

Contact: Kelly McCandless
Billings Chamber/CVB
Phone: (406) 869-3732
(406) 861-2981
kelly@BillingsChamber.com
www.BillingsChamber.com

P.O. Box 31177
815 S. 27th St.
Billings, MT 59107
Fax: (406) 245-7333
www.VisitBillings.com
www.BrandBillings.com



Media Advisory

Billings Chamber Revives 83-year-old Tradition:

Ceremony Honoring Yellowstone Kelly Saturday;
Kick Off of Gravesite Restoration Campaign

For Immediate Release

Billings, MT, June 19, 2013: The Billings Chamber of Commerce/Convention and Visitors Bureau will honor Luther Sage “Yellowstone” Kelly with military honors and a wreath laying ceremony on **Saturday June 22, 2013 from 12:00 p.m. - 12:40 p.m.** The ceremony is a reinstatement of a tradition that took place annually for years after the veteran’s death in 1929, when Kelly’s widow would send a wreath to the Billings Chamber of Commerce to place at his the grave on her behalf. The Billings Chamber/CVB, author and Kelly historian Jerry Keenan, as well as the Custer Battlefield Museum and Historical Association, who will bring 100 people to the ceremony, will pay tribute to this veteran of the Civil War, Plains Indian War and Spanish American War.

The ceremony agenda is as follows:

- 12:00: Custer Battlefield Assoc. introduces Jerry Keenan, author of the Yellowstone Kelly biography.
- 12:05: Jerry Keenan discusses the life of Kelly.
- 12:15: John Brewer, Chamber/CVB President & CEO
Honor Guard—Eugene Sara Detachment of Marine Veterans
Prayer and comments – Commissioner Bill Kennedy;
Volley—Veterans of Foreign Wars
- 12:30: Restoration Project Overview from Bill Cole, chair of the Chamber/CVB Trails Committee

DIRECTIONS: To get to the ceremony, enter the park at the trailhead east of the airport (where the picnic shelter is located) and then walk or drive one mile to the east along the Rims on Black Otter rail.

The media is invited to attend and cover the event. There will be opportunities for interviews following the ceremony.

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Advocate. Connect. Grow. The Billings Chamber/CVB represents you, our 1,200 members who employ more than 44,000 people. We help you grow your bottom line by connecting you to opportunities and advocating for your business and our community.

WHO WAS YELLOWSTONE KELLY?

By Bill Cole

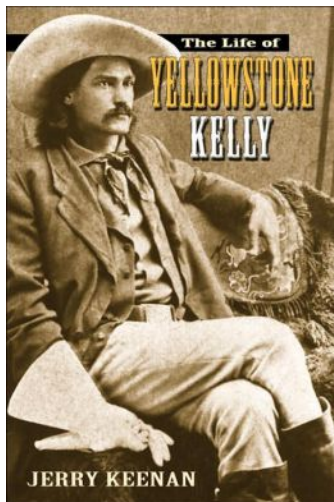


Luther Sage "Yellowstone" Kelly

Who is buried in Yellowstone Kelly's tomb? Hint: Not Ulysses S. Grant. Where is Yellowstone Kelly's tomb? Hint: It is not a tomb, just an inauspicious concrete crypt in Swords Rimrock Park overlooking downtown Billings. To get there, drive to the trailhead east of the airport and then walk or drive one mile along the Rims toward MetraPark. The gravesite is on the Heritage Trail, 23 miles of paved paths that snake through Billings. The Billings Chamber is a key player in developing this trail system that benefits residents and helps attract businesses and tourists.

Unfortunately, the neglected Yellowstone Kelly gravesite is an embarrassment to our community and the memory of the veteran buried there. If properly redeveloped, this historic monument could become a must-see destination along the Heritage Trail system. For these reasons the Chamber decided to make the renovation of the gravesite a top priority.

Luther Sage Kelly was one of the most famous, and fascinating, characters to ever call Montana home. In 1959 Warner Brothers released a movie based on his life, and at least four novels were written about his exploits. Born in upstate New York to prosperous parents, young Kelly might have become a businessman had not fate and the Civil War intervened. In 1865 Kelly lied about his age and joined the Union Army, just in time to see the war end. He found himself assigned to a remote fort in Dakota Territory and it was there that this athletic teenager discovered his love for solitude and the West. When older soldiers refused to carry mail between outposts fearing attack by Sioux warriors, Kelly volunteered. Kelly wandered the river valleys looking for game and hostile Indians.



The Life of Yellowstone Kelly
by Jerry Keenan



1959 Warner Brothers film
"Yellowstone Kelly"

When his enlistment expired in 1868, Kelly, still a teenager, walked west to explore the region between the Upper Missouri and the Yellowstone, earning a reputation for courage, intelligence and the sobriquet "Yellowstone Kelly." This was uncharted, dangerous country, and Kelly had more than his share of close-calls working as an army scout, wolfer, trader, and guide. He maintained respectful relations with the numerous Indian tribes that traversed the region.

Kelly gained national attention after the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876. Kelly was the lead scout for Nelson Miles, the army

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colonel tasked with the job of locating Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, Gall, and other Sioux and Cheyenne chiefs and returning them to their reservations. In 1878 Kelly and Miles chased Chief Joseph and his followers during their epic trek across four states until the Nez Perce surrendered in the Bear Paw Mountains.

Kelly eventually married and became a rancher and government clerk. In 1898 he explored southern Alaska and escorted 538 Scandinavian reindeer and 113 Lapland herders to rescue destitute miners. On another trip to Alaska he guided naturalists John Muir and John Burroughs. In 1899 Kelly distinguished himself fighting insurrectionists in the Philippines, where he remained as an administrator. Kelly was a friend of Teddy Roosevelt and a member of his "tennis cabinet." Later Kelly supervised the Apache reservation in San Carlos, Arizona.

Kelly wanted to be buried in Montana, so on June 26, 1929 he was laid to rest with full military honors overlooking the Yellowstone Valley after an impressive funeral procession organized by the Commercial Club, predecessor of the Billings Chamber. In the words of Kelly's biographer, "If destiny ever decreed a fitting locale for one man's final resting place, surely this spot was meant for Yellowstone Kelly."

Bill Cole is chairman of the Chamber Trails Committee. If you would like to get involved with the restoration of Yellowstone Kelly's gravesite contact Bill at bcole@cofirm.com or John Brewer, Chamber President/CEO, at john@billingschamber.com. For more information on Yellowstone Kelly, read [The Life of Yellowstone Kelly](#) by Jerry Keenan (2006, New Mexico Press).

Below is an artist's rendering of what Yellowstone Kelly's Grave **could** look like. We appreciate your interest in restoring the grave of this Civil War Veteran and historic icon.

