

MONTANA

"The Treasure State"



State Capitol, Helena, Montana



HELENA

"THE CAPITAL CITY"



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RICH IN the colorful history of the Old West, Helena, Montana's Capital City, traces its beginnings back to July 14, 1864, when a party of prospectors known as "The Georgians" took one last chance in their search for gold in the mountains of the West before returning to civilization. They decided to prospect in a little gulch on Prickly Pear Creek, which had been by-passed previously. Their subsequent discovery of gold there founded "Last Chance Gulch" and the city that is now Helena developed quickly from a tiny cluster of rough miners' cabins. Even today, Helena's Main street is still known as Last Chance Gulch.

Helena, thus, was founded in 1864, but Montana's history goes back to January 1, 1743, when Chevalier Pierre de la Verendrye, a French explorer, and his party first sighted what are now known as the Big Horn mountains in the southeastern part of the state. The French explorer wrote of them as "the shining mountains" and to this day Montana often is called "The Land of the Shining Mountains." Others praise it as "The Treasure State."

First extensive exploration of Montana, however, was undertaken by two army officers, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, when their now-famed expedition crossed the state in 1805 and returned eastward the following year—a journey which was commemorated by special observances and trail markings in 1945.

Not far from Helena, on Gold Creek in Powell County, the first discovery of gold in Montana was made on May 2, 1858, by James and Granville Stuart. Their find precipitated the "gold rushes" of subsequent years, resulting in "strikes" at Bannack, the first capital; Virginia City and in Helena's Last Chance Gulch. The Territory of Montana was created on May 26, 1864, and Sidney Edgerton became the first territorial governor. The first election was held October 24, 1864, and the first legislature met at Bannack on December 12 of that year. In 1865 the capital was moved to Virginia City. The state constitutional convention met in Helena in March, 1866, and on April 19, 1875, the capital was moved there. Montana became a state on November 8, 1889, adding the 41st star to the Union flag, and Joseph K. Toole became the first state governor.

The Bitter Root, Montana's official state flower, is found in abundance in the western part of the state but also grows in many other areas including the Helena district. A perennial, the Bitter Root presents an exquisite pink blossom which grows close to the ground and its delicate shading offers to the eye one of the loveliest of wild flowers. Named for Captain Meriwether Lewis of the Lewis and Clark expedition, it is known to botanists as "Lewisia Rediviva."



Montana's official bird is the Western Meadowlark, a gay, colorful creature whose distinctive, flute-like song marks him as one of the favorites of bird lovers throughout the country. A chunky, brown speckled bird, the Western Meadowlark is made conspicuous by a patch of white on each side of a short, wide tail and a bright yellow vest crossed by a black V. The Meadowlark's loud, clear, warbling whistle makes him easily recognizable, as does his peculiar flight habits consisting of several short, rapid wing beats alternated with brief periods of sailing.

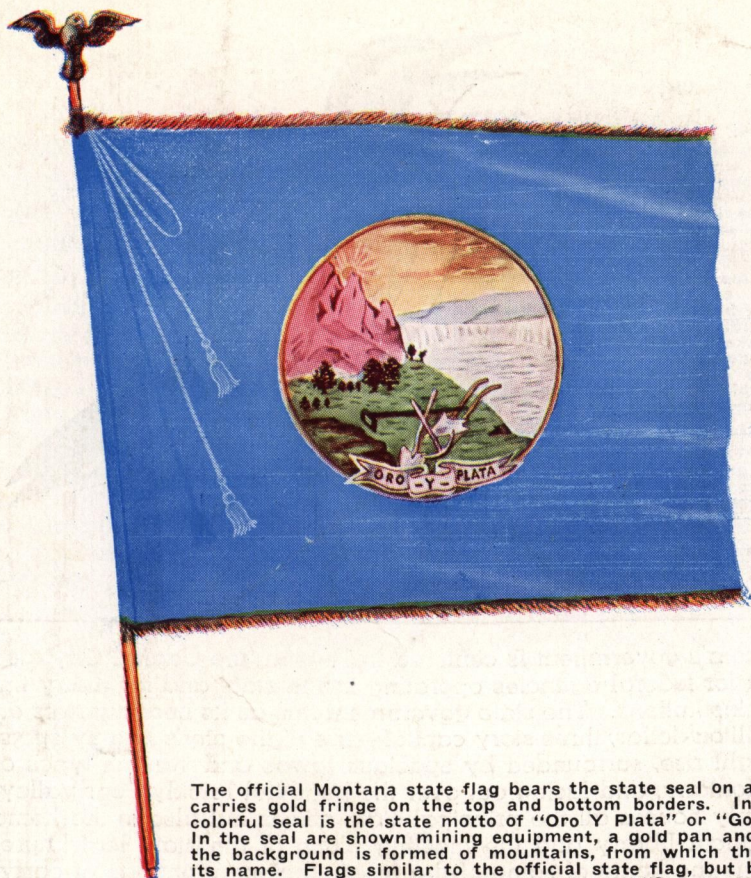
(REPRINTED FROM "FIELD GUIDE TO WESTERN BIRDS," BY ROGER TORY PETERSON, HOUGHTON MIFFLIN CO., PUBLISHERS.)



While Montana's government is centered in Helena, the Capital City also is the focal point for federal agencies operating in the state and for many important business institutions. The state government has as its headquarters an imposing, two-million-dollar, three-story capitol—one of the city's beauty spots. Located on a slight rise, surrounded by spacious lawns and various types of trees native to Montana, and facing out over the beautiful Prickly Pear valley, the capitol not only houses all the principal state offices but also is the home of the state historical library and the meeting place of the state legislature. The capitol also is the home of some of the most precious paintings of early-day Montana history. The Montana statehouse is 464 feet long, 130 feet wide and has an average height of 90 feet. The lofty central dome, surmounted by a small replica of the Statue of Liberty, rises 165 feet into the air.

The capitol's cornerstone was laid on July 4, 1899, after the legislature of 1896 appropriated \$1,000,000 to build the central section. In 1909 a subsequent legislature voted to enlarge the structure by addition of the two large colonnaded wings, completed in 1911. The capitol is built of sandstone faced with Montana granite. Among historical paintings it houses are several by E. S. Paxson, Missoula artist, and some by Charles Russell, Montana cowboy who rose to worldwide fame for his portrayals of the Old West. Behind the speaker's desk in the house of representatives' chamber is Russell's painting of Lewis and Clark meeting the Indians at Ross' Hole in the Bitter Root Valley, his largest work and one which has been valued from \$5,000 to \$25,000. Nearby is a set of six large murals by Paxson, depicting important happenings in the state's early history. Other chambers of the statehouse are decorated similarly.

Montana is a big state—the third largest in the Union—and the diversity of life it presents is no more strikingly apparent than is the contrast between its flat, eastern prairies and the rugged mountains of its western third. Montana is a state of decided comparisons. Eastern Montana is a tableland of wheat farms and cattle ranches; home of the huge Fort Peck Dam across the mighty Missouri River, the largest earth-fill dam in the world; and site of the famed Battle of the Little Big Horn, more generally known as Custer's Last Stand, in which General George A. Custer and his little command were wiped out by rampaging Indians on June 25, 1876. Western Montana, on the other hand, where lumbering and



The official Montana state flag bears the state seal on a blue field and carries gold fringe on the top and bottom borders. Inscribed on the colorful seal is the state motto of "Oro Y Plata" or "Gold and Silver." In the seal are shown mining equipment, a gold pan and a plow, while the background is formed of mountains, from which the state derives its name. Flags similar to the official state flag, but bearing the inscription "First Montana Volunteers" and "Second Montana Volunteers" have been carried into battle by Montana forces as their official colors.

mining are the chief industries, is the possessor of deep pine forests, cascading waterfalls and crystal-clear lakes. The early missionaries first located there—building the first church at St. Mary's (Stevensville) in 1841—and it was in western Montana where the Vigilantes of 1863 and 1864 enacted the swift, wholesale justice of the Old West in curbing the activities of Henry Plummer, notorious sheriff of Bannack, and his band of road agents.

Montana is 535 miles long and 275 miles wide, with an area of 146,997 square miles, and within its borders are modern cities, prosperous farming communities, dude ranches, rushing mining camps, colorful Indian reservations, huge wheat and cattle ranches, and remote spots not frequented by man. There are many varieties of wild game animals, from picturesque Chinese pheasants to bull moose and grizzly bear. Montana is the home of Glacier National Park and five of the main entrances to adjacent Yellowstone National Park are in the state. Near Whitehall, south of Helena, is located Morrison Cave, a state park, displaying true stalactites and stalagmites in beautiful formations.

Helena, crossroads of the state's paved highway system, hub of modern-day air travel and regular stop for transcontinental trains, lies right in the center of all Montana life—geographically, governmentally and industrially.