

## Weekend away

# Moss Mansion in Billings retains turn-of-the-century charm

By LARI POWELL HATLEY  
For the Tribune

BILLINGS — Missouri lumber magnate Preston B. Moss first visited Billings at the turn of the century. He was so impressed with the hustle and bustle of the place that he and his wife Mattie and their children returned the next year to stay.

During the next two years, they built one of the state's most elegant houses.

Their mansion cost more than \$100,000 during a time when the average family home cost \$3,000.

Money and taste don't always go hand in hand, but they did for the Moss family. The house stayed in family hands until daughter Melville Moss died in 1984 at age 88.

The house retains many original furnishings and all of its original beauty.

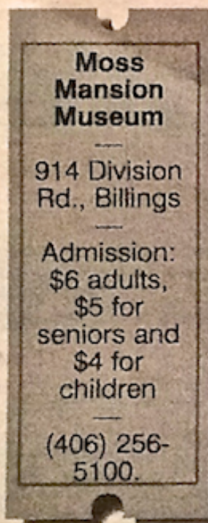
Today the Moss Mansion Museum and its well-groomed

grounds are open to the public.

According to the tour guides and museum literature, P. B. Moss became owner of two banks in Billings and was the town's leading entrepreneur and innovator.

Guests at the Moss Mansion could expect to be treated to every luxury and the cutting-edge technology of the day.

The mansion was one of Billings' first homes to be wired for electricity.



Billings' Moss mansion is an elegant turn-of-the-century home.

Photo courtesy Moss Mansion

No expense was spared in building or decorating the home. The entryway was designed in the Moorish style with ornate mahogany arches trimmed in 14-karat gold paint. On either side of the double front doors were coat closets with their own radiators. Guests leaving the home found their coats and boots warm, dry, and ready for any weather.

In the formal living room the drapes and rugs were handmade

in a small French village. They cost more than half the total cost of an average home.

The Moss Mansion is within several blocks of the Yellowstone Art Museum. Also close nearby are the Alberta Bair Theater and the Western Heritage Museum.

Asked if the residence was home to any ghosts, one tour guide answered, "No. The official answer is no." Pressed, the guide

laughed and confided that Virginia Moss, the youngest of the six Moss children, did die of diphtheria in her room at age five. The guide admitted, "The volunteers make a habit of greeting Virginia each morning and saying good-bye each night. We thank her for keeping the house safe. Just in case."

Better safe than sorry.

The museum holds a fund-raiser Friday, July 30. Tickets to the In the Mood community gourmet picnic cost \$75 per couple.

Call (406) 256-5100 for reservations.

The mansion is open June 1 through Aug. 31 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays and 1 to 3 p.m. Sundays. The museum is open 1 to 3 p.m. the rest of the year.

Lari Powell Hatley is a free-lance writer in Great Falls. Send Weekend Away suggestions to Hot Ticket, Great Falls Tribune, P.O. Box 5468, Great Falls, MT 59403.