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Review of *Montana Moments: History on the Go* by Ellen Baumler

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Ellen Baumler, interpretive historian and coordinator of Montana’s National Register Sign Program at the Montana Historical Society, once again delights readers with her excellent Montana Moments: History on the Go. The book is the result of years of research she conducted while writing sign texts for the National Register of Historic Places and her popular History Half-Note radio vignettes for KCAP in Helena. She selected about 250 of her favorite snippets for this collection.

Baumler does a fine job offering readers short, well-researched, and entertaining stories on a variety of topics including animals, buildings, people, events, and nature that are accessible to anyone interested in learning more about Montana or the Great Plains in general. Her thorough research also makes the book appealing to academics looking for interesting anecdotes to include in lectures and presentations.

The chapters “Special Places,” “A Traveler’s Respite,” and “Missions, Churches, and Clergy” provide readers with interesting landmarks they might visit, including old forts, homesteads, hotels, historic homes, brothels (including the “brothel-turned-courthouse” in Daniels County), churches, and schools. Baumler also
breathes new life into the tales of Montana's famous "Desperadoes, Dandies, and Darned Good Men" and "Wild, Wicked, and Wonderful Women," such as Civil War officer and acting governor of Montana Territory Thomas Francis Meagher, "Copper King" William A. Clark, artist Charlie Russell, and photographer Evelyn Cameron. She also highlights lesser-known individuals who reflect the diversity of Montanans. John W. White was a janitor at Kalispell's Central School for over thirty-five years. In 1932, he told students about his life as a slave and how freedom changed his life at age ten.

Although Baumler's work is a "popular" history, it would have been useful to have short chapter introductions placing the vignettes in historical and social context. Streamlining could have reduced some repetition of stories, allowing for other tales to be told. Like most general works on Montana, the collection's content is primarily about western Montana, and over two-thirds of the vignettes cover the time frame between 1860 and 1910 (although several of these provide ties to more current times). But these are minor criticisms for an overall enjoyable and solidly researched book. It is a must-read for anyone interested in Montana history.

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