

# Today in History - May 26

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Today's Stories: [Montana](#)

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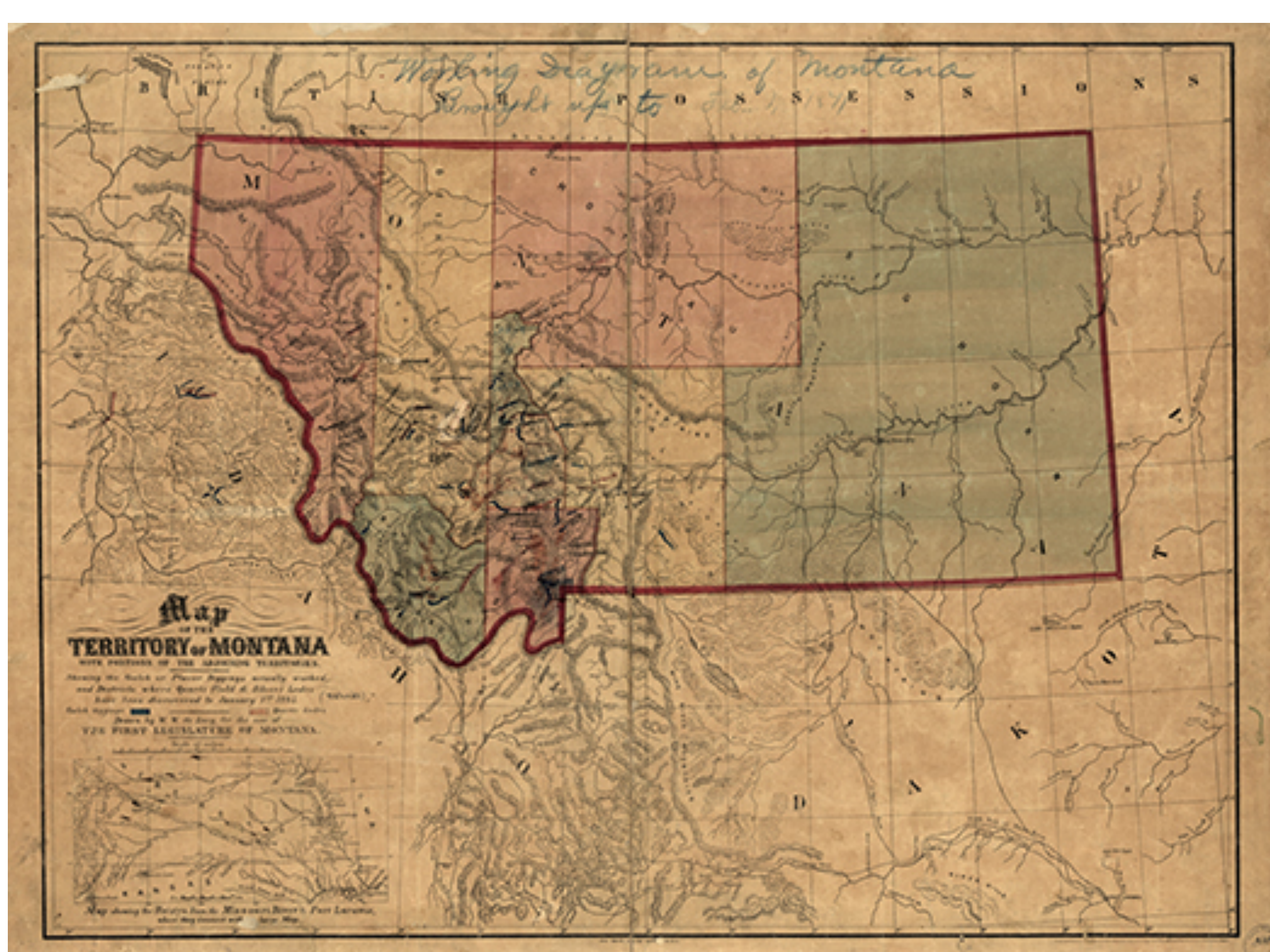


## Montana

On **May 26**, 1864, President Lincoln signed an enabling act creating the [Territory of Montana](#). Twenty-five years later, on November 8, 1889, Montana became the forty-first state.



B.E. view, Helena, Mont. Haines Photo Co., c1908. [Panoramic Photographs](#). Prints & Photographs Division



Map of the territory of Montana with portions of the adjoining territories. Drawn by W. W. de Lacy for the use of the first legislature of Montana; St. Louis, Mo: Jul. Hutawa, lithr., 1865. [General Maps](#). Geography & Map Division

Numerous Native American tribes originally inhabited the Montana Territory. Today, Montana's Indian reservations maintain the heritage and culture of many of these tribes including the [Crow](#), Northern Cheyenne, [Assiniboine](#), Gros Ventre or Atsina, Blackfeet, Kootenai, Salish, Chippewa, and Cree. [Meriwether Lewis](#), William Clark, and the members of their expedition were the first explorers to document a journey through Montana and the lands of the Louisiana Purchase. Soon, forts were established to facilitate regular fur trading with Native American tribes. Missionaries and trailblazers followed.

The discovery of gold in the early 1860s sped the creation of the Montana Territory. As settlers and gold prospectors entered Montana in the 1860s and 1870s conflicts with the Indians arose. Perhaps the most famous clash between Native Americans and the United States military occurred in Montana on June 25, 1876. On that day, Sioux and Cheyenne defeated Lieutenant Colonel [George Armstrong Custer's](#) 7th United States Cavalry regiment at the Battle of the Little Bighorn, also known as Custer's Last Stand. A year later, [Nez Percé Chief Joseph](#) surrendered in the Bear Paw Mountains of Montana after traveling over 1,000 miles across Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana, trying to elude the U.S. Army and reach safe haven in Canada.



Bands of sheep on the Gravelly Range at the foot of Black Butte, Madison County, Montana, Russell Lee, photographer, Aug. 1942. [Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Color Photographs](#). Prints & Photographs Division

Lured by gold in the 1860s and copper in the 1880s, mining brought many settlers to Montana. [Rich grazing lands](#) for cattle and sheep attracted other pioneers. Irene Bunderies recalls her memories of moving to Superior, Montana as a young girl:

*My family came to Superior from Missoula in 1898, when I was about 14. My father had been editor of several of the larger Montana papers, among them the Butte Miner. Our former environment had been so different from the one we found here that the mining atmosphere made quite an...impression on my brothers and sisters and me, at first mainly of shock.*

"[Social Life in and about Superior.](#)" Irene Bunderies, interviewee; Mabel Olson, interviewer; Superior, Montana, between 1936 and 1940. [American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1940](#). Manuscript Division

## Learn More

- Read more accounts of pioneer life in Montana. Search the collection [American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1940](#) on *pioneer*, *homestead*, *Montana*. [Trails of Hope: Overland Diaries and Letters, 1846-1869](#) includes personal diaries and journals such as [Trip to Montana by Wagon Train](#).
- Search the [Photos/Prints collections](#) on *Montana* to view additional Montana scenes including [Glacier National Park](#).
- The Library's [Digital Collections](#) include information about the culture and history of the Native American tribes living in Montana and across the United States. Search on *Montana*, *Native Americans*, *Indians* or the names of individual Indian chiefs and tribes to find a wide array of materials. Other collections to explore include the [Denver Public Library Digital Collections](#) and [American Indians of the Pacific Northwest](#) from the University of Washington Libraries. This collection provides access to important written documentation found in Annual Reports of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior. Reports include information from the Montana agencies such as the Flathead Agency, Blackfeet Agency, Crow Agency, and others.
- Examine bird's-eye view maps of [Montana towns](#) through the collection [Panoramic Maps](#). Enlarge and zoom in on an area of the map to see houses, churches, horse drawn carts, and much more in fine and accurate detail. See, for example, [Helena](#) in 1875, [Miles City](#) in 1883, or [Butte](#) about 1884.

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