

Chapter 1 An Extraordinary Start

The first Advertising Club of Great Falls was organized May 19, 1916. There is very little to tell about its achievements until 1925 when it livened up and became very active. It must be remembered of course, that World War I, which followed shortly after its organization, would naturally slow it down.

One of the club's first ventures, a pure food show, took place in 1925. That same year it sponsored Great Falls' first rodeo, which was a flop due to constant rain, forcing the club to pay several thousand dollars in losses.

Walter Searles was secretary up to this time and, on his resignation, Tom Messelt was elected to serve until a year before it closed.

The first window display night was held on March 20, 1926. Windows were covered all day and uncovered at the blowing of the fire siren at 7:30 p.m. Central Avenue from Third to Sixth Streets was blocked off to car traffic so pedestrians could walk anywhere. It attracted good crowds from all over the trading area. This project was repeated for several years.

The "Winterless Winter" took place in April 1926, when a parade of bathing beauties was arranged, which brought the first cold weather and it quickly became a parade of goose-pimples.

A contest was held in 1927 to name the triangle area of Great Falls-Havre-Shelby. The winning entry was "Treasurebelt".

The first “Straw Hat Day” was May 23, 1930 with fines for members wearing their felts. There were barrels on street corners for the old hats—not many were discarded, but it brought some less fortunate from the south side to forage for hats.

Forrest Arthur was elected President in July 1926.

The first gridiron dinner was held April 9, 1931, followed by another February 10, 1932, and the last one on February 1, 1933. Ernest Immel, a writer for the Great Falls Tribune had attended a similar dinner in Washington, D.C. and he was in charge of the Great Falls affairs. These were designed to pan politicians, big companies, unions and other notables who were mimicked, made fun of and jibed at. It was all in fun and attracted people from all over the state.

Easter egg hunts were first sponsored on March 23, 1932, in the park where the Civic Center now stands. An old fire bell was used to trigger the hunt. These hunts were sponsored for several years before other groups took over the reigns.

Christmas home decorations were proposed and contests arranged with prizes. Judges were picked from various organizations and the project was popular for several years.

In 1932 Ted Cogswell, club President, authorized Tom Messelt and Dave Ross to develop what Ted facetiously called “Tom’s Doll Parade.” The idea came from Spokane where successful parades were being held and it was named the Pet and Doll Parade, a moniker it carries to this day. It was carefully laid out and entry requirements were strict. Several women’s organizations were called upon to act as judges for the different sections.

When the North Montana Fair was organized with Harold DePue as manager, Tom Messelt became his assistant, organizing the sale of merchandise display booths, as well as the promotion for the annual auto giveaway sponsored by the merchants. The merchants participating gave numbered coupons with each sale, which were used in the

drawing for the automobile. Tom's association with the fair made available skits and notables for Ad Club Programs.

Ad Club luncheon meetings were held every Friday at the Rainbow and the program committee met every Monday in the basement of the Parrot Coffee Shop. The only woman member was Jessie Jacobsen, manager of KFBB Radio. The weekly publication was named "AdVents."

Other prominent ad club members during this time included Lester Cole, Paul Trigg, Alex Warden, Lou and Wally Wendt, Roy Currell and Speck McDonald.

By 1936 however, the club was weak, with membership being very low. The club disbanded during the WWII years. The most members the club had was approximately 40.

Chapter 2: A New Beginning

The next incarnation of the Ad Club was reorganized out of the old club in 1956. Forrest Arthur was then Manager of Buttrey Associates and was instrumental in the reorganization.

O. S. Warden, owner and publisher of the Great Falls Tribune, contacted Forrest Arthur regarding some problems the paper was having, and suggested to Arthur that the city reorganize a good advertising club which he, Warden, felt might assist him in solving some of the paper's problems with some advertisers. Recalling the failures of the first club, Arthur promised Warden he would take over this assignment, and contacted some associates to help him; among them, Tom Messelt, Sr., Bill Oliver, Beecher Cushman and Bud Blanchette. These men met every Tuesday for 4-5 months to make sound plans for a new ad club. They wrote to Washington D. C. for the names and addresses of all advertising clubs in the U.S. and received from some of these club's By-Laws and

Constitutions. One of the main items they gleaned from this information was to invite women as members.

The first meeting was held October 3, 1957. Active members included Joe Callihan, Dave Coverdale, Frank Kops, Jim Kovich, Jess Owen, Bob Warner, Shan Welch, Roger Hanson, Stan Legowick, Norman Monsos, Harry Frazer, Dale Stapp, Jimmie Krier and LeRoy Stahl.

Forrest Arthur was to be the new president of the new club and he reported to Warden what had been accomplished. A "secret committee" was appointed to determine what advertisers were doing. One department store was found to be advertising "closing out sales" for a period of many, many months. Upon pressure based on good advertising practices and integrity, the store eventually did close.

Some of the first main activities of the club were: Wheel of Fortune (door prizes to encourage attendance), the Giant Balloon Parade, the Holiday Frolic (a Christmas time event open to the entire city), What's New (the membership was encouraged to come before the club to introduce their new products for a period of 5 minutes during a meeting), and later, the C. M. Russell Auction, the GFAF Scholarship Fund, Career Days (in which Great Falls High and CMR High, Vo-Tech & the College of Great Falls' students are invited to the meeting), and Great Ad Awards.

The most successful project was sparked by Arthur, and was known as the Cadillac Dinners. Each year the dinners were equally successful and practically a sellout each time. The Cadillac Dinner was a very special dinner where participants bought a ticket for one hundred dollars for the chance to win a Cadillac car. Ticket stubs were drawn, and the lucky ones were seated at the winner's table. By a process of elimination, those at the winner's table were drawn out until only the car winner was left. There were a lot of other prizes given and the event was extremely popular with the public.

The Cadillac Dinners were continued until restrictive laws were passed that forced the club to discontinue the event. Profits were sufficient to enable the Club to give scholarships and other gifts to charitable groups.

Another project that continued to attract overflow crowds was the Christmas party (Holiday Frolic). Music and acts were the entertainment from the start with surprising talent in the membership presenting itself. Loot bags for everyone were popular, and the whole city participated.

The most important activity of the club, however, according to Arthur, was “to make the Club meetings educational, whereby the programs would attempt to teach the members something new about advertising and marketing, and which would encourage attendance.”

The original By-Laws included three important words: “No Social Activities”. It was to be a “training” club where the membership could learn something. Women members were a forceful element. They instituted the “Golden Garter Award”, where women members selected a man member for his outstanding performance and help during a single year. This was followed by the “Golden Girdle Award”, where the Golden Garter recipients selected a woman member for the same criteria.

Prizes awarded through raffles and as outright gifts during this time period included a 5-day trip for two to the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, CA, a trip for two to the Super Bowl in New Orleans and 13 weekends for two to Virginia City, Flathead Lake, West Glacier, Big Sky in Montana, Yellowstone Park, Fairmont Hot Springs, B.C., Waterton Park, Canada, the North Dakota Badlands and a week’s vacation for two in Yellowstone Park. These trips were awarded from 1959 through 1978. In addition, we also gave away two trips for two to the New York World’s Fair in 1963 and in 1964, a trip for two via steamship from San Francisco to Los Angeles, a round trip for two to London, a Polaris snowmobile, a color television set, a set of luggage and \$500 in cash.

During its first 25 years of existence, the club also received many awards and recognitions for its achievements. Some are listed below:

1. Certificate of Appreciation and Fire Bell, from the Great Falls Fire Department for assisting in promoting Fire Prevention, 1961.
2. All women members were presented with corsages, in appreciation of their “being just the gals they are,” from the men members in 1962.
3. Blue Ribbon from the Western Fairs Association for promoting State Fair in 1963.
4. The 1968 AAF Club Achievement Award, First Place in Programs, both in Regional and National competition.
5. First Place for the “Best Scrapbook” on the C.M. Russell Auction in 1972.
6. First Place for the “Best Scrapbook” on the C.M. Russell Auction in 1973, and in 1974 from the American Advertising Federation.
7. Old West Trail Foundation’s Trailblazer’s Commission Award for the C.M. Russell Auction in 1979.

The club also had a publication known as AdVents, a name that came from the previous Ad Club.

In its first few years, the new Ad Club also participated in contests initiated by the Advertising Association of the West for the best presentation of its projects, growth and public participation. In its first participation at the annual meeting in Lake Tahoe, the club won the sweepstakes – that is everything. The fact that the smallest club in the Association competing with Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Phoenix and others and took all the honors was very impressive. The club competed several times over the years winning many honors until the contests discontinued.

Topping all these fine projects is the Art Auction, which was headed by Norma Ashby, the Russell Museum and others. It has taken on a national character, bringing generous

funds to the C. M. Russell Museum and putting large sums each year into the Ad Club treasury for its benevolent uses.

The Club has donated a large sum of money to civic projects over the years, including the Great Falls Committee, Great Falls Chamber of Commerce, the Trade Promotion Association, The Diamond Jubilee, Tournament of Roses Parade Montana floats, "It's a Great Day in Great Falls" promotion, Expo '74, the College of Great Falls BASH Auctions, Easter Seal Center, Heritage Park, "Soaring Sprits" AWRT project, the Bicentennial Parade, the Montana Federation of Music, Four Seasons Arena, Paris Gibson Square, and the slogan contest, "Great Falls Montana – A City for All Reasons".

We're also proud of all funds we've raised over the years for youth groups, including the Montana State University football team, the Girl Scouts, Great Falls Youth Choir, Golden Skyliners, Great Falls High School Band and Delphian Choir.

Our charitable contributions also extend to libraries, (including the Great Falls Public Library and the Library of the University of Great Falls), the Great Falls Symphony, the Salvation Army and advertising affiliated projects, (including the American Advertising Federation Advertising Education Foundation, the AAF Student Advertising Competitions, and assistance in the formation of new Montana Advertising Clubs).

The Great Falls Ad Club has experienced an extraordinary history and anticipate an extraordinary future.

This history of Great Falls was compiled by Shan Morrison, Forrest Arthur and Tom Messelt, Sr.