

History Mystery III

Boom or Bust: Mystery of the Old Homestead

The educational partnership between the Bureau of Land Management, Billings Curation Center and Western Heritage Center recently released the third installment in the edgy investigation activity series called "History Mystery." The 2011 mystery is ***Boom or Bust: Mystery of the Old Homestead***. Students become investigators who must race against one other to fill in spaces on a hanging game board by examining source files to determine the "who, where, when, why and how" of each homesteader's story, deciding whether they boomed or busted on the eastern Montana prairie. Ultimately, students will learn that history and research are fun and interesting.



Area schools and the general public can check out the educational trunks at specially selected locations throughout the state. These locations include the Big Horn County Historical and Visitor Center in Hardin, the Museum of the Beartooths in Columbus, the MonDak Heritage Center in Sidney, the Schoolhouse History and Art Center in Colstrip, Yellowstone Gateway Museum in Livingston, and the Western Heritage Center in Billings.

The ***Boom or Bust: Mystery of the Old Homestead*** educational kit provide a unique way of learning the stories of 42 homestead families that settled in eastern Montana prior to World War II. Most of the homesteader stories are from previously unpublished accounts from the Western Heritage Center oral history collections. The game includes stories, land records, and family photographs. In addition, the kit includes teaching resources and tools to provide a more in-depth understanding of the homesteader experience. These resources include games, living history activities, short stories, a bibliography, and a guide on how to incorporate oral interviews for preserving local history.

"We've pulled together sources from the media, the internet, local historians, the library, local museums, and government agencies," said the BLM's Billings Curation Center Director David K. Wade. "The goal is to teach kids that learning about any topic requires more than a simple Google search."

Together, the partner organizations have spent months pulling together the resources, designing the activity, and outfitting the kits that will now go out to regional museums. One kit will remain at the Western Heritage Center, and one kit will be housed at the Billings Curation Center; both available for reservation and check out by teachers and educational organizations.



The History Mystery kit educational kit series does not advance any one version of the kit's topic as the "correct" version. The project engages local youth in interactive research exercises where they'll be introduced to:

- The rich history and stories of the people of Eastern Montana;
- The importance of thorough research and analytical thinking when forming independent conclusions; and

- The concepts of heritage preservation, where each generation protects resources for the next generation.

Julie Dial, Executive Director of the Western Heritage Center, says, "It's a very exciting partnership. We found that although each of our organizations does many different things and serves several different publics, we have intersecting missions of providing public education about our heritage and the preservation of resources."

The Billings Curation Center (BCC) is the main repository for archaeological and ethnographical collections recovered from BLM-administered public lands in Montana and the Dakotas. The BCC is located at the BLM Montana State Office at 5001 Southgate Drive. For more information, contact David Wade at the BLM, 406-896-5213, or Lisa Olmsted at the Western Heritage Center, 406-256-6809, ext. 121.

History Mystery I: Sacrifice Cliff and History Mystery II: Pryor Mountain Wild Horses are also still available.