

Sustaining Garnet into the 21st Century Garnet Preservation Association

Narrative

Nestled among the dark conifers of the Garnet Range, the gray, weathered wood buildings of Garnet Ghost Town appear stark in contrast. The creaky old buildings are now a reminder that what appears to be a quiet, peaceful spot was once a bustling town of over 1,000 residents, a tiny metropolis seemingly in the middle of nowhere. At the turn of the century, this remote site attracted hundreds of miners' families with the promise of gold, but by the onset of WWI, only a few die-hard miners remained. There was a brief resurgence during the Great Depression, but Garnet officially became a 'ghost town' with the death of Frank Davey, the mercantile owner, in 1947. Garnet has been hailed far and wide as the "best preserved ghost town in Montana", yet that Garnet is left standing at all shows the uniqueness and great fortune of this town. Like so many other ghost towns, Garnet, too, was once a victim of frequent vandalism.

Starting in the 1960's, little bits and pieces of Garnet began to disappear. Vandals were taking the town apart, and the few remaining area residents were powerless to stop them. Finally, in the 1970's, a major portion of Garnet was donated to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and preservation work began. In 1983, a non-profit organization of concerned citizens, the Garnet Preservation Association (GPA), organized itself, and the BLM and the GPA teamed up. Since that time, the BLM and GPA have jointly managed and protected the site, working to educate visitors about local Montana history. Despite several miles of gravel road separating Garnet from the rest of the world, over 20,000 annual visitors come to experience Garnet Ghost Town, a symbol of the history of western Montana. These visitors have come from all over the globe, representing all 50 states and over 15 countries, yet the great majority of our visitors continue to be Montanans learning a little bit about their own heritage. Garnet Ghost Town provides a great educational opportunity for Montana schools: dozens of schools bring their 4th graders every year to supplement their Montana history lessons, and older students use Garnet as an historical resource.

Need

With each year, the operations of Garnet Ghost Town have expanded, accommodating new visitors, reaching new audiences, and educating new groups. From the 1980's, when a single volunteer greeted a few hundred annual visitors, to the present, when four BLM and GPA staff members and a handful of volunteers now educate thousands, the management of Garnet has done a lot of changing. To keep up with demand, additional staff became necessary. We began charging a nominal entrance fee (\$2 per adult, kids free) to pay two summer employees to give school tours and provide information to visitors. In addition, we put on an annual Garnet Appreciation Day, which is free to the public. This not only provides a free day for lower-income visitors, but a fun day of games and music to thank our community for their support. However, staff wages and Garnet Appreciation Day expenditures are only barely being met by our normal income of entrance fees, winter cabin rentals, and a membership donor system. While we have been self-sustaining for several years now, it has been a challenge to improve and expand our programs the way our visitors deserve them to be. Our organization has grown beyond its current means. The natural next step for an organization such as ours is the establishment of one consistent employee, to take care of business, expansion, and maintenance in a way that exceeds the current capabilities of its all-volunteer board.

Purpose

To ensure the future stability of our organization and the continuing education of young Montanans, the GPA needs help. Seasonal staff are instrumental in the day-to-day work of collecting fees and making sales, but a full-time Executive Director is badly needed. Such a position, one employee dedicated full-time to Garnet, is way overdue at the ghost town. We are already juggling several

projects: an educational 'Traveling Trunk' full of lessons about Garnet which is due to debut in local elementary schools this fall, an Artifact Curation Project, and an ongoing Oral History Project, as well as a constant stream of historic preservation projects. While the all-volunteer board of directors will be busy organizing major fundraisers for their endowment drive, the Executive Director will keep our membership base intact, process daily correspondence, public relations and publicity, and general organization, as well as help with major donor details and fundraising efforts. To ensure the future stability of the organization, the GPA is in the process of setting up an endowment fund. The GPA is pending a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), which would provide half of the \$120,000 endowment over three years, from January 2003 to January 2006. The other half, \$60,000, will be the GPA's fundraising challenge. We are not applying to the Montana Cultural Trust for help with this endowment, but rather, for help with a full-time Executive Director position who will take care of business during these busy fundraising years, and raise enough money to ensure the future of the GPA, and hopefully, the future of the director's position. Part of the proviso of the NEH grant provides for \$3,000 per year for an Executive Director in 2003, 2004, and 2005. In addition, in a demonstration of our strong partnership, the BLM has also pledged \$5,000 per year to contribute to the Executive Director's salary, through its Challenge Cost Share program. After the first crucial years, 2004-2005, and once the endowment is established, the GPA should be in sound financial condition. After that time, the GPA should be able to support the director's salary from our normal self-sustaining income of entrance fees, sales, winter cabin rentals, memberships, and donations, with the added security of the endowment fund.

Publicity and Accessibility

Garnet Ghost Town is open for anyone and everyone that wishes to come see it. Special facilities and parking are provided for our elderly visitors and visitors with disabilities. We provide Garnet Appreciation Day each year as a chance for those of all income levels to enjoy the town without having to pay a fee. Special opportunities are provided for school groups. Publicity is inherent in fundraising and Garnet Appreciation Day, but we also publish a biannual newsletter and have been the subject of newspaper and magazine articles, and books, too numerous to count.

Major Tasks

The Executive Director's major tasks will include membership maintenance and recruitment, assistance with organizing fundraising efforts, and general managerial tasks, such as publicity, correspondence, and secretarial duties. Major fundraising events during this time will include a Moonlight Dogsled Ride raffle, in which one lucky raffle ticket buyer will win a dogsled ride into Garnet and a romantic night in a Garnet cabin, and a Monte Dolack commemorative poster sale.

Evaluation

At a minimum, the Executive Director should increase memberships and cabin rentals by 15%, and entrance fees and sales by 10% by the end of each year. Evaluation will consist of the successful meeting of these goals by the last day of each year. In addition, the director should help the GPA reach its NEH fundraising challenge.

The GPA is a fully self-reliant organization, with almost twenty years' experience and the confident support of the community. We have been the successful recipients of six Montana Cultural Trust grants in the past, but the last several years we have been a wholly self-sustaining organization. We are financially responsible and we seek during these next three years a greater financial stability through the efforts of a full-time director, and eventually a cushion of security from the procurement of an endowment fund. After twenty years, we know what to expect of ourselves, and the Montana Arts Council knows what to expect of us after six successful grants. Our impact on Montana history is evident and the community interest is genuine - 20,000 visitors and 400 members can't be wrong. Provide us your support that we may take Garnet Ghost Town to the next level.