

STATE GUIDE

WYOMING

by DANA MCCULLOUGH

WYOMING ISN'T AMONG America's most metropolitan states (its largest urban area has just over 90,000 residents), but it is one of the most progressive—at least as far as women's rights go. Its citizens enforced female suffrage in local elections 50 years before Uncle Sam caught on (though their main motive was garnering votes for statehood, which finally came in 1890). The Equality State also claims America's first female juror, court bailiff, judge and state governor.

Of course, Wyoming is known for more than egalitarianism. It's also home to our first national park (Yellowstone), a strong mining industry, and thoroughfares for westward-bound pioneers. The Oregon, Overland, Mormon, Bozeman and Bridger trails passed through the state; more than 400,000 travelers used them from about 1841 to 1868.

Shoshone, Arapaho, Crow and Cheyenne Indians lived in the area many years before the first white American reached it in 1807. Most of what's now Wyoming became part of Nebraska Territory in 1854; other portions belonged to Washington and Utah. Northern Wyoming went to Dakota Territory in 1861; Idaho got the southern part in 1863.

Despite its location in the path of migrants, Wyoming's population didn't begin booming until around 1868, when it became a US territory and the Union Pacific Railroad reached its capital, Cheyenne. Chinese, Irish and Mexican laborers built the railroad, which drew Midwestern settlers, Texas cattlemen, Idaho Mormons and Finnish immigrants. Most of today's Wyomingites have German, English, Irish, American Indian, Norwegian or Swedish ancestry.

EVERYBODY COUNTS

Most of Wyoming's residents have been counted in US censuses since 1870, during the territory days. Before then, you'll find some Uintah County residents in the 1850 census for Utah Territory. Settlers in eastern Wyoming may be in the "unorganized land" category of the 1860 Nebraska census (find this indexed in the Wyoming Census database at subscription site Ancestry.com <ancestry.com>). Wyoming's 1890 census was destroyed in a fire, except for the special veterans census.

In addition, you'll find an 1869 territorial census at the Family History Library (FHL) <www.familysearch.org> and the state archives (see the Toolkit box for contact information). The archives also have 1875 and 1878 head counts for Cheyenne. Wyoming took three state censuses: 1905, 1915 and 1925. Only the 1905 records survived, and they're at the state archives. A 1938 and 1939 census of the Wind River Indian reservation is at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) <archives.gov> and the FHL; it includes some genealogical information.

VITAL TRUTHS

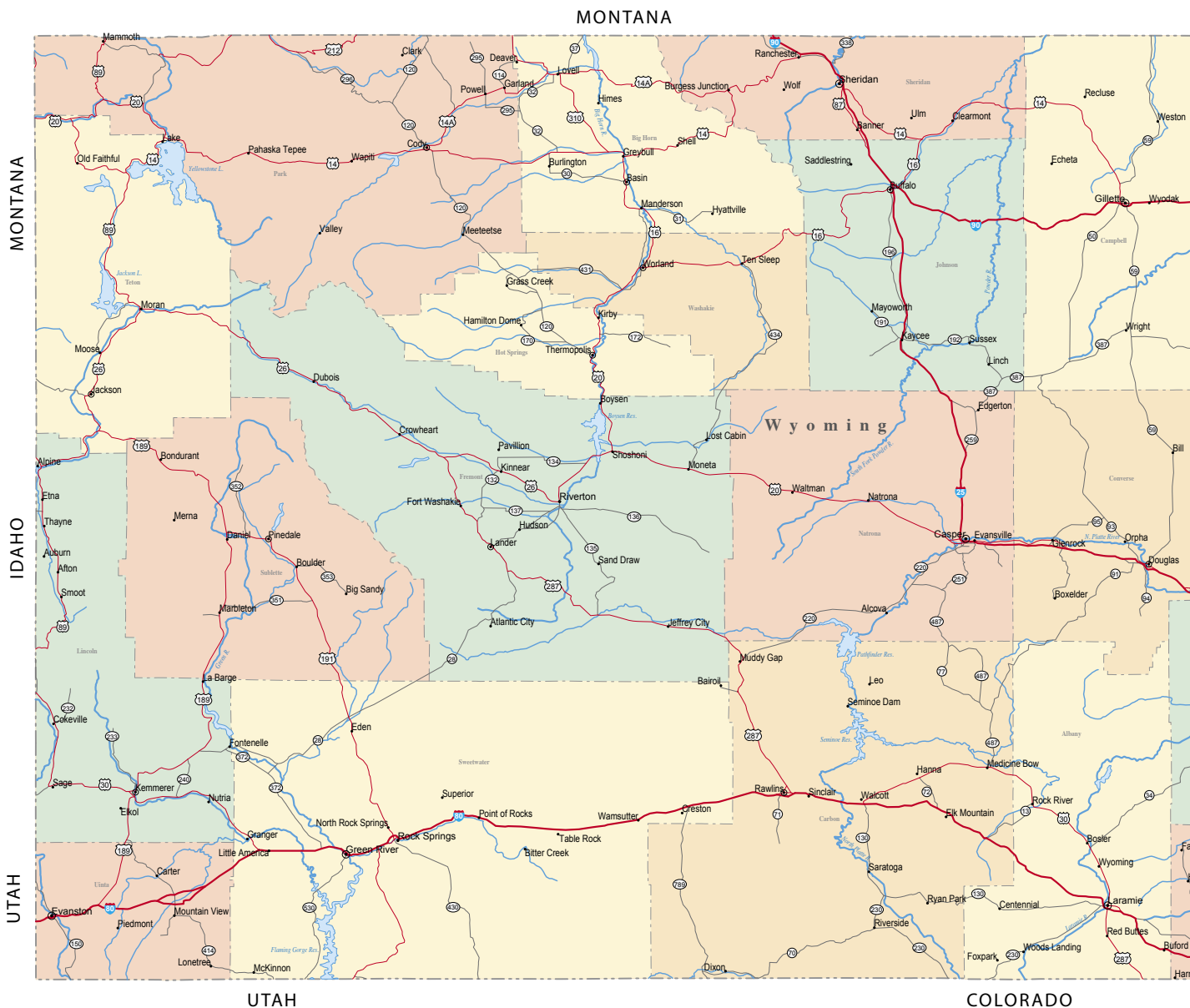
It may not seem fair, but finding vital records for your Equality State ancestors can be a daunting task. The state began recording birth and death data in 1909 and marriages and divorces in 1941. Death, marriage and divorce records less than 50 years old are restricted to immediate family. Birth records are also closed for 100 years—making only a few years' worth available. Request older records from the state archives and restricted ones, if you qualify, from the vital statistics department (see the Fast Facts box).

FAST FACTS

- ★ **Statehood:** 1890
- ★ **First federal census:** 1870
- ★ **Statewide birth and death records begin:** 1909
- ★ **Statewide marriage records begin:** 1941
- ★ **Public-land state**
- ★ **Counties:** 23
- ★ **Contact for vital records:** Vital Statistics Services, 2300, Capitol Ave., Cheyenne, WY, 82002, (307) 777-7591, <health.wyo.gov/admin/vitalstatistics/vital-record/>

WYOMING

In all fairness, finding Wyoming ancestors may be a bit more challenging than in more-populous states.



timeline

1803

The United States acquires part of Wyoming in the Louisiana Purchase

1804

Lewis and Clark meet Shoshone woman Sacajewean

1834

Wyoming's first permanent trading post opens at Fort Laramie

1863

The Daily Telegraph starts publication at Fort Bridger

1872

Yellowstone is designated America's first national park

1877

The Wind River Reservation opens to Shoshone and Arapahoe Indians

WYOMING



SOUTH DAKOTA

NEBRASKA



A few counties kept vital records before 1909; they'll be with county clerks or at the state archives. The archives also have some delayed birth certificates for those born between 1868 and 1895. FamilySearch.org has an index to some marriage records (1877–1920).

If you're lucky, your ancestors' nuptials are among the 913,000 in the Western States Marriage Records Index <abish.byui.edu/specialcollections/westernstates/search.cfm>, which covers the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s.

Some counties have indexed their marriage records; contact local genealogical societies or check their websites. And the state archives has started a death certificate index (1909–1939) on its website under Databases & Inventories.

In lieu of vital records, look for newspaper announcements. The state archives has the most complete newspaper collection; link to searchable digitized papers and a database of microfilm holdings from <wyoarchives.wyo.gov/index.php/find-it-in-the-archives/newspapers>. The archives doesn't lend microfilm, so borrow newspapers on film through interlibrary loan from the University of Wyoming Libraries <www-lib.uwyo.edu> or Wyoming State Library <library.wyo.gov>. Submit online requests for *Wyoming Tribune-Eagle* obituary lookups via <www.lclsonline.org>.

EQUAL FOOTING

Wyoming's wide-open land was a magnet for pioneers. Land records begin as early as 1841 and include cash entries (for land bought outright), homestead certificates (for land acquired by fulfilling conditions such as farming) and cancelled homestead entries (for which conditions weren't fulfilled).

Begin your search with the General Land Office patent and survey plat database <www.glorerecords.blm.gov>. Search results provide the patent issue date, legal land description and often an image of the original document. Then you can order the land entry case file from NARA; see <archives.gov/research/land> for instructions. Local land offices recorded transactions in tract books and mapped townships' land entries in townships plats. NARA has these books and plats at its Washington, DC, headquarters; the Bureau of Land Management's Wyoming office has some copies, too <www.blm.gov/wy>.

1894

The Carey Act legalizing private water sales in dry states sparks settlement in northern Wyoming

1902

J.C. Penney opens his first store in Kemmerer

1906

The 1,267-foot-tall Devil's Tower becomes the first national monument

1978

The world's largest radio telescope is built on Jelm Mountain

1988

A fire in Yellowstone National Park consumes more than a million acres

TOOLKIT

Websites

Cheyenne Genealogical and Historical Society
<cgshswyoming.org>

Cyndi's List: Wyoming <cyndislist.com/us/wy>

Rocky Mountain Online Archive <rmoa.unm.edu>

Wyoming GenWeb Project
<rootsweb.ancestry.com/~wygenweb>

Wyoming State Archives <woarchives.wyo.gov>

Publications

Genealogical Guide to Wyoming by Joyce V.H. Spiros
(Verlene Publishing)

Guide to the County Archives of Wyoming edited by
Jim Donahue (Wyoming State Archives)

History of Wyoming by T.A. Larson (University of
Nebraska Press)

Wyoming Atlas of Historical County Boundaries
edited by John H. Long (Thomson Gale)

Wyoming Place Names by Mae Urbanek (Mountain Press
Publishing Co)

Archives and Organizations

American Heritage Center University of Wyoming,
Dept. 3924, 1000 E. University Ave., Laramie, WY 82071,
(307) 766-4114, <www.uwyo.edu/ahc>

Bureau of Land Management, Wyoming State Office
5353 Yellowstone Rd., Cheyenne, WY 82009,
(307) 775-6256, <www.blm.gov/wyoming>

National Archives at Denver 17101 Huron St.,
Broomfield, CO, 80023, (303) 604-4700,
<archives.gov/denver>

University of Wyoming Libraries Dept. 3334, 1000
E. University Ave., Laramie, WY 82071, (307) 766-3190,
<www-lib.uwyo.edu>

Wyoming State Archives Barrett Building,
2301 Central Ave., Cheyenne, WY 82002, (307) 777-7826,
<woarchives.state.wy.us>

Wyoming State Historical Society P. O. Box 247,
Wheatland, WY 82201, <www.wyshs.org>

Wyoming State Library 2800 Central Avenue, Cheyenne,
WY 82002, (307) 777-6333, <library.wyo.gov/wyld>

Land transfers between private parties are recorded at county clerks' offices. Some counties' land records are at the state archives and about half are on microfilm at the FHL.

FIGHTING FAIR

Many of the state's military posts began as trail stops and trading posts. These forts established a vital military presence on the frontier, particularly during the Indian Wars between 1817 and 1898. The state archives has records of 16 military posts, as well as a microfilmed census index called Wyoming Territorial Military Post Returns.

You also might find these soldiers among Army enlistment registers covering 1798 to 1914, found at NARA and the FHL (starting with microfilm 350307). Both repositories also have a pension index spanning 1892 to 1926, which may cover Indian War veterans. You can order copies of those pension records, as well as Civil War service and pension records (Union soldiers from Wyoming are grouped with those from Nebraska), from NARA. Find an 1883 index to Wyoming pensioners at <files.usgwarchives.net/wy/pens1883.txt>.

After you dig into these records, check out the Rocky Mountain Online Archive <rmoa.unm.edu> for finding aids for records of businesses, institutions, mines, governments and organizations such as women's clubs. Search on *Wyoming* to see what's available; each record entry shows the repository that has the item.

COUNT ON COUNTIES

Records kept locally—in counties and sometimes even at the town level—can lead to more information about your ancestors. Browse an inventory of county records at the state archives website under the Archives tab (click on Databases & Inventories).

County civil and probate court cases can reveal information from naturalizations, divorce proceedings and wills. Before you trek to the archives for county records, though, verify which county the event occurred in and contact the district court for a case file number. County boundaries weren't set until 1923, so consult the Newberry Library's online Atlas of Historical County Boundaries at <publications.newberry.org/ahcbp>.

In all fairness, finding Wyoming ancestors may be a bit more challenging than in more-populous states. But with persistence and this advice, you'll level the playing field and discover your family in the Equality State. ●