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Work study students bring True Grit’s Mattie Ross to meet Moss Mansion’s Mattie Moss

BILLINGS, Feb. 12, 2014 – Two Rocky Mountain College students will offer living history in early evening presentations at a Billings landmark, the Moss Mansion Historic House Museum at 914 Division Street. Michaela Shifely and Mitch Lagge do historical research as a chunk of their work study duties at the elegant property. RMC Community Services Coordinator Jill Washburn finds community placements for students to learn practical skills as they assist non-profits around the city and county.

Mattie Ross, the sparky teen heroine from Charles Portis’ 1968 novel True Grit, visits Mattie Moss, real-life well-heeled daughter of 1890’s Billings bank president Preston Moss, at the Moss Mansion in two presentations Friday, Feb. 28 and Friday, March 4 at 6:30 p.m.

“We love them. They are wonderful… I can’t say enough about either of them. They helped out tremendously during the holiday seasons, giving tours and hosting special events. They are now going through our archives, finding new material,” said Executive Director Jenna Richter.

“They’re going to be heading up a huge project of updating the inventory of every historical item in the house. We’ve had other interns, we’ve had college volunteers, but these two are phenomenal. They’re like family,” Richter said. “This makes us huge proponents of the work study program you have up there.”

Sue Robinson, Moss Mansion volunteer coordinator, has coordinated work at the elegant historic property, which is jointly owned by the State of Montana and the City of Billings. Regarding the presentations featuring the two Matties, Robinson wrote, “The women will express views on being a woman growing up in the West, their losses, sorrows, how they dealt with both the good and the bad in their lives, and throw in a little ugliness… almost as if Clint Eastwood might have had a hand in the story!”

RMC student Shifley said, “Visitors will get to experience life through two very different 19th century women. As a work study student, I just feel so lucky that I … learn so much and gain experience for the curator career I hope for. This project has definitely opened my eyes to all of the wonderful – and shady – facets that shaped Billings’ history.”

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