

4712 33d Ave NE
Seattle, Wash. 98105
May 27, 1968

Mr. Taylor Gordon
White Sulphur Springs
Montana

Dear Mr. Gordon:

Although we've both spent quite a bit of our lives in White Sulphur, I'm afraid we don't know each other. I do remember hearing you sing once at the school house when I was in grade school, perhaps 15 or 18 years ago, but my family moved away just as I began high school and they didn't move back until I was spending my time in places such as Chicago and Seattle.

But I would like very much to meet you this summer when my wife and I visit White Sulphur Springs for a while. You see, I have been a magazine writer and now teach history at the University of Washington; I'd like very much to talk with you and get down on paper or possibly on tape recording some of your memories of your career.

Would you be willing to talk with me a few hours? I think your memories of the New York scene in the 1920s, for instance, may be valuable history some day; it would be very worthwhile to have them preserved for the future.

I believe I'll be in White Sulphur from June 29 to July 7. If you prefer, I could contact you then to see if we could get together to talk.

Cordially,
Ivan Doig
Ivan Doig

July 5, 1968

Rose and Taylor Gordon
White Sulphur Springs
Montana

Miss Gordon -- I'm returning your article, and thank you so much for loaning it to me to read. I've replayed parts of the talk with you the other day, and I think it came out very well. I'm grateful to you for consenting to the interview.

Mr. Gordon -- I think the session with you on the 3rd was excellent. I'm glad you consented to the taping; I think some of the material may be very useful someday to a historian writing about New York in the 1920's. I would urge you to start on the sequel to Born to Be as soon as you can; there's a good deal of material you should get into book form. I think you'd do well to talk a lot of your book into a tape recorder; you have a nice knack for telling a story out loud. In fact, you might do particularly well to have someone questioning you as I was on Wednesday; a good interview can bring a lot back into memory.

Again, thank you both for your time and help, and for being so gracious to Carol and me. We hope to visit with you again someday.

Very best regards

Ivan Doig
Ivan Doig

4712 33d Ave NE
Seattle, Wash. 98105
Sept. 19, 1968

Mrs. Vivian Paladin
Editor, Montana
Montana Historical Society
Roberts at Sixth Ave.
Helena, Montana

Dear Mrs. Paladin

Over in White Sulphur Springs there is a 75-year-old Negro named Taylor Gordon. His is a remarkable story, and I wonder if you could use an article on him.

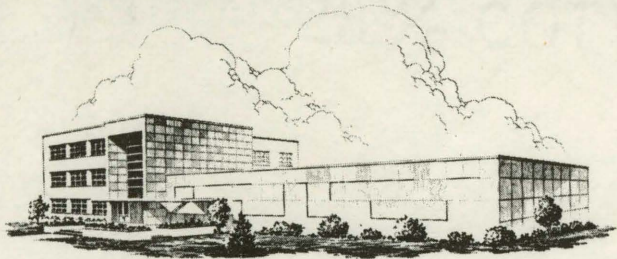
Mr. Gordon in the 1920's was a professional singer -- a pretty good one, singing tenor in the great halls in New York City and elsewhere in the East. I've looked up the New York Times reviews, and he had modest but solid notice as a spiritual singer. More importantly, he was good enough to gain access to the social swim in New York City and he met and partied with an incredible array of literary and social leaders.

The Gordon family is one of the oldest in White Sulphur, dating I think from the 1880's. On his way from the cowtown to the concert stage, Taylor Gordon worked in brothels, was a handyman for John Ringling of the circus family, and otherwise bounced around.

All this adds up to an interesting story, I think. With the help of Carl Van Vechten and Mabel Norman, Mr. Gordon wrote a book in 1929, entitled Born to Be. And since White Sulphur is my hometown too, on a recent visit my wife and I got a three-hour interview with Mr. Gordon on tape. I believe there's easily enough material between these two sources for me to put together a good piece on him -- not the usual sort of article Montana runs, I guess, but a good story and shot through with Montana background and mood nonetheless. I don't want to make this letter too long, but you get some idea of the possibilities when I say Mr. Gordon has good memories and anecdotes about Heywood Brown, Sinclair Lewis, Father Divine, Marcus Garvey, Rebecca West and many others in New York besides good lore about White Sulphur several decades ago. There are interesting illustration possibilities; you'll find in the Montana state library in Helena a copy of Born to Be with remarkable illustrations by Covarrubias.

A few words on me: I'm finishing up a doctorate in U.S. frontier history at the University of Washington, formerly was an editor of the Rotarian magazine, and have done a lot of free-lancing. If you're interested in this idea, I'll want the payment to go to Mr. Gordon, but that's another topic to be discussed if we get past this first stage. Should you be interested, I can give you a fuller picture of what the article could be like; for now, I'll just say it's not the usual journal fare, but it's a doggone good story.

Cordially
Ivan Doig
Ivan Doig



MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Founded 1865

225 N. ROBERTS

PHONE (406) 442-3260, EXT. 271

HELENA, MONTANA 59601

September 25, 1968

Mr. Ivan Doig
4712 33d Avenue, N. E.
Seattle, Washington 98105

Dear Mr. Doig:

Thank you for your interesting letter regarding a possible article on Taylor Gordon. His story has long interested us, and indeed we are familiar with BORN TO BE, as well as a recent monograph he wrote on the Sherman family of White Sulphur Springs under title THE MAN WHO BUILT THE STONE CASTLE. If this interests you, I think one would be available from the Meagher County News at White Sulphur. They published it, and while it could have used some editorial tightening, it does indicate Mr. Gordon's knowledge of his town and his interest in its history.

I think we should by all means see your article, although you no doubt know that we are unable to make advance commitments. It is also, as you say, a bit removed from our usual format. This need not be a barrier, though, for we find a variation in fare is well received by our readership.

Pictures will be very important, so I will appreciate either seeing those or a description of your suggestions and the sources from which either you or we could get them. You may certainly go ahead with a fuller outline, for it is possible we could make a firm judgment from it, or proceed with the article. The article should run to at least 3,500 words and we can handle up to 5,500 to 6,500.

We'll look forward to hearing from you soon again.

Sincerely,

VP/dn

(Mrs.) Vivian A. Paladin, Editor
MONTANA, The Magazine of Western History

4712 33d Ave NE
Seattle, Wash. 98105
October 6, 1968

Dear Mr. Gordon --

I was very sorry to hear about the truck smashing into your house. The only good side of it, I suppose, is that you and Miss Gordon escaped.

Several times since you talked with Carol and me last summer, I've wondered about you and your next book. This truck disaster must have cost you a lot, and we both know a person needs some money to afford the time and effort that goes into a book. I'd like to help a bit, if I can.

Perhaps you know the Montana Historical Society publishes a magazine called MONTANA. Out of several story ideas I suggested to the editor recently, she liked the idea of an article about you. She can't guarantee the magazine could use it and I can't guarantee I can do an article any time soon, but she would like me to write an article about you.

Judging by what MONTANA usually pays, they'd likely pay around \$100 for such an article. If I write the article and if MONTANA publishes it, I would split the \$100 with you, and I guess this letter can be your guarantee of it. You see, I'm more interested in having your story told than in trying to make money from it -- although writing the article would be several days' work and I can't afford to do it for nothing either. The editor would be interested in pictures too, and of course whatever pictures you provided would be paid for to you alone.

This doesn't involve much money, but it would be enough to nearly pay for a Wollensak tape recorder such as mine -- and I think you'd do well to talk your book into a recorder.

I am remembering our agreement that you don't want anything written on your life beyond 1929, where Born to Be ends. Any article I would do would draw on Born to Be and the tape recording. It would not interfere at all with the story you want to tell in your book. Also, such an article would be useful in trying to sell a publisher on your next book; you've been in business long enough to know a good deal about the value of publicity.

If you have any reason why I shouldn't go ahead with the article, please let me know as soon as possible. Please remember, it's not certain that the magazine can publish the piece, so none of this is sure-fire. But it seems to me worth a try.

Best regards

Ivan Doig
Ivan Doig

4712 33d Ave NE
Seattle, Wash. 98105
June 5, 1969

Vivian A. Paladin
Editor, MONTANA
225 N. Roberts
Helena, Montana

Dear Mrs. Paladin

I'm sorry it's taken me several months to get back to you about the Taylor Gordon article. I had an unexpected amount of trouble finishing up work for my Ph.D. and then had other articles I'd promised to do before I could get to the Gordon piece. But things are coming under control now, and here is a lead, an outline, samples of material to be used, and suggestions for illustration.

As I've come back to the article and done some more research, the article looks more and more promising. I've found quite a lot of material on him, and the Covarrubias illustrations in BORN TO BE more and more impress me as ideal for the article. I'll be interested to know your response to them.

I think I mentioned in my original letter that much of the article would come from a long interview with Taylor last summer. The two pages of quotes are meant to be rough samples; I think I would cut a few of them a bit, for the sake of tightening.

Also, I'm writing to Yale to see if their Carl Van Vechten collection holds any letters from Taylor to Van Vechten, or has any photos which would interest you.

Let's see; looking over your letter, I find that you say you can't make advance commitments, but add that perhaps you can provide a "firm judgment" from an outline. Since this year I'm making my living as a free lance writer and would be doing this article mostly as a labor of affection, I think I have to have a pretty firm understanding that you want the piece before I can go ahead with it. I'm quite sure it'll be a good one for MONTANA if we go ahead with it; the one place I can see a possible snag would be in illustration, which is largely out of my hands, I'm afraid. What do you think -- can we proceed?

Incidentally, I notice I've never given you any proof I can write. I'll enclose an article; naturally the one I'd do for MONTANA would be in a more serious vein.

Regards

Ivan Doig

A few more notes about picture possibilities for the Taylor Gordon article:

-- Among the photocopies Yale sent was the attached letter from the Helena Public Library in 1935. Is it possible they might still have the photo at the Library?

-- (Mrs.) Anne Whelpley, Library Assistant, The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University Library, New Haven, Connecticut 06520 wrote me that Yale has photos of Taylor Gordon taken by Carl Van Vechten. She said permission to have copies would have to be secured from Mrs. Carl Van Vechten. I wrote Mrs. Van Vechten and got the enclosed letter from her lawyer. Would you prefer to reply, or should I? Seems to me it might be simpler if you handled correspondence with the Van Vechten lawyer and Yale so the copies of the photos would come directly to you, but I'm willing to do it either way.

~~the United States government's policy as well.~~

careful.

In addition to the question of handling timber trespass, two other topics appeared frequently in McGilvra's letters in his first few months in Washington Territory and recurred throughout his term. One involved the resources of his job, which lacked ^{no lack of books, papers, and furniture for his office} such items as office furniture and a set of U.S. Statutes. ("In a word, I find the Office and the business of the Office in a most wretched condition," he wrote very early in a letter to the Solicitor of the Treasury.) The second topic was the sale of liquor to the Indians. The district attorney never managed to do much about the condition of his office, but he was able to act on the liquor issue. / *you apparently have not sought to clear up the former, find precise words instead of*

"I found upon arriving here that liquor was being continually sold to the Indians by various white persons," *the vague indefinite language that often makes it almost impossible to know what you are talking about.*

McGilvra wrote in explaining a suit initiated against one offender, "to such an extent as to make the Indians not only troublesome and annoying to the whites, but they have frequently been quarrelling and fighting between themselves in our streets" (JJM to Solicitor of the Treasury Edward Jordan, August 1, 1861, TDP.) McGilvra's reports to the Solicitor of the Treasury show a continuing record of prosecutions for selling liquor to the Indians even though the results often revealed the problems of frontier law enforcement--"Nol Pross entered for the reason that Deft

4712 33d Ave NE
Seattle, Wash. 98105
July 1, 1969

Vivian A. Paladin
Editor, MONTANA
225 N. Roberts
Helena, Montana

Dear Mrs. Paladin

Just a note about illustration possibilities for the Taylor Gordon article: I've been in touch with Yale, and they have photos of Gordon taken by Carl Van Vechten, who made photographing the famous and near-famous a lifetime hobby. The Yale librarian said copies can be had if permission is secured from Van Vechten's widow, and passed along her address.

Also, both Yale and the New York Public Library have letters from Taylor Gordon in their Van Vechten collections. This should be rich material which has not been touched before.

Regards

Ivan Doig
Ivan Doig

P.S. I'm moving soon. My address after July 15 will be 15004 Linden Avenue North, Seattle 98133.

SPEED LETTER®

TO Mr. Ivan Doig

FROM MONTANA, The Magazine of Western History

15004 Linden Ave. No.

Published by
MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Seattle, Washington 98133

**Veterans & Pioneers Memorial Building
Helena, Montana**

SUBJECT Taylor Gordon article

(Mrs.) **Vivian A. Paladin, Associate Editor**

MESSAGE

DATE July 22 19 69

— FOLD

Dear Mr. Doig: I imagine you have moved by now. In any case, it is high time I wrote you. I think we can be quite sure about this for MONTANA, especially in view of the good news about the Van Vechten photos. It is very hard, of course, to say dogmatically that we can publish anything before we see it, but this sounds good. I hope you will proceed.

Sincerely,

SIGNED

Vivian Paladin

REPLY

DATE _____ 19 _____

— FOLD

SIGNED _____

15004 Linden Ave N.
Seattle, Wash. 98133
July 26, 1969

Mrs. Vivian A. Paladin
Editor, MONTANA
225 N. Roberts
Helena, Montana

Dear Mrs. Paladin

Thanks for your letter of the 22nd. If you're that enthused about the Taylor Gordon piece, I have no qualms about going ahead with it. From the looks of your magazine, you appear to be an editor worth trusting.

I'll try get the article to you in the next two-three weeks. As I have a couple of other things to write first, it'll likely be three weeks. Also, yesterday I got an enormous batch of Taylor Gordon material -- letters to Van Vechten, show business memorabilia, and so on -- from the Yale library, and it'll take a little while to sift it. At the first glance, it seems to be excellent historical material.

And, I'll do what I can to get us permission to use the Van Vechten pictures of Gordon, once the article is in your hands and you've made a final decision. I might warn you that if the photos are like much of Van Vechten's stuff, they might be sort of soft-focus, muzzy glamor shots, much better for their historical significance than as art.

Best regards

Ivan Doig
Ivan Doig

Carl Schurz plainly overshadowed Meagher and the other dozen.

1500 Linden Ave N.
Seattle, Wash. 98107
July 20, 1967

Mrs. Vivian A. Paladino
Editor, MONTANA
225 N. Roberts
Helena, Montana

Dear Mrs. Paladino:

Thanks for your letter of the 22nd. If you're that enthused about the Taylor Gordon photo, I have no doubts about going ahead with it. From the look of your magazine, you appear to be an editor worth trusting.

I'll try to get the article to you in the next two-three weeks. As I have a couple of other things to write first, it'll likely be three weeks. Also, yesterday I got an enormous batch of Taylor Gordon material -- letters to Van Vechten, show business memorabilia, and so on -- from the Yale library, and it'll take a little while to sift it. At the first glance, it seems to be excellent historical material.

And, I'll do what I can to get an permission to use the Van Vechten pictures of Gordon, once the article is in your hands and you've made a final decision. I might warn you that if the photos are like much of Van Vechten's stuff, they might be sort of soft-focus, many glamour shots, much better for the historical significance than as art.

Best regards

Ivan Doig
Ivan Doig

1500 Linden Ave N.
Seattle, Wash. 98133
August 17, 1969

Vivian A. Paladin
Editor, MONTANA
Helena, Montana

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dear Mrs. Paladin

Here's the Taylor Gordon piece. I hope you like it. It turned out to be really a lot of work, but fun, too.

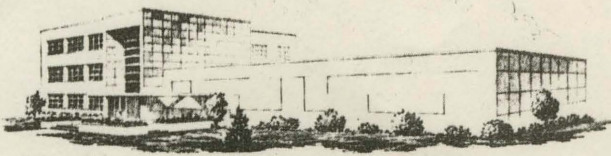
I count it as 5700 words of text, with about 360 words of footnotes. As with every author, I hope it doesn't have to be cut -- but if it does have to, I can do it for you.

I'm writing Yale to get permission to use the quotes from Taylor Gordon's letters to Van Vechten. And if there still are questions about photos after the notes I've sent you, I'll be glad to do what I can to help.

My wife and I are for a two week vacation in San Francisco. We'll be back a few days after Labor Day. I hope you get the same sense from this article that I do in looking it over -- that thanks to your willingness to ask for a somewhat offbeat piece and thanks to my luck in getting Taylor to talk into my tape recorder last summer, we have an unusual article about a chunk of Montana history which hasn't been touched before. What do you think?

Regards

Ivan Doig



MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Founded 1865

ROBERTS AT SIXTH AVENUE

PHONE (406) 442-3260, EXT. 271

HELENA, MONTANA 59601

September 5, 1969

Mr. Ivan Doig
15004 Linden Ave. North
Seattle, Washington 98133

Dear Mr. Doig:

We appreciate the opportunity of reading the manuscript you have just submitted to us. Because we have many other duties not related to the magazine, we may not report to you as speedily as many magazines. At press time, particularly in the months of March, June, September and December, it is virtually impossible to do any manuscript reading; otherwise we try to make an initial report to you within thirty days.

If a situation exists where you must hear from us sooner, please advise and we'll make every effort to assist you.

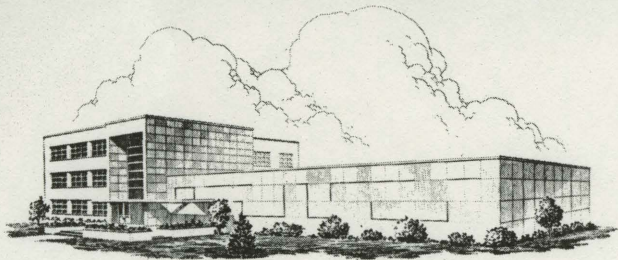
Needless to say, we have tremendous backlogs of article material, but we are constantly searching for new approaches, fresh subjects, and better quality of research and writing.

We appreciate very much your efforts in our behalf.

Sincerely yours,

VP/dn

(Mrs.) Vivian Paladin, Editor
MONTANA, the Magazine of WESTERN HISTORY



MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Founded 1865

ROBERTS AT SIXTH AVENUE

PHONE (406) 442-3260, EXT. 271

HELENA, MONTANA 59601

September 18, 1969

Mr. Ivan Doig
15004 Linden Ave. N.
Seattle, Wash. 98133

Dear Mr. Doig:

I am sorry to say that your Taylor Gordon piece has not passed "muster" for our needs, but I think enough of the subject and of the work you have done to point out some things that might help should you wish to revise or rewrite for us.

Basically, the ~~faul~~ seems to be lack of organization, which has inevitably led to a lack of coherence. The many notables and others ~~which~~ whom you explore are not related enough to Taylor to make them meaningful to his story. In many cases, too, the intrusion of verse seems irrelevant and acts more to distract than to build the narrative.

All this perhaps means that your article would be perfectly acceptable to another publication but not to ours. I will be glad to hear from you again about this and to be of more help if I can.

Sincerely,

Vivian Paladin

(Mrs.) Vivian Paladin

15004 Linden Ave N.
Seattle, Washington 98133
September 20, 1969

Vivian A. Paladin
Editor, MONTANA
225 N. Roberts
Helena, Montana

Dear Mrs. Paladin

I am surprised that we are so far apart on the way I wrote the Taylor Gordon piece and what you apparently expected. The sample lead, quotes, picture possibilities and so on I sent in early June were meant to show you what I had in mind, as was my question then as to whether you could give me fairly firm assurance on the article.

Okay. Let's see what can be done to salvage; I have so much work into the article, plus a considerable investment in photocopied material I had to obtain, that I'd better try.

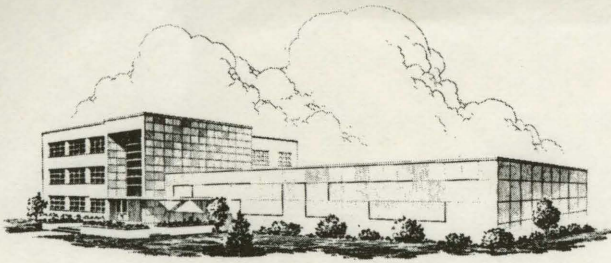
The verse of course can go; it simply was an experiment which I liked and you don't. Your qualms about the organization and the notables' lack of relevance to Taylor's story are more serious. The article as I wrote it simply provided an introduction, moved Taylor chronologically from person to person and incident to incident in the making of his career, and ended with a conclusion. Perhaps you found the verse segments so distracting this story line did not come out for you. What suggestions do you have in the way of organization?

To me, the value of the quotes from Taylor about people he met and observed on the party circuit are the same as in the memories of people who knew Lincoln. They provide social history which cannot be obtained any other way. This, it seems to me, is what oral history is about. Is it, then, that you don't find the section of quotes I used strong enough for the story, or did you feel there was not sufficient background material about the persons being quoted? (I don't know that I can make the celebrities more "relevant" to Taylor; the historical relevance I see is that this is a black man moving in white high society and these are his impressions.)

So, please do provide me all the advice you can. I'll get back to ~~your~~ article as soon as your reply as I can. One final question before we get started again: was my writing style perfectly acceptable to you?

Cordially

Ivan Doig



MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Founded 1865

225 N. ROBERTS

PHONE (406) 442-3260, EXT. 271

HELENA, MONTANA 59601

October 3, 1969

Mr. Ivan Doig
15004 Linden Avenue N
Seattle, Wash. 98133

Dear Mr. Doig:

I have done some conferring and some tall thinking since receiving your letter of September 20, and I hope now that I can be of some help. The main problem seems to be that your article did not relate enough to Taylor Gordon. Rather than getting acquainted with him as a man, he seems more to be, in your article, a showcase for telling about celebrities and for a message. I do not mean by the latter that we object to your conclusions about a black man in a white man's world. We just didn't get to know Taylor Gordon. Your MacGillvra piece, on the other hand, while written in a light-hearted manner, is an excellent portrait of the man.

I am perfectly aware that your article on Taylor Gordon might well be acceptable by some other publication, and I do not mean to sound pretentious. But for our needs, the emphasis is not right: we are more interested in the qualities of character, personality and talents which made it possible for Taylor Gordon to mingle with these people. I know that he is a truly remarkable man, and we want very much to publish about him.

If this letter can be of help, I'll be very pleased to see a revise. Let me know if you think I could be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

(Mrs.) Vivian Paladin

15004 Linden Ave N.
Seattle, Washington 98133
October 9, 1969

Vivian Paladin
Editor, MONTANA
Helena, Montana

Dear Mrs. Paladin

I think your letter of October 3 has focused your advice for me, and here's the Taylor Gordon piece. I hope you find it revised along the lines you had in mind.

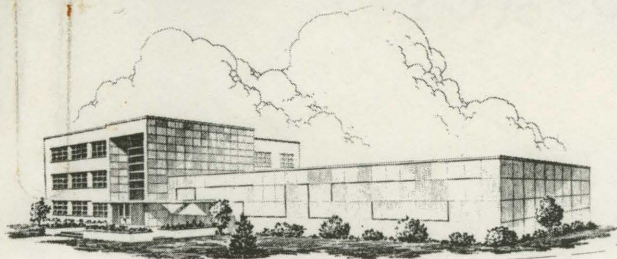
I've left in Taylor's quotes about Sinclair Lewis and the others, and have added a paragraph beforehand to emphasize what seems to me the value of his reminiscences. It may be that you still are not sold on this material (beginning on page 18), and if you're not, feel free to cut it to whatever extent you wish.

In fact, if you still want revisions sizeable enough that you think I should see them, please feel free to edit or comment in the margins of the manuscript or on a photocopy. I find it a great help to have an editor's comments right on the copy.

The piece is almost the same length as before, about 5600 words of text, I think. I can't think of anything else you should know about the revision; this version should speak for itself, and I hope our problems from here on in will be the usual ones about checking points in the manuscript. Thanks again for your guidance in the October 3 letter.

Cordially

Ivan Doig



MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Founded 1865

225 N. ROBERTS

PHONE (406) 449-2694

HELENA, MONTANA 59601

July 6, 1970

Dr. Ivan Doig
15004 Linden Avenue North
Seattle, Washington 98133

Dear Ivan:

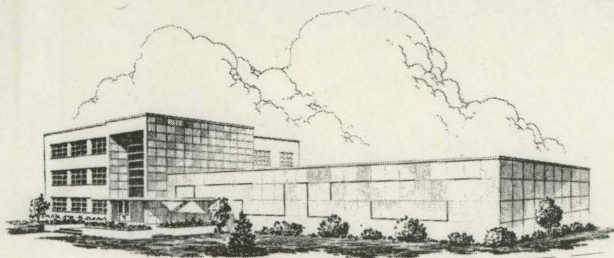
I was glad to receive your letter and to note that you made it home before the holiday rush. Your kind words about our work here are appreciated and I will see that you get a copy of our forthcoming catalog to Montana's Archives, tentatively scheduled to be in the mill by September.

Your tip concerning Taylor Gordon's papers is timely as I have not yet considered them as possibilities but agree that there is a great deal of potential there. The whole family is worth some attention and I have every chance to get the job done. I'll put it on my list.

It was a pleasure to see you again and to meet Carol. People always enjoy seeing a home-town boy make good!

Sincerely yours,

John R. Coleman
Archivist



MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Founded 1865

225 N. ROBERTS

PHONE (406) 449-2694

HELENA, MONTANA 59601

June 18, 1970

Mr. Ivan Doig
15004 Linden Avenue N.
Seattle, Washington 98133

Dear Ivan:

We are pleased to know you will be visiting the Montana Historical Society library this summer and will be glad to make available our homesteading photos of which we have many.

We look forward to your visit.

Sincerely yours,

John R. Coleman
Archivist

JRC:bt

Visited JRC June 29, '70: extensive holdings in archives, especially in mining. 6 or 7 governors' papers; has Aronson's, said Babcock burned his. Salvaged some Wellington D. Rankin papers from old building in Helena; thought might have to restrict for ten years. Very complete collection of newspapers. Some homesteading material.

JRC has only degree of kind from U of Mont; Montana history and archival administration, I think. Arranged by K. Ross Toole, who evidently pointed him towards the archivist job.

ID July 2, '70

15004 Linden Ave N.
Seattle, Wash. 98133
July 2, '70

John R. Coleman
Archivist
Montana Historical Society
Helena, Montana

Dear John

Just a note to thank you for showing us around your domain on Monday. Carol and I greatly enjoyed it, and are much impressed with what you're doing. You really have a wealth of material; please remember to send me a description of the holdings when you publish it, huh?

This may be something you've already done, but I thought I should mention it, just in case. You may know from Vivian Paladin that I'm doing an article for the magazine about Taylor Gordon; I picked up the manuscript from Vivian the other day to look over their revising and do some of my own. Taylor is the last of his family -- in WSS or any place else, I gather. My article is based on taped interviews with him, but he seems to have photos and clippings about his singing career, and he might even have correspondence. Has anyone ever approached him about leaving his materials to the archives? Maybe you know that many of his letters are in the Carl Van Vechten papers at Yale; I've been using xerox copies for this article. If they're any guide, Taylor's material likely is useful social history, offering insights into Harlem and white New York society in the 1920s.

Taylor is a little hard to deal with, as you may also know. But if you think it worthwhile, the right approach may very well persuade him to leave his materials to the archives.

As if you didn't have enough paperwork there already . . .

See you again; give us a
call if you make it to Seattle.

Ivan Doig

Jack Valenti.

For Lyndon Johnson, veteran campaigner that he is, the constituency which right now counts most is posterity; those interviews by CBS television with the former President made at least this point clear. So, for all those folks from here to wherever it is we end up who will read about the Johnson years in the White House; for the many historians and political scientists who will write the books about the LBJ era; for those tribes of schoolchildren; for the middle-aged couple from Connecticut on their first visit to Texas; for the tour group on its way to San Antonio to see the Alamo -- Lyndon Johnson is trying to pull it all together for them here on this hill in Austin, Texas.

Which is not unexpected. Former Presidents seldom are averse to monuments to themselves. Scarcely anybody is. What is remarkable about the LBJ project is how the man and the edifice are being fused together under the heat of the Johnson personality, the result shaping up finally before us as the world's biggest piece of Marisol art.

A presidential library does not loom in our national scenery as does, say, the Statue of Liberty or the Washington Monument. The four presidential libraries now in operation at the home grounds of Messrs. Hoover, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Eisenhower, and Truman have not drawn endless caravans of pilgrims to West Branch, Iowa; Hyde Park, New York; Abilene, Kansas; or Independence, Missouri.

Actually, the pilgrims could do a lot worse, and probably will

15004 Linden Ave. N.
Seattle, Washington 98133
December 29, 1970

phone 206-364-9408

Vivian Paladin
Editor
MONTANA
Montana Historical Society
225 N. Roberts
Helena, Montana

Dear Vivian

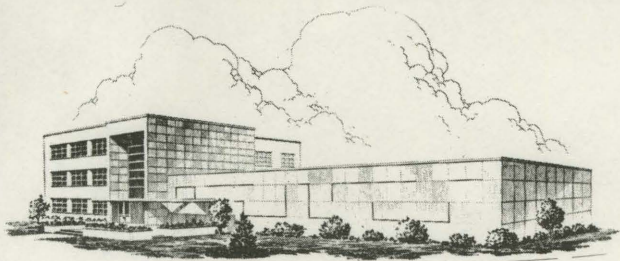
When we last got together -- last July, I guess -- you were tentatively slotting my Taylor Gordon article for your winter or spring issue, I think I remember. What's the latest plan? I'm not bugging you to use it soon, because I know how difficult it is to cram things into print; this is just a bookkeeping letter on my part, to find out how various unpublished articles stand.

Made a quick trip to White Sulphur Springs for Christmas; the weather and scenery were spectacular.

Regards

Ivan

Ivan Doig



MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Founded 1865

225 N. ROBERTS

PHONE (406) 449-2694

HELENA, MONTANA 59601

January 4, 1971

Ivan Doig
15004 Linden Avenue North
Seattle, Washington 98133

Dear Ivan:

As so often happens in this business, we have revised our plans regarding your Taylor Gordon article, and are now hoping to publish it sometime during this, 1971, volume year.

For now, I can just say that I appreciate your patience, and will let you know what is going on when our plans firm up.

Meanwhile, hope you have a good 1971.

Sincerely,

(Mrs.) Vivian Paladin, Editor

VP:br

15004 Linden Ave. N.
Seattle, Washington 98133
May 8, 1971

phone 206-364-9408

Vivian Paladin
Editor
MONTANA
225 N. Roberts
Helena, Montana

Dear Vivian

Just a note to insure that you know about Taylor Gordon's death last week. I've just written to John Coleman to tell him the photos and other papers Taylor showed me a few summers ago looked like valuable historical material, and I hope it doesn't get lost.

And naturally I'll be glad to revise verb tenses and any other references that need changing now in the article. Would you be interested in a few hundred more words near the end of the article, to add a bit more perspective now that Taylor has passed away -- or can you afford any more length?

Best regards

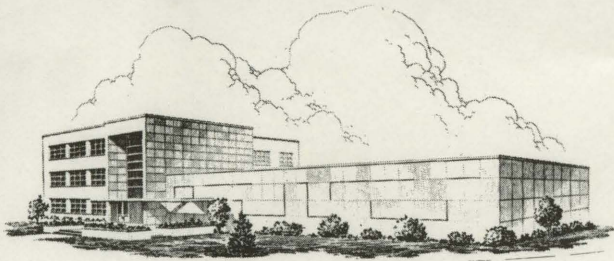
Ivan

Ivan Doig

Dear Ivan: Yes, I felt bad when I read of Taylor's death in a Kalispell paper yesterday when we were coming home from a trip to Libby/ My feelings, in fact, are a bit mixed: I am sure it would have pleased him if we had been able to publish while he lived; yet I have never felt completely gung-ho because of some of his feelings--I'm sure you know what I mean. I think you should have a chance to see the entire article as we now have it, and append a proper ending as you see fit. We will try and schedule it for the Fall or Winter issue, but that is not definite, and I think we should proceed with as much revision as you want now. Thanks for writing, and we are sending the mss to you herewith.

Cordial regards,

Ivan



MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Founded 1865

225 N. ROBERTS

PHONE (406) 449-2694

HELENA, MONTANA 59601

May 14, 1971

Dr. Ivan Doig
15004 Linden Avenue North
Seattle, Washington 98133

Dear Ivan:

We are making considerable progress on the Taylor Gordon thing although it will be some time before final disposition is accomplished (Try dividing that word sometime). Next week I will be conducting an "examination and appraisal" of his effects in co-operation with the First National Bank in White Sulphur. This is expected to result in our temporary acquisition for safekeeping of those items and papers deemed of historical value. I will try to keep you posted on developments.

Sincerely,

15004 Linden Ave. N.
Seattle, Washington 98133
April 21, 1971

phone 206-364-9408

Vivian Paladin
Editor
MONTANA
225 N. Roberts
Helena, Montana

Dear Vivian

As I try to do every half year or so, I've been checking through my files to see if there are loose ends dangling from articles I've written. I find one from the Taylor Gordon article; according to a note I wrote myself after we talked last summer, I'm to see a final version of the article for one last checking before it is published. I think this is a good idea, and have found it standard procedure when I've written for such journals as Idaho Yesterdays, Forest History, and The American West. I like to make one last check -- which by that time usually is a triple-check -- of dates, names, and other hard facts, plus comparing quotes to the tape recorded version to insure that they are precisely the same. I'm looking ahead to a summer schedule now, when I want to devote full time to a book, and would appreciate a note from you about when a checking copy might show up. If you have one ready now, this would be a good time for me to take a final look and send it back to you for once and for all. If the checking copy won't be available until later, I'll simply note into my schedule that the job will come along then.

Don't trouble yourself with a long reply; I know editors always have more useful things to do than correspond with waiting authors. Just a line or two estimating the schedule on the checking copy will straighten me away, and insure that I can get to the project for you in good time.

Incidentally, a piece I wrote will be in The American West in May. It's a bit of Puget Sound history -- a long way from your bailiwick -- but an article I had fun with.

Best regards

Ivan Doig

15004 Linden Ave. N.
Seattle, Washington 98133
May 8, 1971

phone 206-364-9408

Vivian Paladin
Editor
MONTANA
225 N. Roberts
Helena, Montana

Dear Vivian

Just a note to insure that you know about Taylor Gordon's death last week. I've just written to John Coleman to tell him the photos and other papers Taylor showed me a few summers ago looked like valuable historical material, and I hope it doesn't get lost.

And naturally I'll be glad to revise verb tenses and any other references that need changing now in the article. Would you be interested in a few hundred more words near the end of the article, to add a bit more perspective now that Taylor has passed away -- or can you afford any more length?

Best regards

Ivan Doig

15004 Linden Ave. N.
Seattle, Washington 98133
May 8, 1971

phone 206-364-9408

John R. Coleman
Archivist
Montana Historical Society
225 N. Roberts
Helena, Montana 59601

Dear John

I learned yesterday that Taylor Gordon died; probably you have already seen the obituary in the Independent-Record or somewhere. Taylor had some photos -- I think some entire scrapbooks -- and probably other papers about his singing career. I'm sure they are valuable historical material, and I hope they won't be lost. I have no idea whether Taylor left a will or had any heirs, but I sort of guess he had neither. Vivian Paladin talked with Taylor a year or so ago when he looked over an article I've written about him; perhaps he mentioned to her the disposition of his papers.

Anyway, I'm writing simply as double insurance that you do know about Taylor's materials. I'll drop a line to Mrs. Paladin too, to ask about revising my article on Taylor. Sorry I can't provide you more precise details about the papers and their disposition, but it would be a helluva crime if they are lost.

Best regards

Ivan Doig

15004 Linden Ave. N.
Seattle, Washington 98133
May 8, 1971

Ken Twichel
Twichel Funeral Home
White Sulphur Springs
Montana

Dear Kenny

It's been less than a month since I saw Taylor Gordon at Dad's funeral and we talked about him the night Carol and I were up to see you, and now I learn that he's gone, too. Taylor had some scrapbooks and other papers about his singing career which are important historical items. I've just written to John Coleman at the Montana Historical Society to remind him about Taylor's papers, and perhaps he'll manage to get them, or the local historical society will take care of them. But I'd hate like hell for the papers to fall between groups and get lost; I thought I'd ask if you know anything about the disposition of Taylor's things. Do you know if he had any heirs, or if not, who the estate administrator will be? I'm asking only so that I can prod some people to make sure those papers aren't lost; often archivists and historical societies can be pushed into doing something if a researcher such as me gives them good reasons and some information to go on.

All is well with us. My grandmother is here; she and Wally and Joyce likely will be back in WSS by the time you get this. See you in late summer, if I manage to get to Montana then.

Best

Ivan Doig

15004 Linden Ave. N.
Seattle, Wash. 98133
May 24, 1971

phone 206-364-9408

Vivian Paladin
Editor
MONTANA
225 N. Roberts
Helena, Montana 59601

Dear Vivian

Here's an edit-and-paste job on the Taylor Gordon piece, plus
a new ending.

Using the authors' bios in your latest issue, I've done a bio
for you to edit down. Let me know if you need anything else; and I
stuck in a photo, in case you need one.

best regards

Ivan Doig

IVAN DOIG was born and raised in White Sulphur Springs, Montana, the hometown of Taylor Gordon. After graduating from high school in Valier, Montana, he majored in journalism at Northwestern University, receiving his B.S.J. in 1961 and an M.S.J. in 1962. He worked in journalism for several years, including a period as assistant editor of The Rotarian magazine, before receiving his Ph.D. in U.S. frontier history from the University of Washington in 1969. He and his wife, Carol, live in Seattle, where he is a free-lance writer and she teaches journalism at Shoreline Community College. Articles by Ivan Doig have appeared in Parents', Writer's Digest, McCall's, Bell Telephone Magazine, Denver Post, Yankee, and some 40 other publications. He has had historical articles in The American West, Idaho Yesterdays, Journalism Quarterly, Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, and Forest History. His poems about the plains country have appeared in Midwest Quarterly, Word, and Brass Ring. Much of the anecdotal material in this article is from a taped interview the Doigs conducted with Taylor Gordon and his sister, Rose, in the summer of 1968. "The last time I saw Taylor was as he filed past the casket at my father's funeral on April 8, 1971," he writes. "Less than a month after that, Taylor was gone, too."



MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Founded 1865

ROBERTS AT SIXTH AVENUE

PHONE (406) 442-3260, EXT. 271

HELENA, MONTANA 59601

June 3, 1971

We appreciate the opportunity of reading the manuscript you have just submitted to us. Because we have many other duties not related to the magazine, we may not report to you as speedily as many magazines. At press time, particularly in the months of March, June, September and December, it is virtually impossible to do any manuscript reading; otherwise we try to make an initial report to you within thirty days.

If a situation exists where you must hear from us sooner, please advise and we'll make every effort to assist you.

Needless to say, we have tremendous backlogs of article material, but we are constantly searching for new approaches, fresh subjects, and better quality of research and writing.

We appreciate very much your efforts in our behalf.

Sincerely yours,

Vivian Paladin

VP/dn

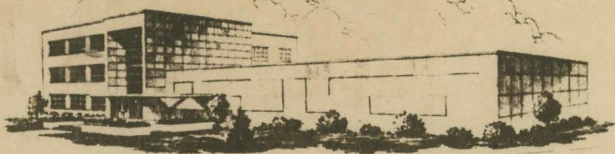
(Mrs.) Vivian Paladin, Editor
MONTANA, the Magazine of WESTERN HISTORY

Dear Ivan: I have just glanced at TAYLOR GORDON, but can tell you have updated this, and indeed added to its weight. I am sure you're aware that John Coleman is processing some things from his sad estate, although I don't know the extent of it nor its usability at this juncture. At any rate, I hope you will bear with me until I have time to read your new version (I have just lost, by husband transfer, my only helper so I'm going crazier than usual). Let us hope we can deal fully and fairly now soon with poor old Taylor.

Best,

Vivian

Ivan - Thought you might be interested - JRC.



MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Founded 1865

225 N. ROBERTS

PHONE (406) 449-2694

HELENA, MONTANA 59601

March 30, 1972

Robert Hemenway, Associate Professor
School of American Studies
University of Wyoming
Box 3334, University Station
Laramie, Wyoming 82070

Dear Mr. Hemenway:

I have your letter of March 27, 1972, requesting information on the content and status of the Taylor Gordon papers and will be happy to aid your research, now and in the future, in any way I can.

There is no catalogue to the materials as yet; however, we are fortunate in having benefit of preliminary sorting and evaluation by Mr. Mauck Brammer, a very able volunteer, and a copy of his notes on the collection is enclosed. Mr. Brammer took time from his own research projects to compile them specifically for answering your letter. Mauck was quite well-acquainted with Taylor and lends a good deal of valuable insight toward the collection's worth. His notes are the best answer we have as to content.

A usage restriction exists by the very nature of the deposit agreement but I don't consider it insurmountable. The papers are here on a safekeeping basis only. Actual ownership is still vested in the estate and final disposition is a long way off. I have been in touch with administrative officers and feel use arrangements can be made, especially if some benefit would accrue to the estate. Also, an intent to conduct further biographical research has been expressed by Dr. Ivan Doig but I don't think your respective approaches seriously overlap. The administrators must be concerned, necessarily, with the collection's potential merchantability but I'm sure they would allow serious research if properly approached.

I hope this information is useful, and let me know if there is anything we can do to further aid your research.

Sincerely,

John R. Coleman
Archivist

JRC/hs

Enclosure

930 East State St.
Helena, Montana 59601
March 30, 1972

To John Coleman
Archivist, Montana State Historical Society

These notes may help to answer Professor Hemenway's inquiry of March 27 about the Taylor Gordon documents. They are derived from my nearly complete first sorting of the Gordon family papers now in your vaults.

As I understand it, this estate has not yet been settled. Taylor Gordon left his manuscript to the Library of Congress and the other papers and materials to the State of Montana. With the First National Bank of White Sulphur Springs, particularly Don Powell, as administrator, there are three estates to be cleared up, that of Robert, of Rose, and of Taylor. Both physical and literary property are involved and there are outstanding obligations to be satisfied; and the public administrator, Mrs. Jenny Minder, has been approached on the subject.

The material you brought to Helena for safekeeping consists of eighteen archive storage cartons. They do not contain the manuscript of the novel Daonda, an unpublished manuscript which Gordon claimed was plagiarized by the Viking Press and John Steiⁿbeck in The Grapes of Wrath. That manuscript, as you know, is in a safe-deposit vault in New York and has been specifically willed to the Library of Congress. Without further examination, this would not necessarily include publishing rights.

Much of the material in your collection belongs to the remains of Rose B. Gordon. In addition to being a local historian, she was so loved by all that two full boxes contain nothing but greeting cards and notes to her. There are several manuscripts by Rose, some fragments of attempts at romantic stories but mainly short biographical and historical items centering about W. S. S., Martinsdale, and Ringling and the people she knew there.

The most substantial work by Rose is Gone Are the Days, which exists in an early draft and two final copies. It is essentially the story of her Mother, beginning with the start westward in 1881, re^counting the

the early experiences of the family in Montana, and eventually moving into sketches of events and people important to Rose. There is evidence that with the help of Grace Stone Coates she attempted to interest the ^{Caldwell} Caldwell Printers but they pleaded too many prior commitments. It is my guess that this manuscript and other papers by Rose should be issued in serial form by the local newspaper.

The material by Taylor Gordon, while less in amount, provides much greater publishing possibilities. There are indications that he tried for a reissue of B66m To Be through Professor Hemenway and also vanity presses, but it would appear that he expected to recoup much of the fortunes he felt cheated out of, and that he got no where. Its copyright, if there was a renewal, which we should find out, is willed to the State of Montana. If the work was renewed in its 28th year, it might fall into that group of works automatically extended until a new copyright law is enacted.

There are surprisingly few scraps about his musical career, a few programs, an attempt or two at composition, and two or three photographs. There are several papers relating to his attempt to establish the Gordon junk as antiques and to set himself up in that business in his later years. There is even a lot of material of a correspondence course in typing.

The main item is a manuscript dated Dec. 23, 1970, called BTB Seq., which begins, "This is the second half of my life story... Ho! Ho! What's he doin' now?" One copy in a three-ring binder looks like a final draft with corrections and indications for the typist, but there is no final typescript. There are, instead, a very confusing mess of earlier drafts, almost impossible to piece together, that were rolled up in bits, held by rubber bands, and stuck in bread and grocery sacks.

The 131 pages of orderly manuscript, double-spaced typing in the binder, detail the growth of his persecution complex into paranoia and complete mental collapse during about twelve years of incarceration in mental hospitals. It is incredibly remembered, and the work should be a publishable item if edited by a literary psychiatrist. And a full study of Daonda in relation to The Grapes of Wrath needs to be done.

In addition to the above, there are a number of letters written and received while he was under restraint, one very eloquent on the ^{Lektrovitz} New York State Attorney General pleading his case.

These shorter bits are of interest:

"Emanuel Taylor Gordon was born...." is a two-page publicity release scribbled in pencil with an attached typed page about J. Rosamund Johnson, his accompanist.

"Born in White Sulphur Spgs. April 29th 1893".... is a four-page pencilled autobiography to 1935. It fills in some details between Born To Be and BTB Seq.

"To Senator John McClellan, D. Ark," dated October 1, 1955, is an account of his imagined drafting by the army secret service to help catch his persecutors through "an experiment in Electronics," obviously that radio in his head that the networks had bugged.

"To----- Dear Sir: The time has come..." dated April 28, 1959, from W. S. S., is a twelve-page typed letter recounting his struggles from about 1939 until he was allowed to return to Montana, Feb 6, 1959. This must have been written in a reasonably calm period, for it is quite objective compared to BTB Seq.

There is also a letter to J. Edgar Hoover, dated May 8, 1959, enclosing a two-page "Summary of My Experiences," ending with the hope that he might now resume his musical career. He did, with a few concerts in W.S. S., Great Falls, etc.

Among the papers are many state and regional clippings, with little (and surprisingly so) about the Negro problem. There is a sixteen-page pen-written paper called "The History of the Negro Race" It is unsigned and handwriting is hard to identify. It is so factual that it sounds like a newspaper copied from printed sources.

With several copies of his 1967 The Man Who Built the Stone Castle there is some manuscript. A number of letters begging assistance from the wealthy indicate that he got little or none.

While my New York experience was in educational publishing, I believe a publishable book or ^{two} could be made out of Born To Be, Daonda and The Grapes of Wrath, and BTB Seq. with the usual editing and bridging. I had once hoped I might do it, but with my present commitments in Montana archaeology, I believe the task should fall to a younger man.

Mr. Hemenway may be interested to know that Ivan Doig of Seattle is interested in Taylor Gordon and has written a short biography 'Taylor Gordon, A Montana Song,' 2 several copies of which are in the Gordon papers.

Sincerely,

Mauck Brammer
Mauck Brammer

Taylor G: last time I saw -
three slatted bars of funeral
home. At graveside, people
didn't stay b. bitter wind.
OO days later, T & G was
deft. Buried a few rows
^{west}ing my father, closer
2. hart y. valley

~~Indians calling themselves~~
"people" - Indian Puritans

Ap 3, '72 -- Vivian Paladin called, in reply to my letter. Asked if I knew Taylor Gordon is dead, and didn't I think we'd need an update. Told her I knew, and she already has an update from me. She said they pay about $1\frac{1}{2}$ ¢/word; after bit of hassle, we agreed on \$100 for the article. Asked me to keep her apprised of my address when we go abroad; said the article likely would appear in '73 volume year.

My reaction: she still seems to have shaky ideas about the article, which probably would resolved if she'd ever sit down and read it from end to end. Asked me if I preferred to have the piece back, told her ~~now~~, I can't mess with it any more.

52 Egerton Crescent
London S.W. 3, England
November 24, 1972

Vivian Paladin
Editor
MONTANA
Roberts at Sixth
Helena, Montana 59601

Dear Vivian

When we last talked about the Taylor Gordon article, you asked me to provide you my London address after we got over here. The above address will last at least through February 1, and from now until we return to Seattle in late spring any mail sent to our Seattle address will be forwarded to us promptly by a diligent friend.

Whenever the Gordon piece is in the offing, I'd like a chance to update my author's bio a bit. Also, I do hope you don't hold any qualms about the research bolstering the article. I was painstaking about it, and back home in the files is an annotated version giving solid sources for every thing in the article. I only mention this because I know that when articles are on file for awhile, they somehow fall under suspicions that they're not as sound as the idea originally sounded.

London is a delight, although at least as expensive as the scare stories say. Carol and I are waiting with interest for the first report from Prentice-Hall on how well our NEWS: A CONSUMER'S GUIDE is selling -- or, perish the thought, isn't selling.

I hope all is well with you. Happy holidays.

regards

Ivan Doig

15004 Linden Ave. N.
Seattle, Wash. 98133
March 30, 1972

phone 206-361-9408

Vivian Paladin
Editor
MONTANA
Montana Historical Society
Roberts at Sixth Ave.
Helena, Montana 59601

Dear Vivian --

Prospects are that Carol and I may spend the better part of a year in Great Britain, assuming the final details of her sabbatical come through okay. I'm tidying up financial items in anticipation; would you put through a check for me for the Taylor Gordon article at your earliest convenience?

All is well here. We're looking forward to imminent arrival of page proofs on our news media book, which will be out in August. Hope life is treating you well.

Regards

Ivan Doig

17021 10th Ave. NW
Seattle, Wash. 98177
April 2, 1975

phone 206-542-6658

Vivian Paladin
Editor, MONTANA
Roberts at Sixth
Helena, Montana 59601

Dear Vivian

I'm doing a periodic sweep of the files to see how unpublished articles are faring, and my piece on Taylor Gordon is far and away the longest-standing. I think it's evident to both of us by now, Vivian, that the article isn't right for you and never will see print in MONTANA. Why this is so, I haven't a clue. Looking back over our correspondence, I find you've been uneasy all along. There were the changes you allowed Taylor to make, then my revision after his death, then a fairly inept revision by one of your staff assistants which I had to revise in turn. I don't know what the problem has been, since I'm able to document everything in the article. In all the writing I've done -- more than a hundred articles for national magazines, about a dozen scholarly journal pieces, and two books going on three -- there's never been anything similar to this situation.

Anyway, isn't it time we called it quits on both ends, as far as this article is concerned? I would appreciate having it back -- that is, having it released to me.

No hard feelings in any of this. I'm simply more puzzled than bothered. Maybe we can jibe better on some other project sometime.

regards

Ivan Doig

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	TRANSFER AND CLAIM NUMBER		976
	ORGANIZATIONAL ENTITY	CODE	5117
	TITLE	MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY	
DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT	PAYABLE TO	
Manuscript: TAYLOR GORDON	100.00	Ivan Doig 15004 Linden Ave. No. Seattle, Washington 98183	
	TOTAL AMOUNT PAID		
	100.00		



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MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

225 NORTH ROBERTS • HELENA, MONTANA 59601

M E S S A G E

TO

Ivan Doig

15004 Linden Ave. No.

Seattle, Washington 98133

DATE

April 4, 1972

Vendor Invoice

Please sign the enclosed vendor invoice
(original and first duplicate) by the
red "X" and return it in the enclosed
self-addressed envelope. You may keep
the second duplicate for your records.
Thank you for your cooperation.

BY

Bonnie J. Sears, Accountant

R E P L Y

DATE

April 5, '72

2 copies of vendor invoice
for \$100 (Taylor Gordon MS)
signed and enclosed.

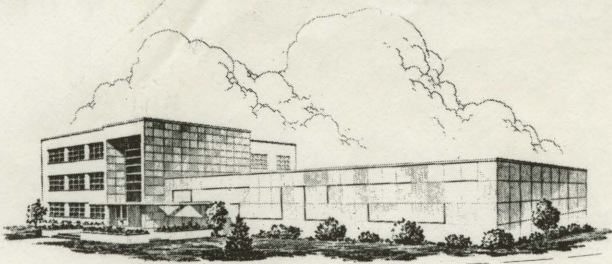
SIGNED

Ivan Doig

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VENDOR'S NAME AND ADDRESS		BILLED TO
Ivan Doig 15004 Linden Ave. No. Seattle, Washington 98133		Montana Historical Society 225 North Roberts Helena, Montana 59601

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GRAND TOTAL		100.00

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Authorized Signature			Vendor's Name	Ivan Doig
Date			Date Processed	April 4, 1972
			Vendor's Signature	<i>YOUR COPY</i>
			Title	



MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Founded 1865

225 N. ROBERTS

PHONE (406) 449-2694

HELENA, MONTANA 59601

April 10, 1976

Mr. Ivan Doig
17021 10th Ave. NW
Seattle, Washington 98177

Dear Ivan:

As a submitter a few times myself, I can understand the puzzlement, to say nothing of the frustration, you express in your recent letter. Yes, the Taylor Gordon piece has always bothered me, and of course on reflection I know that I contributed to the total murkiness of this situation. Now that he's dead, one becomes somewhat more comfortable, but he is still a touchy subject. I agree with you that we have agonized long enough, and I return the revised version herewith.

I am serious when I say, though, that I hope you have not written us off as a potential vehicle for Doig articles. You have been, aside from that, unfailingly courteous and I appreciate that. Before that last sentence I should have said that I think you write well!

It has been a very long day, and so I hope this letter hangs together well enough for you to know how I feel regarding this matter.

Best of good wishes,

P.S. If there is other material--illustrative, for instance--that you furnished, I hope you will let me know. But be specific, for we gathered quite a body of pictures from Taylor himself and from other sources,



AMERICAN HERITAGE PUBLISHING CO., INC.

1221 Avenue of the Americas, New York, New York 10020

April 12, 1976

Ms. Ann Nelson
5015 Ivanhoe Place, N.E.
Seattle, Washington 98105

Dear Ms. Nelson:

Thanks for your query of March 22, addressed
to Oliver Jensen (who is no longer with the magazine.)

We feel that Taylor Gordon is too obscure a
figure to suit our purposes, although we admire
Ivan Doig's work.

Sincerely,

E. M. Halliday
Chairman, Board of Editors

EMH/jl

16 December 1977

Ann--

THOS You know that the story of Taylor Gordon ^{years 1} has haunted in and out of my work on the Montana book this past year--that every so often in the storyline my younger self simply comes upon him, grinning and tragic, a wraith from Harlem somehow wafted into a Montana cowtown. With the Montana manuscript starting its way through the Harcourt Brace assembly line, I think the time has come to begin querying to see if Taylor at last can get his due, in a magazine piece.

~~Last year's re-issue of his book, BORN TO BE, is the best assay of him and his spurt of fame. But to summarize for an editor:~~ Taylor Gordon was born, the son of former slaves, in White Sulphur Springs, Montana, in 1893, and died there in 1971. As a young man, he became an occasional handyman or factotum for John Ringling, the circus heir who lived almost baronially in that area of Montana. Traveling on Ringling's private railroad car, Taylor got out and up in the world, and one time in Boston, Ringling staked him to a few singing lessons. Gordon proved to have a colossal voice for Negro spirituals (I have some trouble calling them "black" spirituals) and formed a concert team with J. Rosamond Johnson, brother of the well-known black writer, James Weldon Johnson. Gordon and Johnson made it big, performing at Carnegie Hall, touring Europe; critics began to call Gordon the "latest rival" to Paul Robeson as a singer of spirituals.

The money days lasted from about 1925 until the Depression, and while they did, Gordon consorted with the black intelligentsia of the "Harlem Renaissance" and wrote BORN TO BE with the paternal help of novelist Carl Van Vechten. He also went through money like clean shirts, and early in the Depression ended up herding sheep back in Montana. Somewhere in there began the paranoia which ruled the last half of his life.

He became convinced that John Steinbeck swiped the idea for THE GRAPES OF WRATH from him. (Gordon's publisher for BORN TO BE had been Pascal Covici, who became Steinbeck's lifelong editor.) He also maintained that he had been cheated out of great inventions, and that the government had electronically bugged his head; he spent some years in New York mental institutions during the late Forties and early Fifties. (Robert Hemensway's introduction to the reissued BORN TO BE is instructive on all this, although Hemensway is shaky on the Montana backdrop of Gordon's life.)

Yet Gordon was the farthest thing from a raving loony. Rather, he was

a cordial, charming man, with a considerable gift of insight and a crystalline memory. When I interviewed him at length about ten years ago, he could recite remarkably fine detail of the New York scene in the 1920's (I'm attaching a page or so of excerpts as samples) and did so willingly. On the other hand, he wouldn't talk at all about his later life--the paranoia period.

So, Taylor Gordon went to the end of his days along a path flagstoned with ironies. He was the one creative artist ever spawned by his hometown of White Sulphur Springs (a place he loved deeply and uncritically, incidentally), yet he was also merely a local "character," and moreover the only black man in town. He had remarkably valuable lore in his head, but couldn't keep himself delusion-free enough to set it onto paper. And he died in May of 1971, after the great circle of striving-fame-decline-disarray, back in the pioneer cabin where he was born.

Given my background of having known Taylor Gordon in the years when I was growing up, and the material I've gathered on our mutual hometown during my years of work on my own book, the article I see in this is summed up in the working title: "A Town Big Enough for the Two of Us?" It would be an exploratory narrative across two generations of a Western town, along such lines as these:

--That both Gordon and I have mulled White Sulphur Springs, Montana, and our upbringings there, to write books about the place, and have come up with versions about as different as Oz (his) and Gopher Prairie (mine).

--That he, a black man and a poor man in a town not notably kind on either matters of race or poverty, found it the one place he could live congenially, while I as a lower-middle class bookish striver found it the prime place I could not live and work.

--That, in its somewhat bizarre way, the American system found each of us there in our thwarted lineages and zoomed us out sideways to fresh chance: Gordon, of a financially-and-socially hopeless family of small-town blacks, was granted celebrityhood, New York dazzle, the affections of Harlem ladies; I, from a line of homesteaders and cowboys, was given the propulsion of education, scholarships, jobs at desks where writing is done.

--That, ineluctably, our orbits began to cross: I sought to interview and write about him for posterity's sake, and succeeded; he sought to influence that portrait of himself to posterity, and doubtless succeeded as well.

These, then, are some of the ideas perking toward an article. I think it will make an unusual piece, and a mellow and thoughtful one. The documentation is virtually ideal--my own hours of taped interview with Gordon, copies of his letters from the Van Vechten collection at Yale, his own book, and all the background I've accumulated in the work on my own book. So, let's see what you can do; and of course, if you find an editor intrigued enough with the topic and general story line, I'll happily refine the article proposal itself.

6 May 1977

Ann--

C
O
P
Y

You know that the story of Taylor Gordon has haunted in and out of my work on the Montana book -- that every so often in the storyline my younger self simply comes upon him, grinning and tragic, a wraith from Harlem somehow wafted into a Montana cowtown. I think the time has come to begin querying to see if Taylor at last can get his due.

Last year's re-issue of his book, BORN TO BE, is the best assay of him and his spurt of fame. But to summarize for an editor: Taylor Gordon was born, the son of former slaves, in White Sulphur Springs, Montana, in 1893, and died there in 1971. As a young man, he became an occasional handyman or factotum for John Ringling, the circus heir who lived almost baronially in that area of Montana. Traveling on Ringling's private railroad car, Taylor got out and up in the world, and one time in Boston, Ringling staked him to a few singing lessons. Gordon proved to have a colossal voice for Negro spirituals (I have trouble calling them "black" spirituals) and formed a concert team with J. Rosamond Johnson, brother of the well-known black writer, James Weldon Johnson. Gordon and Johnson made it big, performing at Carnegie Hall, touring Europe; critics began to call Gordon the "latest rival" to Paul Robeson as a singer of spirituals.

The money days lasted from about 1925 until the Depression, and while they did, Gordon consorted with the black intelligentsia of the "Harlem Renaissance" and wrote BORN TO BE with the paternal help of novelist Carl Van Vechten. He also went through money like clean shirts, and early in the Depression ended up herding sheep back in Montana. Somewhere in there began the paranoia which ruled the last half of his life.

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So, Taylor Gordon went to the end of his days along a path flagstoned with ironies. He was the one creative artist ever spawned by his hometown of White Sulphur Springs (a place he deeply loved, incidentally), yet he was also merely a local "character," and moreover the only black man in town. He had remarkably valuable history and lore in his head, but couldn't keep himself delusion-free enough to set them onto paper. And he died, after the great circle of striving-fame-decline-disarray, back in the pioneer cabin where he was born.

The article I see in this is summed up in the ironic, perhaps sardonic, working title I've put on it: "A Town Big Enough for the Two of Us?" It would be an exploratory narrative across two generations of a Western town, along such lines as these:

--That both Gordon and I have mulled White Sulphur Springs, Montana, and our upbringings there, to write books about the place, and have come up with versions as different as Oz and Gopher Prairie.

--That he, a black man and a poor man in a town not notably kind on either matters of race or poverty, found it the one place he could live congenially, while I as a lower-middle class bookish striver found it the prime place I could not live.

--That, in its somewhat bizarre way, the American system found each of us there in our thwarted lineages and zoomed us out sideways to fresh chance: Gordon, of a financially-and-socially hopeless family of small-town blacks, was granted celebrityhood, New York dazzle, the affections of Harlem ladies; I, from a line of homesteaders and cowboys, was given the propulsion of education, scholarships, jobs at desks where writing is done.

--That, ineluctably, our orbits began to cross: I sought to interview and write about him for posterity's sake, and succeeded; he sought to influence that portrait of himself to posterity, and succeeded.

These, then, are some of the ideas perking toward an article. You know that I'll be spending time in White Sulphur Springs this summer researching the Montana book; naturally, that will be a time when any further work toward a piece of this sort could be done. And of course, if you find an editor intrigued enough with the topic and general story angle, I'll happily refine the article proposal itself.

Excerpts from an interview with Taylor Gordon, July, 1968:

We'd get down in Greenwich Village and Sinclair Lewis, in his apartment--say, that Sinclair Lewis, he was somebody. You know, he could sing more spirituals than I could. Oh, we used to get down there three-four clock in the mornin'...and we'd end up singin' songs, after talkin' all about Marx and all about the politics of the world...

A woman was tellin' me one time, she says, "Taylor, I would marry you, you're a lovely man, but you're such--colored people are such lousy providers." I said, "What do you mean?" "Well, if they marry a beautiful woman, they can't take care of them. They won't, positively won't take care of them." I says, "They won't take care of them? They couldn't take care of them if they wanted to." I says, "Where do they get the money from? They're always squeezed out of any place they's any money, you unnerstand what I mean? The only colored people made any money was a prizefighter, or a political man, or some burglar."

Father Divine came up there durin' the Depression, when everybody was broke, and a lot of people would go to Father Divine and get the best meal in the world for 35 cents, see. And you'd be surprised--white, black, blue, green and the other, they'd eat in Father Divine's, because when you couldn't eat downtown you could go to Father Divine's and get a whole half a chicken. You could get a meal you couldn't pay \$2 for downtown, for 35 cents, including ice cream dessert...And he had 'em lined up, I mean you'd thought a baseball game was goin' on.

Father Divine must have been about five feet five or six, couldn't have been much more, and he must have weighed about 180 pounds, and he always kept his head shaved, like Jack Johnson the prize fighter.... And he was kind of a copper brown, oak brown. And he had very good features, and he didn't seem to age. I seen him over 20 years, and he always seemed to look about the same....

I wouldn't have written BORN 'TO BE if it hadn't been for Carl (Van Vechten). When I went to Europe, why, goin' around London I would see all these sights and I'd write back to Carl, and he'd read the letter to the group...So he wrote me back and he said, "Your letters are such a tremendous success at the parties," he says, "you've gotta write a book when you come back."

I said, "Carl, I can't write a book, I can't even spell."

"Don't worry about the spelling," he says, "you write the book."

...I would write it between midnight and six o'clock in the morning, because that's the time Harlem is the quietest and then nobody would bother me....I wrote it longhand, see, and when it come to typin' it out, I got Edna (Thomas). Edna had a Boston education, she was a very cultured woman....So she started typing my book, and Edna'd say, "You can't put that down that way. That's just not so." "You put it down that way anyhow," I'd say. "Oh, my God," she'd say, "it'll be throwed in the wastepaper basket."

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18 December '77

Ann--

Taylor Gordon revisited (and retyped). Let's indeed try it on Robert Shnayerson at QUEST/78, making these points to him:

--That Suzanne Mantell of the Harper's editorial staff suggested shooting it his way.

--That what I have in mind is not an excerpt from the Montana book, or in any way connected.

--Call his attention to the Covarrubias illustrations in BORN TO BE, and add that ~~more~~ photos are available, as other illustration, from the Montana Historical Society.

Seems to me there's an article in each of these copies of QUEST which are in the genre of what I would do with Taylor Gordon--Peter Matthiessen's "Return to Bladensfield" in Sept/Oct., and Christopher Finch's "Growing Up with Bud" in Jan/Feb; have a look, and cite them to Shnayerson if it feels right to you.

Since Shnayerson is another New York-based editor, perhaps a NYTimes writing sample would be best to send him--the jogging one, maybe, or maybe it and the Montana travel piece?

Anyway, here's the stuff. Go go.

ivan

April 6, 1985 *Lowell Rte*
Martinsdale, Montana
59053

Dear Ivan,

I have been working on a short biography of Grace Stone Coates and a reprint of some of her work and am to the stage of trying to find a publisher. I took it to MarkK Thompson of the Mountain Press, who rejected it because it "wasn't their type of thing..." and they were afraid there wouldn't be any profit in it. However, in the text of the biography I mentioned that Grace had helped (among many) Taylor Gordon. One of the gals at Mt. Press questioned this and further mentioned that you had done some work on Taylor. This is all a very long way to say that I thought you might like to see a poem that GSC wrote about him. I have some reference to him in a couple of letters as well.

Have enjoyed your books, especially the first for obvious reasons, and some time when you are in the area would like to have ours autographed.

Sincerely,

Lee Rosted
Lee Rosted

29 April '85

Dear Lee--

I appreciated the Grace Stone Coates poem and information. It's not clear at this point whether I'll ever do anything with my Taylor Gordon material or not. I trust you know that Rich Roeder, MSU history prof now working in Helena for the Lt. Gov., is a real Coates buff, and is to talk about her at the Pacific Northwest History conference in Helena in mid-May.

best regards. Maybe we can arrange
sometime by way of Theresa Buckingham
for me to sign your books.

Dear Mr. Merriam:

The Range strikes me as good. And it gave me an idea. Here, by the way, is a letter from Countee Collum. The idea is this. Taylor Gordon is preparing a book for Knopf. He was ordered to do it without reference to a dictionary, and without letting one human being correct a word. If it is as funny as his letters - and it will be - it will be great. He writes me for instance (when I asked him to please confine himself to letters that I could drop without blowing myself up)

"The reason I write the kind of letters I do is because I am so healthy. Most writers are always sick in bed half the time. I will have to catch me a bad malosie and be a writer. It wouldn't be any tougher than this singing job. "

If you do institute the range ask Taylor to contribute. He, at least, sacrificed 6 heifers, once, to his fear of ghosts, and it is a good story. You see Taylor is a Montana boy, and he knows a lot beside spirituals.

I think the idea of The Range is good, and it wont be so hard not to be taken in. Let me help, there. There are ways of checking up on people.

The "too-modest" matter. No, really, where I am sure I am cock-sure; and I am very glad indeed that you took the trouble to say all you did for my reassurance. It is not at all that I want praise, but that I do not think any one knows much about criticism. But if I am free to express myself as I feel, and as vigorously

In another letter (can't find it now) she says she had to tell Manning to quit writing except on revision because it made Henderson angry.

GRACE STONE COATES
MONTANA

by H.G. Merriam,

of Montana,

Montana.

line.
am that
suspend
there are
Certain
no "torrents of peace
prolong
torrents of pain
however that
torrents of peace
there

TO TAYLOR GORDON

By Grace Stone Coates

Over the shriveled grass
Tattoo of saving rain,
Drumming of drops that roll,
Lessen, suspend, prolong;
So, from your spirit, pass
Over my thirsty soul
Torrents of peace and pain,
Quickening floods of song.

These four lines
would go
admirably to music.

Gordon, negro tenor, was born in White Sulphur Springs, Montana,
his father took him east for his musical education. Both parents
White Sulphur Springs and ~~is~~ is within fifty or so miles of
Mrs. Coates writes me: " 'Mammy' Taylor Gordon (sings)

~~in a poem~~ --- took his little verse with
apparent delight, --- If I could get Taylor into
verse - the real Taylor, peering thru the superimposed
culture, the sound artist, the wobbly philosopher -
Mr. Mauck would jump at it."

I suppose that can be only confidential.

H.S.M.

Over the arched grass
Tattoo of saving rain,
Dreaming of drops that roll,
Lesser, answer, prolong;
So, from your spirit, pass
Over my thirty soul
Torrents of peace and pain,
Quickening floods of song.

Have you seen
anything of mine?

Taylor Gordon, reporter, was born in White Sulphur Springs, Montana
and is living at his mother's home in the same town.
White Sulphur Springs and Taylor are within fifty miles of
each other. Mrs. Taylor lives in the same town.