

History



In the heart of Montana, the Big Sky Country, Great Falls is surrounded by spectacular natural wonders and scenery. It is nestled between rich, productive farm land only miles away from the majestic Rocky Mountains to its west and Little Belt Mountains to the east.

The city was settled around the mighty Missouri River, one of nature's most magnificent waterways. The Missouri River provides Great Falls with its name. As the Missouri cuts through the city it drops over 500 feet in a series of rapids and five breathtaking waterfalls -- the great falls of the Missouri.

Great Falls is an exciting community of over 58,000 people with various recreational opportunities for citizens and visitors alike.

Known as "The Electric City", Great Falls has a long tradition of history which began with the famous expedition of Lewis and Clark in 1805. They explored the newly purchased Louisiana Territory filled with herds of buffalo roaming the prairies. The Great Falls area had long been inhabited by tribes of native American Indians, mainly the Blackfeet.

Lewis and Clark were the first known white explorers to catch sight of the "great falls" of the Missouri River...they heard the roaring of the falls more than seven miles away.

Their expedition took nearly a month to portage around the falls. Before the party left in mid July of 1805, they celebrated the Fourth of July in the new territory at White Bear Island.

The stage was set for the creation of Great Falls. It was ready for a man named Paris Gibson.

Gibson came west in May of 1882. He made plans for a city, then laid them out before James Hill, a man of great importance in the railroad industry. Hill gave his financial backing to Gibson, knowing that a city in such an area would make a valuable connection for the railroads.

Unlike many other western cities, Great Falls was planned by a practical and extremely thoughtful man. While organizing the town, Gibson made sure the streets were laid out in a precise, arrow- straight pattern, plus he set aside 886 acres for city parks. Gibson believed beauty was important in a city and personally made sure that elm, ash, and fir trees were planted on every street and boulevard.

Modern culture has grown out of the history of Great Falls, mainly in the life and works of western artist Charles M. Russell, the legendary cowboy who made Great Falls his home.

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Great Falls invites you to experience the best of both worlds: city excitement or mountain solitude. In Montana, one has the freedom to enjoy it all. Return to what America was years ago, fresh and innocent, while steeped in perpetual discovery.

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