostly public lands administered by BLM. Although the proposed project area is not in direct contact with the Oregon National Historic Trail, indirect effects could be visible as the wind turbines generally reach heights of 700 feet or more. The project is in close proximity to the Minidoka National Historic Site, a relocation site where more than 13,000 Japanese Americans were incarcerated during World War II. The project received repeated, formal, and passionate opposition from the Idaho State Legislature, Idaho's constitutional officers, impacted county and city officials, and many in the Japanese American community.

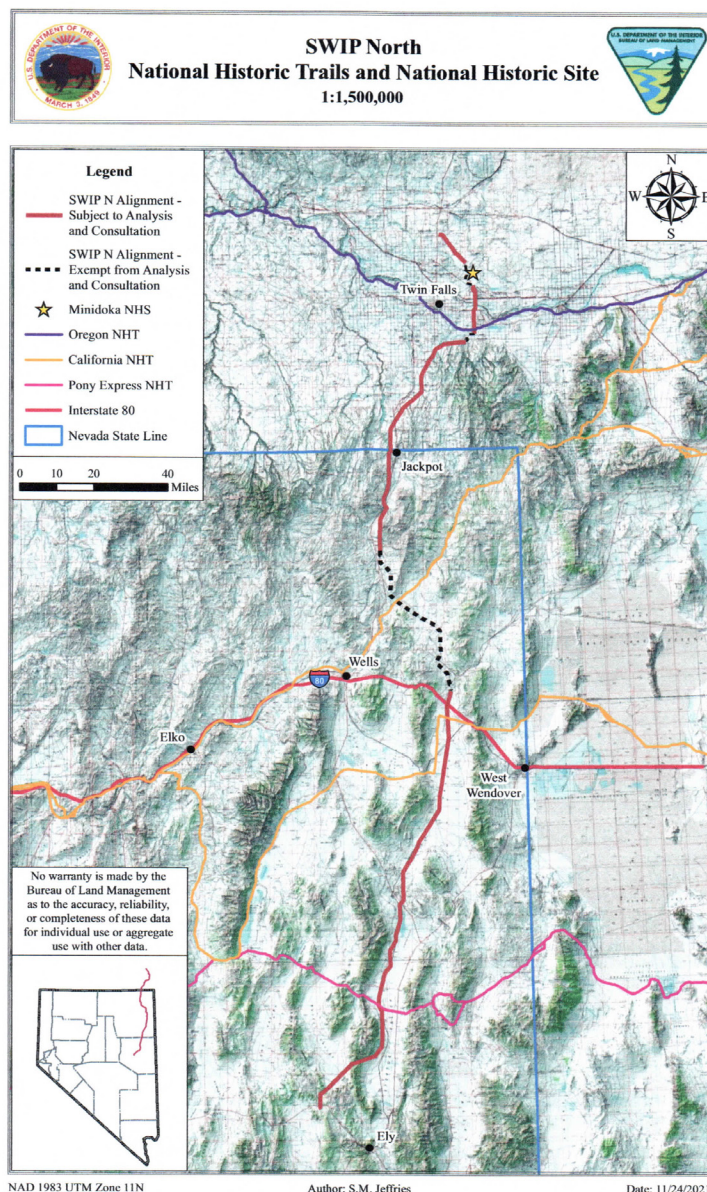
On January 20, 2015, President Trump signed an Executive Order putting a "Temporary Withdrawal of All Areas on the Outer Continental Shelf from Offshore Wind Leasing and Review of the Federal Government's Leasing and Permitting Practices for Wind Project."

Here is the excerpt referring to the Lava Ridge Project:

"(b) In light of criticism that the Record of Decision (ROD) issued by the Bureau of Land Management on December 5,

2024, with respect to the Lava Ridge Wind Project Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), as approved by the Department of the Interior, is allegedly contrary to the public interest and suffers from legal deficiencies, the Secretary of the Interior shall, as appropriate, place a temporary moratorium on all activities and rights of Magic Valley Energy, LLC, or any other party under the ROD, including, but not limited to, any rights-of-way or rights of development or operation of any projects contemplated in the ROD. The Secretary of the Interior shall review the ROD and, as appropriate, conduct a new, comprehensive analysis of the various interests implicated by the Lava Ridge Wind Project and the potential environmental impacts".

Southwest Intertie Project North (SWIP): SWIP (North) is a 275-mile 500 kV transmission line in Idaho and Nevada. The line would run from the Midpoint substation, north of Twin Falls, Idaho to Robinson Summit substation west of Ely, Nevada. This is the third phase of the SWIP project that continues on to southern Nevada. The project is an integral



part of the Lava Ridge Project that has recently been placed on a temporary moratorium by Executive Order by President Trump, however the BLM is continuing.

The SWIP (North) project will cross the Oregon NHT, Central Overland Trail, The Pony Express NHT, The Hastings Cutoff and the California NHT.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is working with the proponent, LS Power Development, LLC to ensure that all stipulations are met and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act is complied with before a Notice to Proceed (NTP) is issued. OCTA has consulting party status on this project and has notified BLM of direct and indirect effects.

Greenlink North: 225 mile, Nevada Energy project from Ely, Nevada (Robinson Substation) to Yerington, Nevada (Fort Churchill Substation). A 525kV transmission line that follows US Highway 50 in part and the Pony Express NHT and Central Overland Trail, crossing in several locations. I have participated in several scoping session with BLM. In addition to the direct effects of trails, at issue is the effect to the "Loneliest Highway" designation.

The BLM contracted to have an inventory and assessment report prepared in support of an Environmental Impact Statement.

Epilogue: As I mentioned at the beginning when introducing Jordan as Assistant National Preservation Officer, OCTA's core goals are to, "save the trails and tell the story". In the past 8 years we have monitored over 200 projects that have had potential adverse effects to the historic emigrant trails. We have had consulting party status on most and have participated in hundreds of meetings, tours, mitigation and litigation. Additionally, OCTA does a good job telling the story through thousands of diaries and journals, extensive collection of books and materials and social media. But what about Artificial Intelligence (AI). Over the Christmas holiday my oldest grandson and I were having a history discussion when the subject came up, out of the blue he picks up his phone and without any background information, asks: "write a poem about the Donner Party"

In a blink of the eye the results. Hmmm! ...*more to come.*

Beneath the towering pines they lay,
A trail of dreams turned cold and gray.
With hearts once full of hope and cheer,
They ventured west, their fates unclear.

Through deserts wide and mountains steep,
Their journey taxed both soul and sleep.
The Hastings Cutoff, a tempting plea,
Became their path to misery.

October's chill, a heavy hand,
Locked them fast in a snowbound land.
The Sierras loomed, both grand and grim,
A frozen fate encircling them.

Hunger gnawed, a cruel thief,
Stripping strength and planting grief.
The oxen gone, the food supplies,
Left only desperate, hollow cries.

A "Forlorn Hope" in daring stride,
Set forth to save those trapped inside.
Through blizzard's wrath and icy breath,
Some found help; others found death.

Back at camp, the fire's glow,
Could not outshine the brutal snow.
And whispers rose, dark and dire,
As hunger stoked a deadly fire.

From flesh of friends, they drew their breath,
Survival born from bitter death.
Yet through the anguish, few survived,
Their spirits fractured, yet alive.

Now by the lake where the winds still moan,
A monument stands, carved from stone.
To those who dared, who faced the test,
A somber ode to the westward quest.

Their tale endures, both grim and stark,
A shadow cast on history's arc.
For in the snow where dreams were slain,
The Donner Party's ghosts remain.

OCTA Email Live Links in our Digital Edition

We have had a rash of reports of digital "phishing" of the email addresses published online and from the live links in the PDF editions of our publications. To minimize this activity and future email misuse by online scammers, we

will no longer live link email addresses in our PDF publications. This will help keep automated 'bot' programs from online harvesting of officer and leadership email addresses. The addresses will still be viewable to readers.

FROM THE ASSOCIATION MANAGER



For nearly thirty-five years, the City of Independence, Missouri, and OCTA collaborated at the National Frontier Trails Museum (NFTM), located on Pacific Street, just south of the City's historic Square. The City operated the NFTM, and together with OCTA, developed the Merrill J. Mattes Library, the premier center for

research in the history of the western trails. The City has now relocated the NFTM to a location off the Square in Independence and leased the space it formerly occupied to the Missouri Model Railroad Museum, which is slated for completion in June 2026.

However, the books, diaries, maps, photographs, videos, and other collections owned by both OCTA and the NFTM still reside in the library of the former NFTM building. The City of Independence has hired a marketing firm out of St. Louis to survey its historic sites and to make recommendations about the future of the sites owned by the city. I was interviewed by this firm at the end of February, and I would like to share with you what I shared with them.

We believe that the combined collections of OCTA and the NFTM represent one of the largest collections of trail-related materials anywhere in the country, but it is woefully underutilized. The items we have digitized (primarily diaries collected by the late Merrill Mattes) do get a lot of use, but the in-person visitor is a rarity.

Several years ago, the city of Independence and Jackson County, Missouri, invested heavily in a 52,000 square-foot Midwest Genealogy Center. It is now the third largest such library in the country, bringing in thousands of visitors who stay in our hotels, eat in our restaurants, and spend money in the community. Similarly, the Harry S Truman Presidential Library underwent a \$30 million renovation, with more renovations planned for the near future. Like the genealogy library, the Truman Library brings thousands upon thousands of visitors to our city, again staying in our hotels, eating in our restaurants, and spending money at other businesses throughout the city.

On top of that, the LDS Church, Community of Christ, and other offshoot denominations have a massive presence in Independence, with each of them bringing significant numbers of visitors to our community. Our intertwined histories of the Oregon-California Trail and the Mormon Pioneer Trail makes them natural partners, a partnership you'll see on full display at our spring

symposium in Salt Lake City (registration materials are available at www.octa-trails.org).

Recently, OCTA Vice President Ethan Gannett challenged me to think big. So, of late, I have been thinking big. And a few fortuitous things happened along the way, the first of which was our Trails Head Chapter's annual Christmas luncheon. Jeannae Brown, President of the Friends of the NFTM, approached me with a question. That question was essentially this: the Friends group really doesn't have a purpose anymore, but we have a lot of money in the bank, so do you have any ideas about what we might do to reinvigorate our group?

Thinking big, I asked them what they thought of the idea of a brand-new building that would house a western trails research library that could house not only our collections, but perhaps the collections of other trail organizations (such as the Santa Fe Trail Association), making Independence the premiere place to come do research on Western Trails. She loved the idea and ran with it.

By the end of January, the Friends group had started the process of filming a short "call to action" video and creating a website that would advocate for the creation of Independence's next great library. Going back to my interview with the marketing firm out of St. Louis, the city says that it plans to eventually build a new museum that would tell not only trail history, but early Independence history, including the histories of the Indigenous peoples who lived here before Anglo-Americans arrived. A western trails library would obviously dovetail nicely with such a museum, but with no specific timetable from the city, we need to move forward on our own planning to do what is best for our collections.

In addition to a new library, OCTA really needs new office space. The building we currently utilize turned 100 years old about 18 months ago. The foundation has shifted, making the east end of the building sag. A recent mortar restoration project went awry, spreading brick dust all over the office. And earlier this year, the planned demolition of the abandoned water tower next to our office also went awry, sending the 160-high structure freefalling to the ground. The impact caused further settling of our building, causing window frames to shift and making some windows non-functional.

We envision an office complex that would not only house OCTA but also provide space for other trail associations and temporary space for our federal partners, if they need it. We envision a library not only large enough to house our current collections, but also large enough to allow for growth. Soon, the website of the Friends of the National Frontier Trails Museum will

be launched, and we will prominently feature their new advocacy video and website in our social media and E-News announcements.

We value your input in this process, and OCTA board member Mike Smith's committee overseeing our library and archive will be intimately involved in steering the discussion about OCTA's exact needs. Please do reach

out to Mike or me if you have ideas on funding, planning, execution, or any other facet of such a project. Mike can be reached at michaeljohnsmith4@gmail.com and I can be reached at tboley@indepmo.org.

We are dreaming big, and with the right partners and a solid plan, we can see these big dreams realized.

Travis Boley, Association Manager

Treasurer Report

My last communication to you was my report on 2/22/25 about OCTA's first Quarter Financial Statements on 12/31/24 with our Financial team. Today's report is even better, one month later, with a Net Operating loss for the first four months of about \$10K compared to last year's Net Operating loss at the same time of \$6K. The main difference between the two time periods is that this year's operations includes one month of salary in January for the full time media person. In the current 2024-2025 Operating budget for this entire year includes our projected \$41K net loss. We have no additional cost for a full time Assistant Preservation Officer in our Financial Statement at 1/31/25, as she was not an employee for us yet. OCTA's future net operating loss should not change much during the next few months of her employment, as her future salary is being paid from restricted donations for Preservation that OCTA has already received before the person started working for us. It would be wonderful if we could continue to receive more Preservation donations right now to help fund this new position for a few more months. It is going to be difficult this year as we proceed to keep our actual operating loss to less than our budgeted loss of \$41K for the year. I believe that it is possible since so many of us are working hard on trying to help this happen.

Again, this year overall OCTA for our last four months through January 31, 2025 could not have had a better financial start for our fiscal year:

We received another big donation (anonymous) in January which should help us be sure we have the funds in the future to be able to assist in paying for part of the cost for this new full time position, Assistant Preservation Officer for many more years in the future.

OCTA received one of our largest donations/collections last fall from David Hopper which does not get recorded as an asset on our Financial Statement as our accounting policy is to not record non-cash gifts (many non-profit organizations have similar policies). We have already received a small grant to help us with some of the cost of making this new collection more useful to people wanting

to use this new information in those many journals.

During this time period we also received a small grant from Farmland Reserve to assist us with having our Mid Year Board and Symposium meetings in Salt Lake City, which helps us to be more confident about realizing our net budgeted profit of \$1.8K.

Our National bank account received a transfer of cash in December of \$64 from B J Heritage investment account to have the projected cash necessary to get us through the third quarter of 6/30/25. This gives us enough cash to pay our bills and salaries without needing any additional transfers until we begin our new budget development process this spring or early summer. We do not know right now what our net operating loss will be between 2/1/25 to 6/30/25 for the next five months, but if it gets close to what we budgeted for our loss of \$41K or more than we could need additional transfers to our National checking account before early summer. We are trying to control our expenses right now if possible.

Kathy and I have been working with our new accounting firm, CLA, who prepares our non-profit tax return and our goal is to provide them with the rest of the information they requested by next Tuesday, March 11, which is about a week later than they had requested. I am working towards this being an action item for our Board meeting at April 15, 2025 meeting in Salt Lake City. It is going to be very close for us to have our completed 990 tax return for everyone to review prior to our filing it with the IRS, but it is still possible if this continues to be a priority for everyone involved right now.

This will be my last written planned report to you prior to our Salt Lake City Board meeting. Kathy and I will do our best to make sure you have at least a verbal update about our financial statements results for February and March, 2025, at the April 15th Board meeting. My goal is always for the OCTA Board to be provided with our most up to date financial information possible to aid you in making your decisions relating to our association's future.

Jerry Mogg, Treasurer, National OCTA

Crossroads Hosting Spring OCTA Symposium

Crossroads is hosting the Spring 2025 OCTA Symposium in Salt Lake City. It will be held April 15-18 at the Salt Lake Plaza Hotel downtown. Registration materials are now available and this is one you won't want to miss!

We even have a couple of nationally renowned presenters in Dr. Greg Jackson from Utah Valley University and Dr. Jay Buckley from Brigham Young University. Dr. Jackson, host of the highly regarded podcast *History That Doesn't Suck*, will kick off the symposium on Wednesday morning with his talk on *Western Expansion and History*, while Dr. Buckley will kick off the Friday session with his talk, *Jim Bridger, Brigham Young, and Washakie: Contestation Over the Upper Green River Country during the 1840s and 1850s*.

In between, the symposium will cover everything from women on the trail, medicine on the trail, Shoshone history and culture, the Salt Flats Trap, the trail through the Wasatch, Chinese railroad workers, and the Mormon "out and back" companies.

Tours will include trips along the Hastings Cutoff to the east, the Hastings to the west, and the trail around the Great Salt Lake (which will also include a stop at an incredible wagon museum). Those not wanting to go on a tour are invited to spend a day at the* FamilySearch

Genealogy *Library*, right next door to our host hotel.

There is also an optional tour of This Is the Place Heritage Park and a free evening of watching the rehearsal of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. On your own, you can attend the Broadway performance of the hit musical "Wicked." As we said before, is certainly one symposium you do not want to miss. We look forward to seeing you in Salt Lake City in April!

Registration is at 2025 OCTA Salt Lake Symposium - OCTA https://octa-trails.org/octa-events/2025-octa-salt-lake-symposium/?fbclid=IwY2xjawlce-lleHRuA2FlbQlxMAABHXC5g1KJ97gSWH4FVwkHCSimiS6O_In3YCQV8AFzInmwuJoNVMWhGOV6eA_aem_worOKawOBqv5TgNfdm6lw

Hotel information is at Salt Lake Plaza Hotel SureStay Collection | Hotel Rooms https://www.bestwestern.com/en_US/book/hotel-rooms.53045.html?groupId=V54DX1J3&fbclid=IwY2xjawlce8BleHRuA2FlbQlxMAABHY-oDYtIWkHD5SqPKAc08LtJoZ7i_ivffBoT7s2Q72Vr8Dg0O5XrlujzQ_aem_9ExQ12RQkT7Xufos1HJX0Q

We hope to see you there!

Laura Anderson & Steve Allison

Crossroads Symposium 2025 Planners

OCTA Nominations for Directors and Secretary

The deadline for nominations for **Board Director** has now passed (March 1st) but we are still looking for candidates to be considered for the position of **Secretary** to the Board.

Position of Secretary The Secretary is an Officer of the Association and shall:

- Attend all general meetings of the Members of the Board of Directors and General Membership meetings.
- Keep the minutes of the meetings.
- Provide a summary of action items within two weeks following each meeting at which such items were adopted. In addition, provide the complete minutes within six weeks.
- Perform all duties incident of the office of

Secretary and such other duties assigned by the President or the Directors.

If interested please contact Nominating and Leadership Committee Chair John Briggs at johnxbriggs@msn.com or Association Manager Travis Boley.

Note: The current Officers of the Association are the President, one Vice President, the Immediate Past President, the Secretary, the Treasurer, and the National Preservation Officer. They are elected by the Board of Directors. All Officers elected by the Board of Directors are ex-officio Members of the Board of Directors during their respective terms of office, with all powers and privileges of Directors, including the right to vote on all matters coming before the Board.

Meet Our Members

We continue to welcome and learn more about our new members. As has been done with all our past MOM “celebrities,” when initially contacted, they are given the opportunity to be highlighted in our MOM section. They are given about ten or more questions that serve as a guide and then are given the choice of responding to any or all of the questions or writing their own introduction for the section. As you will read, they have ties to the trails, but each in their own way. One now calls Minnesota, the Land of 10,000 Lakes, home and the other, Wyoming, the land of hundreds of miles of trails, home.

First, we have **Jim and Chris Chiles** who live in Plymouth, Minnesota, a suburb west of Minneapolis.

“My wife Chris and I heard about OCTA while listening to Rinker Buck’s tape of the Oregon Trail book last summer, on a trip through South Dakota, Wyoming, and Nebraska. The author said many good things about OCTA and the efforts to preserve the trail and locate unmarked gravesites. We’d been out to western migration landmarks in previous years, like Ash Hollow and Independence Rock, but hadn’t heard of OCTA until Rinker’s book.

On our 2024 trip we spent a day at Scotts Bluff and felt lucky to be visiting the ranger station (Scotts Bluff National Monument) on the afternoon when the Pony Express rider reenactors passed through.

We’re interested in the subject of western migrations for two reasons: we love the West, and my family had some western-minded relations back in those days.

One was Joseph Balingier Chiles, who joined the Bidwell-Bartleson wagon expedition to California in 1841, and who later led three wagon expeditions from Missouri to California. He settled east of Napa under a Mexican land grant, now called Chiles Valley.

One multiyear project we have is to mark out the 1841 trail as pinpoints on Google Earth, using the excellent resource *No Trail to Follow*. That book uses diaries to identify each night’s camping location. That will give us new places to visit when we range out from our home in Minnesota.

We haven’t gone off-road to check out trail locations – yet

– but that would be fun. I once wrote an article for Smithsonian Magazine about northwest Nevada’s Black Rock Desert, and while four-wheeling around the playa I could see the attraction of leaving the pavement.

Another relative was Benoni Hudspeth, who tried to find a shortcut to California in 1849. The 19th century Hudspeth branch of my Dad’s family tree was mostly based around Jackson County, Missouri. Three of those Hudspeths rode with William Quantrill as Civil War guerillas.

I’m retired from an environmental-policy job with the state of Minnesota, and my wife retired after 20 years as a Lutheran pastor. I continue to write nonfiction: I started that sideline in 1979, now totaling 125 features and columns. That led to appearances on National Geographic Channel, History Channel, and Japan’s NHK network. I’ve written a book on technological catastrophes for Harper Collins, *Inviting Disaster*, and a social history of helicopters for Random House, *The God Machine*.”

I would call that a family with a tree with deep roots in the western trails and history.

Next we will hear from the second family, who have a more present-day trail history. They are also life members.

“Hello. We are **Bret and Niki Wernsman**. We live in Torrington, Wyoming. Together with our daughters, Grace and Lyia, we own and operate the Yoke 7 Ranch. The Yoke 7 is nestled along the south bank of the North Platte River near the Wyoming-Nebraska state line.

The ranch boasts around six miles of the original

Oregon Trail, marked by deep swales and several graves of unfortunate pioneers. We originally learned about OCTA from the trail markers and were later introduced to Randy Brown.

We love to take family and friends on tours of the trail, often spending several hours in side-by-sides enjoying an adult beverage or two. Traveling the same route as so many did long ago often spark many fun conversations about what they endured and how we might have reacted to the hardships of the journey.

We have always had an interest in the history of the American West. Our family often takes road



Bishop Gravesite. Photo: Bret & Niki Wernsman

trips to bull sales, and while on the road we enjoy stopping at historical markers and museums along the way. One of our favorite places has been Register Cliffs in Guernsey, Wyoming. The deep ruts marked in the stone near there are a reminder of just how many pioneers traveled through this area.

We have several favorite places here on the Yoke 7. The earliest marked grave belongs to a 49er named Charles Bishop. The detail provided in the story of his journey, death, and burial ceremony is impressive and gives a wonderful insight into the traditions and customs of the time.

Another favorite is the Unknown Pioneer Traveler Gravesite. The lonely stone sits on a small hill overlooking the North Platte River. To the East, the great Scotts Bluff and to the West, Laramie Peak. Everything they left behind and the dreams they never

achieved. It's a reminder of all the souls lost and the ones that had to push on without them. We often wonder who it was, where they came from and where they were headed.

(possible insert of Bishop's Gravesite photo)

We look forward to continuing to preserve the history of Southeastern Wyoming, the Oregon Trail and the travelers who came through this area. OCTA has done wonderful work to mark these historical sites, and we are hopeful that with the help of Randy Brown and OCTA that we can locate and identify more possible graves and stories of pioneer travelers. We are working to preserve the history of the trail. It has been fun to read the stories in the Overland Journal about the trail and the research and work others are doing. We look forward to becoming part of the organization and helping out where we can."

Welcome New Members!

Michael Aguilar
Buena Park, CA

Steve Baldwin
Santee, CA

Barry Byrne
North San Juan, CA

Tim Davis
Federal Way, WA

Robert Dyer
Denver, CO

Michael Freer
Shingle Springs, CA

Hal Hall
Auburn, CA

Carol Harper
Tres Pinos, CA

Susan Wesley Hartley
St Joseph, MO

Conner Kacmarynski
Monmouth, OR

Amanda Long
Colorado Springs, CO

William McCartney
Kersey, CO

Kathy McWhorter
Pie Town, NM

Joseph Meyer
Idaho Falls, ID

Brian Moore
Westmoreland, KS

Mark and Barb O'Connor
Sacramento, CA

SueAnne Pate
Reno, NV

Robert Phelps
Fredericksburg, TX

Patrick Ready
Manhattan Beach, CA

Daniel Rosen
Wellington, FL

Ronald Schow
Morro Bay, CA

Karen Sear
Aurora, CO

Richard Sigman
Alexandria, VA

Kim Thurman
Shady Cove, OR

Steve Unger
Jacksonville, OR

Margaret Waters
Flemington, NJ

Linda Wheatley
East Montpelier, VT

Publications News and Education Awards

We hope everyone has been keeping up with the fine articles in the Overland Journal. The Winter edition marks the end of Volume 42 and the commencement of Volume 43. As I am sure you noticed, the focus of much of the last issue was the Winter of 1846 and the various aspects of the Donner Party that fateful winter.

With the completion of the volume, the committee begins the process of reviewing all the articles in past four editions of the Overland Journal to determine the recipient of the Merrill Mattes Award for the best article. The range of topics and the high quality of the articles will once again present a daunting challenge.

The selection should be made by this June.

No conclusions have been reached regarding the idea of expanding the responsibilities of the Publications Committee to include some of those previously handled by the Educational Publications and Awards Committee. Unfortunately, a number of factors, including changes in OCTA leadership positions and other committee leadership roles, and committee memberships have combined to slow down the discussions. The discussions will continue.

Spring is also the time to develop a proposed budget for next year, 2025 – 2026. This should be completed and sent to the Budget Committee before June for its review, recommendations, and submission to the Board for action during the Pueblo Convention. A preliminary review does not see any major increases in costs for the News from the Plains, but the Overland Journal may reflect an increase due to additional compensation and possible paper/printing and mailing increases. Hopefully they will not occur, and we will work to keep any increase as low as possible.

(We hope to have a financial review of all OCTA book

publications by the fall convention.) Discussion about the Graves and Sites book and how to best deal with the numerous additional markings made since the last edition will continue.

Education Publications and Awards

We received no cards for the educational book raffle, so there is no recipient for 2025.

The artwork for the “Emigrant and Indian – Types of Dwellings” student calendar is due April 15 and work on it will commence immediately thereafter. Those students whose artwork is selected should be notified by June. The calendar will be available later in the summer from headquarters and also for sale at the convention.

The deadline for the Outstanding Educator Awards has passed. Based on the entries, which are unknown at the time of this writing, the review and selection of the recipients should now be underway. The recipients are normally notified before June. The award for the Outstanding Educator is usually presented during the annual convention at the Awards Dinner.

Bill Hill

Marketing/PR Committee

Since the holidays, the YouTube channel has experienced exponential growth. Recently, we hit over a million views on the channel since we started releasing content almost four years ago. On top of that, we are 75% of the way to our subscription goal! If you are not yet subscribed, please do so. Once we reach 10,000 subscribers, we'll be able to list our store offerings on Google for free.

Check out our two-part series on the incorrect moniker of George Washington Bush. He had come down to us historically, until recently, as one man. In actuality, his is the story of three people whose legacies became intertwined due to a typo. Part I is at <https://youtu.be/91qOedwK-8Q?feature=shared>, while Part II is at https://youtu.be/49o0dkEXv_Y?feature=shared.

A big thank you to Karen Johnson from the Tumwater Foundation and our Northwest Chapter as well as Jewell Dunn from Washington State Archives in Olympia, as it would not have been possible to make the piece without their expertise, hospitality, and kindness. Our members and their knowledge are one of the things that allow us to make weekly content.

New & Upcoming Series: *Historical Places in Mundane Spaces* is our ongoing series of shorts where we find the location of historical events that are now everyday settings. For instance, the land where Jim Bridger's farm once stood in south Kansas City now houses a gas station, a highway, and a hospital. His original grave site is now a tire shop and liquor

store. A video about these locations will be created shortly.

In Tech on the Trails, we examine the influence of pioneer innovation in the modern world and the evolution of technology across the decades of western expansion. The first episode, filmed at the LeMay Automotive Museum in Tacoma, Washington, explores why early automobiles look a lot like carriages with an engine shoved into a wooden frame. Join Chip as he annoys his partner about classic cars and discovering a Kansas City connection to the museum. You can view that episode at <https://youtu.be/ZgnDky6RQ78?feature=shared>.

On Historians React, Travis Boley, OCTA's Association Manager, and Chip react to the ways in which trail history is presented in media. In the premier episode, Travis and Chip discuss the Netflix series American Primeval and its creative decision to tone down the violence compared to the reality of horrors displayed to emigrants on the trails. That episode is at <https://youtu.be/riKuxH1AKic?feature=shared>.

This year, we are still working towards our goal of reaching 10,000 subscribers on the channel. Hitting this number of followers will allow us to greater opportunities and cross-promotions across the platform. So, if you have not already, please subscribe to the Oregon-California Trails on YouTube. It is the easiest and cheapest way to support OCTA. You can get to the channel's home page at <https://www.youtube.com/@octatrails>.

Chip Ashby, Digital Media Manager

News from the Chapters

COLORADO-CHEROKEE

We happily anticipate registration being posted for the 2025 OCTA Pueblo Convention in April! Hotel rooms can already be booked, see the latest Enews for the link. Dates are September 7-12, 2025, with the 7th being a workshop day like you haven't seen before, the 8th is the board meeting and reception that night, and the conference starts on the 9th. We have an exceptional venue, next-door hotels, a professional bus service, acclaimed caterers, and a star-studded roster of speakers covering diverse trail users through the Western emigration period. The bus and walking tours will take you to wide-ranging and fascinating historic sites and museums, allowing you to visit Cherokee Trail ruts and view artifacts you have never seen! For further details, check out Planning Chair Ethan Gannett's article in the *Overland Journal* Spring issue.

New this year is our pre-convention series of active, hands-on workshops covering emigrant trades up through modern-day trail detection techniques. Artisans, tradesmen, surveying reenactors, and many different skills of the day will be demonstrated at these short workshops. It should be exciting and fun for all ages. Plan to arrive early and participate in the all-day series of short workshops.

If this is your first convention, we will have our first new member lunch orientation meeting this year to connect you to your chapter and show you how to plug in as an active member of OCTA. Come join us in September for **Colorado's Historic Trails: A Journey Through Time**.

Our membership continues to grow with four new chapter members since our last report. Our two active field teams doing MET mapping in northern and southern Colorado continue their field events. See the mapping report for further details.

In December we hosted Nancy Price at our Zoom Chapter Meeting to present *The Gold Rush and Beyond – Life along the Fontaine Qui Bouille*. Join Nancy again at the convention where she will speak about the *Women of the Gold Rush and Territorial Days*.

In January, Ethan Gannett presented to the City of

Westminster Historic Landmarks Board on research for potential Cherokee Trail sign locations within Westminster City limits. Ethan was amused to discover two OCTA members on the Historic Landmarks Board who were excited to share their knowledge about the Cherokee Trail. We will report in the future if the board decides to enact a Cherokee Trail sign project!

In preparation for the Pueblo Convention, Pueblo Convention Planning Committee members visited several historic sites and museums that will be on the convention tours. We are happy to report that they all are excited to be on the tour itinerary and are looking forward to your visit to their venues!

While the change in administration has slowed legislation progress, we hope to see renewed progress recognizing the Cherokee Trail as a National Historic Trail. To that end, Colorado's Senator Hickenlooper has agreed to sponsor the bill in the Senate and a Utah Representative has been selected to work in the House with the bill. We hope to see the bill introduced in a legislative session later this year.

On a personal note I should also share the news that I have been serving as Acting President for OCTA as President Helen

Hankins' husband died and she asked to have a short leave to mourn his loss. We are sad for Helen. Needless to say, it has been a trial by fire to take on this additional role while planning a convention and running a chapter. However, it's with the support of many other leaders within OCTA that are assuring we keep carrying the torch until Helen returns in March. Thanks to everyone who has been helping along the way!

I remain dedicated to the Chapter as President and look forward to our Pueblo Convention next September. Plans are coming together well and it should be exciting and packed with new surprises you haven't seen at OCTA conventions before. The registration data will be available in April. Make sure you check out my article on the convention in the Spring issue of the *Overland Journal*.

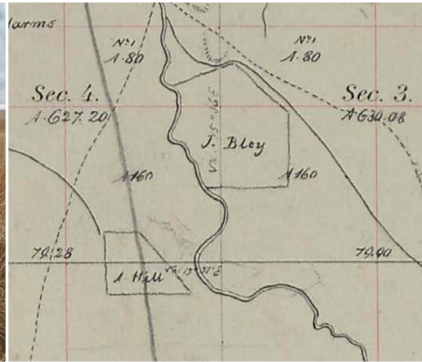
Ethan Gannett, Chapter President



Mapping Committee Report

The Cherokee Trail North field team had a second field day at the Cathy Fromme Prairie Natural Area to complete our fieldwork for the Fort Collins Natural Areas Department. Additional trail evidence was found. Next steps are to write and submit our report to them for review and then complete a National Park Service report on this park and the nearby Coyote Ridge Natural Area. We hope for a future Class 6 reconstructed Cherokee Trail hiking trail between these two natural areas!

The Cherokee Trail South Team visited Hanna Ranch, claimed in 1860 by John Bley along the Fountain Valley, to explore the route of the Cherokee Trail, though no trail segments were located. This was also a camping site for Native Americans. A separate archaeological



group and metal detection group were given access by the land owner to explore the property. Artifacts identified were primarily settler in origin (e.g., ammunition, nails, horse/mule shoes).

Larry Obermesik, leader of the Cherokee Trail South Team has been researching Claim Clubs in southern Colorado and recently presented to the Pikes Peak Library District on the topic (available on their YouTube channel). He has been requested to submit an article to *Colorado Magazine* on the topic.

Access to additional properties near Point of Rocks near the Palmer

Divide and Jimmy Camp continue to be pursued by the south team. In the spring they will return to Bluestem Prairie Open Space to complete field work started there in the past years. *Ethan Gannet, Mapping Chair*

KANZA

After a cold, dreary winter, KANZA is excited about the prospects as spring approaches. Our annual meeting was a roaring success with some new folks attending. Since we have added some new members. After nearly thirty years, and losing many of our original group, we are starting back up.

There are many potential programs and projects being considered. Many will be in conjunction with our partners at Alcove Spring, who are virtually all KANZA, OCTA members. The clean-up of Alcove Spring following the tornado will have been officially completed. We plan

to have a program featuring Tom Parker's great photos showing the extend and progress of the job. Our Wamego school fourth graders will return this year along with a new school beginning a trail program.

A scout group from a nearby county will be visiting Alcove. We will conduct history stories of the trail and guide work projects so they can earn the Historic Trail Award. This program has gone on for a number of years and continues to grow.

Duane Iles, President

SOUTHERN TRAILS

Good things are happening for the Southern Trails chapter. We're cross pollinating with the CARTA group in West Texas with our President Mark Howe, actively participating with their group. The weather in El Paso is nice this time of year, so there are more outings and work with various outdoors groups in the region.

Two of our board members, Gerry Ahnert and Doug Hocking, attended the premiere of the documentary *Dusting Off the Butterfield Trail* in Vail, AZ and took part in the panel discussion, hosted by the Vail Preservation Society, on February 1st, 2025. The movie will be made available online in March 2025. Gerry also has a new book, *The Butterfield Trail through Arizona's New Frontier*, that is available for purchase on Amazon and ECO Publishing.

The Butterfield Trail is picking up traction and attention across the country, as we're working to get accurate and consistent information for the public. We're working closely with the National

Park Service people as they take on the task of accurately assessing the locations of Butterfield stations. One of the local El Paso groups is **Celebration of Our Mountains** and have visited several of these sites. We are hoping to possibly join them in a future endeavor.

We're in discussions about hosting our annual meeting this year in Tubac, AZ on October 21st-22nd, 2025, prior to the De Anza Society's event being held in celebration of the 250th anniversary of the De Anza expedition in Tubac. Visit our website at www.southern-trails.org for more information. *Christopher Jones, Secretary*

CALIFORNIA-NEVADA

The California and Nevada Chapter has had a wet Winter, and you would think not much has been going on. Well, nothing could be further from the truth. The CA-NV Chapter has been busy working on plans for the coming field season as well as wrapping up reports and logging in the data from the last field season. We are one year into a three-year grant from the Tahoe National Forest (TNF). The TNF wants OCTA to tell them where the trail, or trail corridor, actually crosses their forest. Why? Because the forest is getting pressure from power companies that want to upgrade existing powerlines and poles as well as develop more power sources such as wind and solar farms. Chapter members have found sections of the Truckee Route emigrant trail that have never been found or verified. The use of metal detectors is a game changer. Rest assured that every artifact is reburied. With that said, we have to document all this great work. In addition, even with the wet weather, work is going on at the Peter Lassen Rancho Bosquejo project getting ready for the 2026 convention. Contacts are being made and relationships are being built to work on future projects. We are having monthly Chapter Board meetings using Zoom and invite all members to sit in.

In addition to our own OCTA trail activities we are partnering with other organizations with similar interests

and goals. The American Heritage Association is hosting a luncheon at the Nevada State Museum in Carson City on March 15th. The CA-NV Chapter members will be presenting what OCTA does and will use the Truckee project with the TNF to demonstrate how we do it. We will also have a table set up with our information and try to get new members.

We are also assisting History Expeditions, this is the group that wrote those great articles in our *Overland Journal* magazine, with their newest project involving the Stephens-Townsend-Murphy Party of 1844. As anyone knows that has taken the deep dive into a history project it is all about the research.

And of course, you can't do research without sources of historical information such as diaries, maps, books and on-line scanned material. The chapter continues to work on the Don Buck collection developing a bibliography as well as scanning much of the material. This is a hard working group that has been meeting about once a month at a free office that the AKT Development Corporation has provided in Sacramento.

We have our Spring Board meeting and Symposium at the Truckee Airport conference room April 28th with a field trip to the Humboldt Sink April 29th. This will be an exciting and adventurous trek to where so much happened at the beginning of the Forty Mile desert. *Bill Holmes*



Front row left to right: Bart Johnson, Bill Holmes, Angelo Tsakopoulos, Julie Hanson, Joy Sweger, Dee Owens, Phyllis Smith, Joe Waggershauer.
Back row: Joyce Everett, Carolyn McGregor, Becky Judd, Gordon McGregor, Laura Parker



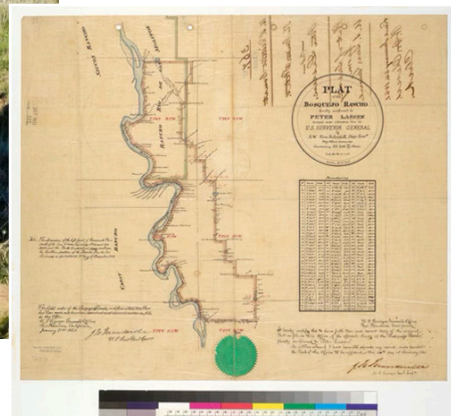
1,500 books!



Dr. Phillip Filbrandt, Dave Freeman, Rick Frey, Richard Starch



Ox shoe and Jeanne's clipboard



Peter Lassen Rancho Bosquejo Plat

IDAHO

Spring appears to be emerging from the clutches of Winter in Idaho. My three Boise Schools Community Education classes were filled in a few days and now have a waiting list. The classes will be held on Wednesdays, February 26, March 5, and March 12. The annual spring byway tour will be held on Saturday, April 19. We will again have a potluck lunch at Sweetbriar Winery which is a lot of fun. Please come join us on the tour.

We have our annual City of Rocks activities planned for Thursday, May 15, and Friday, May 16. On Thursday afternoon, we will be marking the section of the California Trail found last year in lower Circle Creek Canyon. On Friday, I will lead a caravan tour of the California Trail from its start on Raft River to Connor Junction, 7.5 miles southwest of Malta. On Saturday will meet at Perkins Restaurant in Burley for the annual spring meeting. The meeting will start at 10:00 am.

I will be doing three presentations on the Oregon and California Trails in Idaho for the Idaho Humanities Council Inquiring Idaho program in May. Inquiring Idaho is a program from the IHC that serves as a bridge between organizations interested in hosting presentations and speakers who are passionate and knowledgeable about Idaho's history, culture and stories. Friend and chapter member Jim Hardee is also part of this program and

presents on The Impact of the Early Fur Trade on the Settlement of Idaho. It is a great way to share our passions and potentially attract new members.

On Saturday, June 21, I will again lead a tour of Model A cars on the Oregon Trail. This year we will meet at Mountain Home and travel the morning portion of the annual byway tour with a potluck lunch at Sweetbriar Winery. Last year's tour was so much fun the Model A Car Club requested the Oregon Trail tour be an annual event. It was interesting to be around these great people and their cars. Come out and join in the fun.

As is usual for this time of year, I am trying to plan the rest of the year and find it difficult due to the number of options available. Some of the outings being considered include

- Big Hill and Soda Springs sites in eastern Idaho
- Lander Trail
- North Alternate Oregon Trail
- Jeffreys Route in INL
- The Dalles-Boise military road
- Cadaver dogs at Kemmerer, Wyoming
- Utter attack sites on the South Alternate

Please let me know if you have any requests or places of interest.

Jerry Eichhorst, President



California Trail in Circle Creek Canyon



Model A car tour in Mayfield



Lone Model T on the Model A tour

NORTHWEST

The Northwest Chapter's 2025 annual meeting will be held on March 15 at the End of the Trail Interpretive Center in Oregon City. The annual business meeting will be in the morning, and in the afternoon the center's director will speak on the renovations and planning at the center, followed by a tour to see the changes that have taken place since our last meeting there.

Dave Welch has continued hosting excellent Zoom programs this winter that will continue through June.

In May Robin Baker will lead a team in exploring trail evidence in the Blue Mountains for the fifth year. Planning is underway for an outing in June for an auto tour of Oregon Trail routes to Whitman Mission.

The chapter preservation committee is monitoring on several projects. Committee chair Dave Welch's report is included in John Winner's report.

Susan Badger Doyle, President

GATEWAY

In the past years, January has always been the start of planning the Gateway Chapter's programs and activities for the year. This year is different. We started planning for 2025 last fall. There have been major shifts in responsibilities of Board members. Dianne Wadell assisted by Jackie Lewin have accepted the role of heading the program planning functions of the Board. We changed our thinking about the Chapter's mission. In the past our mission was to search for historic sites and go and learn. This year our programs and Board activities will focus on being a presenter of history. The history of the Trails and the emigrants experience on the Trail.

In January, Gateway Chapter furnished three speakers for the Pony Express Tuesday Night Talks. This is the premier gathering of history buffs in St. Joseph. Gateway Board members Sarah Elder and Jackie Lewin gave a history of the Pony Express saga in their unique style.

A group of Gateway members became intrigued by an article in the Overland Journal about the role of deaths on the Trail. That article and the fact that there

are two cemeteries started by emigrant burials on the St. Joe Road were the factors that led the Board to do research from the diaries about how the emigrants experienced death on the Trail. Gateway will sponsor a program entitled "End of the Trail" on June 14 at the Joy Center in St. Joseph.

Gateway has a history of supporting the Iowa Sac and Fox Mission in Highland, Kansas. Rev. Susan Wesley Hartley a new OCTA member and retired Pastor of the Highland Presbyterians/ United Methodist Church has a video made about the Mission. A program about the historic connection between the Tribes, the Trail and the Highland Community will be presented by Gateway Board members on August 16.

Part two of the Iowa Sac/Fox connection is scheduled for October 18 with a site visit to the Mission. The Gateway Planning Committee is open to explore other possibilities. A switch in roles from being in the audience to the role of being a presenter fits Gateway Chapter.

Dave Berger, President

Thank You!

Thanks to the many donors who support OCTA's preservation work through gifts to our annual fund drive and memorial gifts to those who have passed. Recent gifts include:

C. Eugene & Joanne S. Abshier	Denny Evans	Carolyn Logan	Kenneth Rendell
Eva Allen	Lawrence Faylor	Timothy Lord	John T. Riegleman
Carol Bachhuber	Ethan Gannett	Susan Loucks	Sallie Riehl
Jim and Carol Barr	David and Linda Gibbs	Nancy and Eric Lusignan	Louis N Ritten
Cecilia and John Bell	Frank Gifford	William and Patricia	Dan Rottenberg
Brad and Jennifer Bennett	Gregg and Jane Gropel	Mackinnon	Bob and Sandy Rummel
Todd and Betty Berens	Phil Harrington	Catherine MacMillan	Raymond E. Schoch
Carolyn Bowser	Walt and Margaret Hauter	Ross and Shirley Marshall	David and Kay Scott
William and June Braden	Dr. E. Scott Hendricks	Kathryn Miles	Donald L. Siebert
Camille Q. Bradford	William and Jan Hill	Jennifer Miller	Charleene and Dale Smith
Dr. Bonnie Breen-Wagner	Julian and Diane Holt	Jocelyn Moore	Michael and Mary Smith
Dr. and Mrs. Frank Brown	Gordon Jackson	Mark Mulvihill	Newton TerMeer
Vilma Buck	Dr. Niel M Johnson	Tamsen Munger	R. Gordon Tompkins
Gail and Muriel Carbiener	Dr. Leon and Mrs. Judith Jones	Leta and Joe Neiderheiser	Mike Vermillion
Marsha Clark	Timothy J. Kelly	Dick and Ruby Nelson	Charles and Mary Weickert
Linda and Herb Crew	Jane Kettler	David Nicandri	David and Wendy Welch
Michael Davanzo	Jane Kettler	R. Gregory Nokes	David Williams
Douglas Davis	Albert Klem	Frank Norris	John and Susie Winner
Harold and Jill Draper	Ron Kribbs	Judson Parsons	
	Charles and Harriet Lewis	Philip D. Ravert	

REMEMBRANCES



Mary Lethene Parks of Vancouver, Washington, aged 93, passed away peacefully on Sunday, December 29, 2024. She lived at different times in various Washington towns--Spokane, Monroe, Bremerton, Holly, Gig Harbor, and Cedonia.

She was pre-deceased by her husband of 51 years,

Richard Allen Parks, whom she married on March 24, 1951. He died in 2002. She was also preceded in death by her parents, Ed and Mae Dennis, and her sister, Janet Parker.

She is survived by four children: Cathy Sato with husband Masashige Sato; Randy Parks; Carrie Parks with husband Gary Akizuki; and Chris Parks with wife Letitia. There is also a daughter-in-law, Kim Halvorsen. There are seven grandchildren and two step-grandchildren: Rachel Alvarado with husband Shawn; Jon Parks; Katie Rivera with husband, Sam; Ryo Sato with wife, Jessie; Marie Quicksall with husband Josh; Allen Akizuki with wife Melissa; Michelle Akizuki; Martin Moreno with wife Nicole; and Jackie Moreno. She is also survived by seven great grandchildren and two step-great-grandchildren.

Lethene was a resilient trailblazer from early in her life. At the age of 12 she was the main caregiver for her father during the last months of his terminal illness just before WWII while her mother went out to work. She developed an interest in history and genealogy from listening to his family stories during this time. After her father died, she became one of the first two newspaper delivery girls in Spokane during WWII. She graduated from Monroe High School in 1948, a year in which many of her classmates were devastated by a polio outbreak.

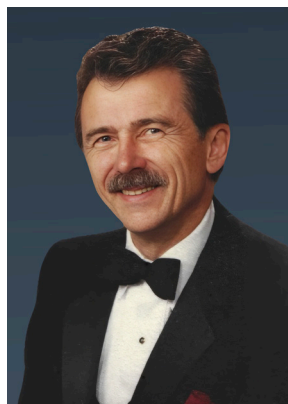
In the 1960's, she overcame the limitations on women to get a BA in History and Masters of Librarianship at the University of Washington. She did this with four kids under the age of ten. Her husband, Dick, worked two jobs to help pay the tuition and gave his full support to her. He was always proud of having an accomplished wife.

She went on to become nationally known, having a long career focused on providing library services to disabled and underserved populations.

She was active in library associations at both the state and national levels. She served on leadership committees, made presentations, wrote professional journal articles, edited newsletters and did training on institutional library services. In her work she also wrote labor contracts, was

part of a management negotiating team, compiled budgets, and wrote grants. She taught classes at the University of Washington and other venues. Her work and activism bettered every community she lived in.

She joined the Oregon-California Trails Association early in her retirement. She and her husband, Richard, traveled the trail its entire length and helped mark it in places. They brought grand-daughter Rachel with them when Rachel was about 11 to put in the marker at the summit of the Blue Mountains in Oregon. She gave seminars related to the trail, and was an integral part of getting a documentary made about current-day students traveling the trail. She and daughter Cathy jointly developed curriculum for a study module on the Oregon Trail that could be used in schools.



Fordyce "Ford" Lee Osborn was born on May 14, 1937, in Santa Rosa, CA to Maxine Ione Tolley Osborn and Fordyce Cicero Osborn. He attended schools in Santa Rosa and Oakland, CA. Ford served in the Naval Air Reserve as a radioman on board the P2V aircraft. He received his Bachelor of Science degree from San Jose State. He was a part of the start-up of Silicon Valley, working

for a number of the early companies. For many years he worked as a Senior Research Engineer for SRI (formerly Stanford Research) in Menlo Park, CA, followed by Lockheed Martin. He and his wife, Ellen, lived in Los Altos, CA. Ford had many hobbies, including: riding his Harley motorcycle, SCUBA diving, folk dancing, and above all, HAM radio. He was licensed by the FCC Amateur Radio League for 70 years. He held an Extra Class License, but kept his original call sign: K6ONE. He loved chess. At one point in his life, he was a nationally ranked player. He was a Master Mason of the Blue Lodge of California, serving as Master of Los Altos Lodge #712 in 1990. After moving to Pollock Pines upon retirement, he affiliated with local lodges.

He and his wife volunteered for the Eldorado National Forest and the Oregon California Trails Association to research the location of the emigrant trails, enjoying many days in the forest with fellow researchers. Ford was recognized for giving over 1000 hours of volunteer service to the Forest Service. He also volunteered with Eldorado National Forest Interpretive Association, where he put in over 500 hours of work. In retirement, Ford took up new interests and developed new skills and talents, such as oil painting, furniture making and welding. He leaves us

many precious examples of his skill. Ford is survived by his wife, Ellen Osborn, of Pollock Pines, and children Nancy Berman of Saratoga, Florida, Michael Osborn of Turlock, California, and Ann Taylor of Patterson, California, and four grandchildren. Ford and his wife volunteered for the Eldorado National Forest and the Oregon California Trails Association to research the location of the emigrant trails, enjoying many days in the forest with fellow researchers. Ford was recognized for giving over 1000 hours of volunteer service to the Forest Service. He also volunteered with Eldorado National Forest Interpretive Association, where he put in over 500 hours of work.



the past two decades.

Who could forget the appearance of Ezra Meeker (portrayed by Ray Egan) at the 2004 OCTA convention at Fort Vancouver,

which was enhanced by the presence of one of Ezra's wagons and the delivery of "Ezra" to the closing event at the Fort Vancouver airfield in Dick Pingrey's 1927 Curtis Robin? This was an homage to Ezra Meeker's airplane trip at age 96 to meet President Calvin Coolidge, thus becoming the nation's first transcontinental air passenger. For those interested in Dick's personal aviation history, you can request a copy of his 82-page memoir by emailing tboley@indepmo.org and a PDF copy will be emailed to you.

Richard H. Pingrey, 92, passed away on February 12, 2025, in Selah, Washington. No services are planned at this time. Shaw & Sons Funeral Home is caring for the family. Memories and condolences may be shared at <https://octa-trails.us17.list-manage.com/track/>



Richard Clay Hanes passed away at home in Springfield on December 5th.

Richard's 36 year career began within the Bureau of Land Management, Department of Interior. From 1979-2008 Richard steadily and with great care built the Cultural, Paleontological, and Tribal Coordination programs

in Oregon, Washington, and Nevada. District Archaeologists within these states consistently praised Richard's enthusiastic support, generosity with his time, leadership, kindness, fairness, and consistent good humor in the face of many challenges. From 2004 to 2008 Richard led the Culture/Heritage Program for both the Bureau of Land Management Oregon/Washington and the Sixth District of the U.S. Forest Service. It was unprecedented to work concurrently for two different departments of the Federal Government, Interior and Agriculture. Richard was a pioneer in his profession.

Richard served on many advisory committees both nationally and for the Pacific Northwest. Two he especially enjoyed were the Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial Committee and for 8 years on the Oregon Travel Information Council's Historic Marker Committee. He served as a member then chairman of the Marker Committee. Family members remember accompanying Richard to dedications of the beautiful historic signs, known as Beaver Boards, throughout Oregon. One summer for fun and interest Richard spent every weekend walking, visiting with landowners, and mapping every foot of the old Barlow Road, the final leg of the Oregon Trail ending in Oregon City. The results were published in the Oregon-California Trails Association's *Overland Journal* 13(2).

We are very sad to inform you of the death of OCTA Past President **Richard H. "Dick" Pingrey**. He served as president of OCTA from 2003 to 2005. He was a retired airline pilot who spent a career traversing the globe before retiring to Selah, Washington, where he owned a hangar full of airplanes and helicopters, providing flying lessons over



We are sad to report the death of **Mike Mauser**, husband of OCTA President Helen Hankins, who passed on February 6th surrounded by loving family. Helen sent us the following memory of Mike's work on the trails around Elko:

Michael (Mike) was first exposed to the California Trail while on a field trip in 1996 to Gravelly Ford; the trip was exciting because Paul Sawyer had salted the walking route with ox shoes and other artifacts. A few years later (2015), Mike and his wife Helen Hankins attended the OCTA Convention at Lake Tahoe. They have attended all conventions since then except Casper.

Shortly after the Lake Tahoe Convention, Mike and Helen attended a MET Mapping workshop in Elko organized by John Winner. This involved both classroom and field instruction. Since then, Mike and Helen have participated in numerous MET mapping trips along the Hastings Cutoff in Ruby Valley and Goshute Valley in northeastern NV. Mike enjoyed being a "digger" on the mapping team.

Prior to the 2021 OCTA convention in Elko, Mike and Helen made numerous trips to the Greenhorn Cutoff to re-establish or replace carsonite markers knocked down or

damaged by livestock. It was evident from this work that the emigrants may have taken more than one canyon along the serpentine route followed by the Greenhorn. Mike also led a hike along the Greenhorn Cutoff during the Elko Convention.

In 2022 and 2023, Helen and Mike worked with Dick Waugh and others to actually MET map the Greenhorn. Previous work had been done by Don Buck some fifty years ago using diaries, and a topographic map. After metal detecting failed to reveal few if any artifacts along the route Don Buck thought most likely, Mike took a hard look at modern lidar images. After some study of these images, Mike identified a slight trail trace in a different canyon and suggested the team try metal detecting there. It turned out to be an inspired and lucrative effort. Many artifacts were found – a greater quantity and variety than on the earlier part of the Greenhorn. A fifth wheel, forks, barrel hoops, ox shoes, horse shoes, mule shoes, wagon wheel hubs, wheel bearings, part of a hair clip, and many others were discovered. It was clear, according to Dick Waugh, that many emigrant wagons had passed this way. Locally we call this section “Mike’s route”.

Mike was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on August 11, 1950, oldest of seven children born to Kathleen Kerrigan and William Mauser. He spent his youth in Cleveland and in Albuquerque, NM, where he graduated from Manzano High.

Mike received a B.S. in Chemical Engineering from the University of New Mexico in 1974. He later earned a Master's degree in Environmental Engineering from the University of Alaska Anchorage and a Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Alaska Fairbanks in 1995.

Mike married Helen M. Hankins on October 7, 1976, on land where he built their first home outside of Durango, Colo. Mike and Helen loved spending time with Rotary Youth Exchange students, and between 1990 and 2007, they hosted eleven young people -- from Indonesia, Mexico, South America, South Africa and Western Europe. In their 48½ years of marriage, they enjoyed interacting with both their families and with youth from Scout troops, Boys & Girls Clubs, 4-H, and Big Brothers Big Sisters. Mike especially delighted in helping kids learn to make crystal radio sets at the Great Basin College's Kids College in Elko, Nevada. Mike and Helen were best friends and lovers for more than fifty years. Often, they could be seen holding hands while out walking or participating in various events. Together they had many outdoor adventures and visited nearly sixty countries.

Mike worked as an engineer for New Mexico Public Service Company in Albuquerque in his early career. He later supported himself as a carpenter while completing his certification from Fort Lewis College in Durango to teach math and science at the secondary-school level. Shortly after receiving this certification, Mike taught for six months at an alternative high school on the Zuni Reservation, south

of Grants, New Mexico. In 1980, Mike accepted a position with the U.S. Public Health Service/Indian Health Service in Anchorage, Alaska. During the next nearly nine years, he worked with Athabascan and Eskimo villages throughout Alaska. He initially trained local Native operators in the function and maintenance of their water and sanitation systems. Later Mike designed many washaterias, sewage treatment systems, as well as a dam in Metlakatla, Alaska.

From Alaska, Mike transferred to the U.S. Public Health Service in Bethesda, Md, where he was the energy engineer for the National Institutes of Health. While working on his Ph.D. in Fairbanks, Mike worked for Roen Engineering and various civil and mechanical engineering projects, including one in Antarctica. After moving to Elko, Nevada, in 1995, Mike worked for Newmont Gold Mining Company for ten years in operations and maintenance in the North area and in gold-recovery-related work at Mill 6.

While working for the U.S. Public Health Service, Mike accepted two special details. One was to train Peace Corps volunteers destined to work in the Philippines about the construction of spring boxes and ferrocement tanks. He also worked with the Cold Regions Research and Engineering Laboratory (CRREL) to evaluate the movement of ice on building foundations in Greenland.

After retirement, Mike really enjoyed building a home for him and Helen in Spring Creek, outside of Elko. He also loved working at the Phoenix Science Museum (2007-2010) and the Denver Museum of Nature and Science (2010-2013) where he designed exhibits and developed projects for kids to learn about science. During these periods, Mike also wrote a book that includes many projects to help children learn about their five senses. In addition, he published articles and videos which are on YouTube about how to see inside one's own eye, and worked with TED Talks on a script covering the same subject.

Mike loved Rotary International and contributed time, effort and funds to Rotary projects. He and Helen visited the site of a potential orphanage in Panama, assisted with the construction of rocket stoves in Guatemala, and supported and visited a liver cancer treatment project in Egypt, among others.

In 2016, Mike and Helen walked over 500 miles from St. John at the Foot of the Pass in France to Santiago de Compostela in Spain as a fundraiser to support Rotary's long-term effort to eradicate polio worldwide.

In 2022, Mike and Helen (with another Rotarian) walked in Italy from Florence to Rome to support the same objective. In total they raised nearly \$50,000. With the 2:1 match from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, this resulted in nearly \$150,000 to fight polio.

Mike was a man who loved the out-of-doors. A Celebration of Life for Mike will be held in the late spring or early summer of 2025 at an outdoor location.

Special Thanks to OCTA's Life Members

OCTA is grateful for the support of many Life Members whose contributions mean so much to the organization. Life memberships are available for \$1,500 and card payments can be made in installments. Life Members receive an Ezra Meeker Life Member pin, and a 15 percent discount in the OCTA Bookstore. Plus, all revenues from Life Memberships go directly to OCTA's Heritage Endowments, so your purchase will have a long-term impact on trails preservation. For more information about becoming a Life member, contact OCTA headquarters at (816) 252-2276. Current and recently deceased Life Members include:

Lila Aamodt (<i>Deceased</i>)	Keith Fessenden	Ken Jutzi	Stanley W. Paher
Craig Anderson	Jack & Pat K. A. Fletcher	Beatrice Kabler (<i>Deceased</i>)	M. Lethene Parks (<i>Deceased</i>)
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For \$50 a year, OCTA Business Sponsors receive a listing on the OCTA website and in *News From the Plains*, a window decal, a framed wall certificate and an OCTA trail map. To learn more, contact OCTA headquarters at (816) 252-2276. Current business sponsors include:

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A Reminder for Ezra Meeker Life Members

If you are an Ezra Meeker Life Member of OCTA and a member of one or more regional chapters, your chapter dues renew on January 1 each year.

For your convenience, you can renew your chapter memberships online by visiting octa-trails.org/why-join-octa/ and following the appropriate links for regional chapters.

You can also call headquarters at (816) 252-2276 for

more information.

If you are not an Ezra Meeker Life Member, you can join at that level at any time. The cost is \$1,500, which can be spread over several regular payments.

Remember, funds from Meeker Life memberships go directly to OCTA Endowments, helping create a legacy of support for trails preservation and education.

Call headquarters to learn more.

Welcome



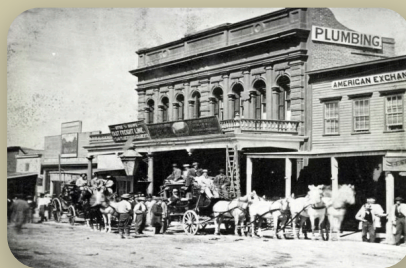
WWHA Roundup 2025

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Virginia City

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Visit our website wildwesthistory.org for updates.

Join Us in Kansas City for the 2025 Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance Annual Gathering!



Dear OCTA Members

We are thrilled to invite you to the **2025 Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance Annual Gathering**, taking place **September 14–17, 2025, in Kansas City, Missouri**. This special event will bring together history enthusiasts, trail advocates, and adventurers for an unforgettable experience filled with exploration, learning, and camaraderie.

Why You Should Attend:

The Host Hotel is the Kansas City Marriott on the world-famous Country Club Plaza

Historic Site Excursions Visit Fort Osage and Kaw Point, key locations along the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail.

Engaging Speakers Enjoy captivating presentations to bring the stories of the Trail to life.

Chautauqua Experience Step back in time with historical reenactments and storytelling.

Food, Fun & Fellowship Connect with fellow trail enthusiasts over delicious meals, including world-famous Kansas City barbecue!

Explore More While You're Here

Kansas City is rich in history and culture! Don't miss the Harry S. Truman Library, Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, Steamboat Arabia Museum, National World War I Museum, and more. Trail lovers can also explore the Oregon, California, Pony Express, and Santa Fe Trails in the region.

With Kansas City's brand-new airport and easy travel access, your journey will be as easy as paddling downstream on the Missouri River.

Register today: <https://lcthf.regfox.com/2025-annual-gathering>

View the Meeting Guidebook:

<https://publuu.com/flip-book/561309/1551670/page/1>

We can't wait to welcome you to this exciting event – see you in Kansas City!

Your friends at the Lewis & Clark Trail Alliance

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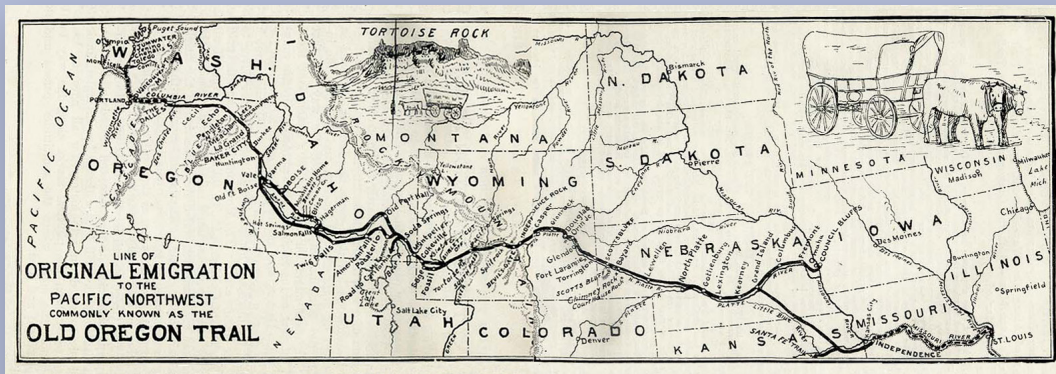
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Where Will Your Footprints Lead? They don't have to disappear.

You can leave a legacy that will ensure that your footprints are never erased, while helping to protect emigrant trails from disappearing forever.



Consider joining OCTA's Trails Legacy Society

Your gift to an OCTA Endowment fund through a bequest or estate gift will help guarantee our ability to preserve and protect the trails.

Visit octa-trails.org/trails-legacy-society

You can make sure that ours are not the last footprints left on the trail.

2024-2025 OCTA Board of Directors

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Our Founding Members

When OCTA was founded in 1983, a group of men and women who believed in the mission and in the importance of trails preservation decided to join this brand new organization. Anyone who joined during that first year became a charter member, the rocks upon which OCTA was built. The last time we recognized them in these pages, the list had 136 names. Today's list is down to 55 names. If you see a charter member, thank them on behalf of OCTA.

Ruth Anderson	Dorothy Duffin (Deceased)	Michael Luther	Randolph W. Seed
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All Members need an account to purchase or renew their subscriptions to have the option to activate or de-activate auto-renewal.

New memberships will be automatically registered with auto-renewal active upon purchase.

All members will have the option to activate or de-activate the auto-renewal option in their account on the **My Account > Subscriptions > <View Subscription>** page.

All members should keep their account information current by editing any information that may have changed recently, including credit card information with an update expiration date.

Emigrant Trails Hall of Fame

The Emigrant Trails Hall of Fame Committee welcomes nominations for new members to be inducted in 2025. The criteria for selection and the nomination form are on OCTA's website:

<https://www.octa-trails.org/emigrant-trails-hall-of-fame/>

The Committee particularly welcomes nominations of individuals whose achievements are less well-known to OCTA members. Please submit nominations by October 31 to: ETHoF1846@gmail.com

Important Dates and Deadlines

Award Nominations – June 1

Budget Development – Budget Request – May 23 (Per OCTA Procedural Manual)

News from the Plains material – Spring issue: February 25, Summer issue: May 25, Fall issue: August 25, Winter issue: November 25

Nominating and Leadership – Announcement of election and number of vacancies on the Board of Directors: November 25 News from the Plains Deadline; Bio and ballot: April 1

Education Activity Book Raffle - February 1

Outstanding Educator Award Application – March 31

Calendar Art for Western Calendar – April 15

National Park Service Volunteers-in-Parks (VIP) – October 1

Volunteer data (Hours, Expenses, Mileage) to Partnership – Report hours on the website at <https://www.octa-journals.org/octa-volunteer>. They can be reported as they are accumulated. If you track your hours on the paper form (available at <https://www.octa-trails.org/activity-forms/>), please report them to HQ by December 31.

Overland Journal – Spring issue to membership: approximately May 20, Summer issue to membership: approximately August 20, Fall issue to membership: approximately November 20, Winter issue to membership: approximately February 20

NEWS FROM THE PLAINS

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Jay Lawrence, Editor

530 Ohio Avenue, Long Beach CA 90814
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Summer 2025 Issue Deadline: May 25, 2025
Send materials to: jaylawrenceocta@gmail.com

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In this issue:

Acting President's Report

Preservation Project News

Crossroads Hosting Spring OCTA Symposium

Officer, Director and Committee Chair Reports

Meet Our Members