

Merrill Gildea Burlingame (1901–1994):

Montana Educator, Historian, Author

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Merrill G. Burlingame was born in Boone, Iowa on March 13, 1901, the son of Nathan and Teresa Gildea Burlingame. He grew up on a farm and graduated from

Luther Consolidated School and the University of Iowa, where he earned a bachelor of arts, a master of arts, and a doctoral degree in history. He married Virginia Struble in 1936 with whom he had one son, Ray.

In 1929 he joined the faculty of Montana State College (now Montana State University) and became chair of the history department in 1935, a position he held for 33 years. He was granted emeritus status in 1969.

Burlingame was an active researcher who wrote numerous works on Montana history, including *The Montana Frontier*, (1942); *A History of Montana* (with K. Ross Toole, 1956); and *John M. Bozeman, Montana Trailmaker* (1971). He also wrote texts pertaining to the history of Montana State University including *Montana State College 1893 to 1919: A Preliminary Sketch* (1943) and *A History, Montana State University, Bozeman, Montana* (1968). Other texts Burlingame wrote relating to the University include *The Danforth Chapel and Religious Activities at Montana State University, 1893-1991* (1991) and *The Montana Cooperative Extension Service: A History, 1893-1974* (1984). He actively researched much local history related to Gallatin County.

Burlingame contributed numerous articles to *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, and *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*.

He was keenly interested in museums and was the director of the Caroline McGill Museum, which would later become the Museum of the Rockies. He was a founding member of the Gallatin County Historical Society

and Pioneer Museum. And he assisted in the reorganization of the Montana Historical Society where he was a member of the Board of Trustees from 1949 to 1978. During this time he also served two years as president of the Board of Trustees.

Throughout his life Burlingame was active in other institutions including the Montana Institute of the Arts, the American Historical Society, the Christian Church, the Masonic fraternity, and the Rotary Club. His lifelong work and interest in Montana history earned him the nickname “Mr. Montana History.”

Merrill Burlingame died in Bozeman, Montana on November 14, 1994, at the age of 93. His publications and the *Merrill G. Burlingame Papers* housed at the Montana State University Library special collections, as well as materials housed at the Montana

Historical Society Research Center, continue to be an invaluable legacy as sources for scholars, students, and researchers interested in Montana history.



Merrill G. Burlingame, Professor Emeritus of History at Montana State University, Bozeman. [no date,] Montana Historical Society Photograph Archives Research Center, 940-871