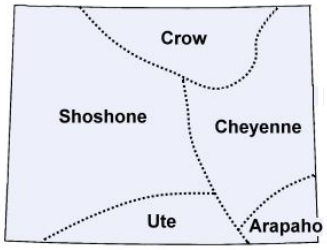
Wyoming Genealogy Research

History

Indigenous Peoples



The people living in present day Wyoming before Europeans came included the Arapaho, Cheyenne, Crow, Shoshoni and Ute tribes. The Crow people followed seasonal abundance through the mountains and plains. The historical record describes American Plains Indians hunting in all corners of Wyoming. Oregon Trail chronicler Francis Parkman encountered Oglala Lakota people hunting bison on the Laramie Plains in 1846 as did the Stansbury Expedition in 1850. In 1857, the Warren survey expedition found Dakotas surrounding a herd of bison in the northern Black Hills.

The Shoshone originally lived in the Wyoming mountains. There they hunted bighorn sheep along with deer, elk and many smaller mammals. They also ate fish and insects. They gathered, dried and stored crickets, cicadas and grasshoppers, along with many plants for food or medicine. They crafted ladles from sheep horns and built conical log dwellings, called wickiups, some of which still stand.

Other tribes who lived in present-day Wyoming at various times included Bannock, Gosiute, Kiowa, Kiowa-Apache, Menominee, Numa, and Pawnee. Tribal boundaries fluctuated with weather, game populations and alliances with other tribes. For example, the Comanche, one of the most entrepreneurial of tribes, once were part of the Shoshone tribe. In the middle 18th century they split from the Shoshone and moved south to rule the plains of Texas and Oklahoma.

Wyoming's current trails, roads and highways follow centuries-old Native American hunting and trade routes.

European/Hispanic Explorers and Settlers

Portions of what is present day Wyoming were at various times claimed by Spain, France, England and Mexico. By the early 1800's, fur traders, fort builders and emigrant trails began to cross the land.

In 1803, the United States acquired most of present-day Wyoming via the Louisiana Purchase. At the time, this area was inhabited mostly by Shoshone, Arapaho and Crow tribes.

Most of the Louisiana Purchase became the District of Louisiana in 1804; it was then renamed the Louisiana Territory in 1805.

In 1807, John Colter entered Togwotee Pass near Jackson Hole. He explored the geysers and beautiful area that later was designated Yellowstone National Park.

On a trip from present day Astoria, Oregon, to St. Louis in 1811-1812, Robert Stuart explored the route through the "South Pass" of the Rocky Mountains in present day Wyoming. His route would be used by thousands of emigrants on the Oregon, Mormon, and California Trails.

Between 1812 and 1869, parts of the area that is now Wyoming were assigned to 8 different U.S. territories!

In 1834, Fort William was founded by William Sublette. A year later, Sublette sold the fort to Thomas Fitzpatrick, a local fur trader. The fort became a rest stop and supply depot for fur traders and explorers and later for emigrants traveling west on the Oregon Trail.

During the 1840's, the U.S. Army built forts and stationed troops to protect settlers and travelers from hostile Native American tribes.

In 1840, the Army built Fort Platte a mile from Fort William. There was competition for travelers between the 2 forts.

The Oregon Trail was established in 1843.

Fur trapper Jim Bridger built Fort Bridger on the Blacks Fork of the Green River. He traded with the Shoshone and sold supplies to travelers going west. His business was profitable until years later newly created shortcuts in the Oregon Trail moved it 100 miles away from the fort!

In 1846, a treaty with Great Britain gave more land in present day Wyoming to the U.S.

In 1847, Latter Day Saints established a ferry on the North Platte River into Wyoming for travelers going west.

In 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo ended the Mexican-American War and gave the southwestern corner of what is now Wyoming to the U.S.
In 1849, the U.S. Army bought Fort John and renamed it Fort Laramie.
In 1851, a treaty was signed near Fort Laramie in which Indian tribes allowed wagon trains access to the Oregon Trail as well as the building of roads and forts.
William Vaux and his daughter Victoria opened the first school in Wyoming at Fort Laramie in 1852.
Fort Laramie - courtesy of website https://mrnussbaum.com/stop-5-along-the-oregon-trail-fort-laramie
In 1853, Ft. Supply, an agricultural settlement, was set up by Latter Day Saints near Ft. Bridger. It prospered until 1857, when it was deserted and burned.
In 1859, Platte Bridge Station was established near what is now Casper on the North Platte River. The station was purchased by the Army in 1862.
In 1860, the Pony Express began its brief period of service.
In the 1860's, Fort Laramie was a stopping point for travelers on horse and wagon, for stagecoach riders as well as the Pony Express riders.
1861-65: No Civil War battles were fought in the area that is now Wyoming. However, some men from the territories fought in Union units during the war.
In 1862, Fort Halleck was established on the Overland (Cherokee) Trail in southern Wyoming. The Overland Stage Line began using the Overland Trail instead of the Oregon Trail.
In 1865, bands of Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho Native Americans attacked the Platte Bridge Station. After the battle, the station was renamed Fort Caspar in honor of Caspar Collins who had been killed.
From 1867 to 1869, the Transcontinental Union Pacific Railway was built through southern Wyoming. The towns of Cheyenne, Laramie, Rawlins, Rock Springs, Green River, and Evanston sprang up along its route.
The Sioux Treaty of 1868 was signed at Fort Laramie. The U.S. government guaranteed that the sacred Black Hills would be part of the Sioux reservation, but when gold was discovered there in 1874, gold seekers came there by the thousands.
Coal mining prospered in the late 1860's and the 1870's in present-day Sweetwater County. Companies brought in Chinese men to work in the mines. Towns such as Atlantic City, Miner's Delight, Red Canyon, and South Pass City supported mining and offered supporting industries.
In 1869, Wyoming Territory granted women the right to vote.
The transcontinental railroad was completed that year.
In the 1870's, the cattle industry boomed; cowboys drove cattle from the south into Wyoming and Montana.
In 1872, Yellowstone became the first U.S. national park. The Wyoming Territorial Prison was established at Laramie.
In defiance of the Sioux Treaty, General George Custer and his troops led gold miners into the Black Hills in 1874. General Custer was defeated by Sioux hunters in the Battle of the Little Big Horn.
The Cheyenne-Black Hills stage line was launched in 1876 and Ft. McKinney was established. From 1876 - 1880's, the U. S. government moved Arapaho and Cheyenne tribes to the Wind River Reservation. Army troops finally defeated the Sioux, and northern Wyoming was opened to cattle grazing.
Electrical lighting was introduced in Cheyenne in 1883.
The especially severe winter of 1886-1887 killed thousands of cattle in "the Great Die-Up."
Because outlaws roamed the plains, canyons and mountains of post-Civil War Wyoming, the Territorial Legislature planned a state-of-the art penitentiary at Rawlins in anticipation of statehood.

Statehood

On July 10, 1890, Wyoming became the 44th state. At that time one-fourth of Wyoming's population was from European countries, Canada, Russia, and China.
The Johnson County War erupted in 1892 between ranchers in the area around the Powder River Basin.

The Carey Act of 1894 provided for the reclamation and homesteading of desert land, stimulating new settlements in northern Wyoming between 1895 and 1910. Latter Day Saints established towns in the Big Horn Basin. A small German-Russian colony from Chicago arrived in the Big Horn Basin in 1896.
In 1898, men from Wyoming served in the Spanish American War.
In 1901, the long-planned Wyoming State Penitentiary (Frontier Prison) was completed in Rawlins. It housed prisoners from 1901 - 1981.
In 1902, the Yellowstone Forest Reserve (Shoshone National Forest) became the first U.S. National Forest.
In 1906, Devil's Tower became the country's first national monument.
From 1906 to 1909, troops were stationed at the Wind River Reservation to prevent hostilities between Shoshone Indians and homesteaders during the allotment of reservation lands.
In 1909, the government began promoting homesteading and dry farming in Wyoming. Up through the peak years of 1920 -1921, much public land was sold in Wyoming. But the depression and years of drought severely challenged the farming industry.

Wyoming Vital Records
Online Indexes - Microfilms
Wyoming Death Certificate Database, 1909 - over 50 years ago - http://deathcertificates.wyo.gov/
Ancestry.com - databases of Wyoming obits, marriage, divorce, death and probate records
FamilySearch.org - databases of state archives records, marriages, obituaries

Wyoming Birth Records
Pre-1909 Records
Some communities registered births at the local or county level prior to 1909. For example:
- Albany County: births beginning in 1899
- Fremont County: Shoshone Indian Reservation, 1884 births
- Laramie County: births from February to April 1896
- Niobrara County: births dating from 1892

Obtain a copy from the **County Clerk** in the county where the birth occurred or from the **Wyoming State Archives.**
The State Archives has a list of birth records stored there. Visit their website for ordering information - https://wyoarchives.wyo.gov/index.php/get-a-copy/request-a-document
Birth Records 1909 and Later
These records are stored at the **Wyoming Department of Public Health Vital Statistics Services.**
Births recorded less than 100 years ago
Wyoming state birth records are restricted for 100 years. Persons recorded on these birth records or their parents can obtain copies from the **Vital Statistics Services.** Ordering information is on their website - https://health.wyo.gov/admin/vitalstatistics/certificates/.
Births recorded over 100 years ago:
These records are public and can be obtained from the **Wyoming State Archives**. Information about ordering a copy is on their website at: https://wyoarchives.wyo.gov/index.php/get-a-copy/request-a-document

Wyoming Death Records
Pre-1909 Records
Some communities registered deaths at the local or county level prior to 1909. For example:
- Albany County: deaths beginning in 1899 - Laramie County: deaths from 1896 to 1900

Most of these death records have been transferred to the **Wyoming State Archives.** See a list of names and get ordering information on the Archives website at https://wyoarchives.wyo.gov/index.php/ask-archivist or call them at (307) 777-7826.

Death Records 1909 and Later
These records are stored at the **Wyoming Department of Public Health, State Vital Statistics Services**.
Deaths recorded less than 50 years ago:
These records are closed to the public. Specific family members can get copies from the **State Vital Statistics Services**.
Deaths recorded over 50 years ago:
State copies can be obtained at the **Wyoming State Archives**

Wyoming Marriage Records
Pre-1909 Records
Marriages have recorded by counties since 1869. Obtain a copy of a pre-1909 marriage record at the **County Clerk's Office** in the county where the marriage occurred.
Marriage Records 1909 and Later
Marriages recorded less than 50 years ago:
Copies of these records are available with restrictions from the **State Vital Statistics Services**.
Marriages recorded over 50 years ago:
State copies are available from the **Wyoming State Archives**.

Wyoming Land Records
Public Domain Land Sales
When the United States acquired Wyoming, most of the became part of the public domain. The federal government surveyed available land and made it available local land offices in Cheyenne, Evanston, Buffalo, Lander, Sundance and Douglas.
Land was sold in Wyoming either based on cash payment (cash entries), or as a homestead. Free homesteads could be obtained after 1862 by those who settled and cultivated the land for at least five years. After a settler completed the requirements for land entry, his case file was sent to the General Land Office in Washington, D.C., where a patent (first-title deed) was issued.
Federal Land Patents are searchable and images available online at the Bureau of Land Management General Land Office website (BLMGLO) - https://glorecords.blm.gov/ . Land Patents on their site include Cash Entry, Homestead and Military Warrant patents. Survey Plats and Field Notes are stored at NARA.

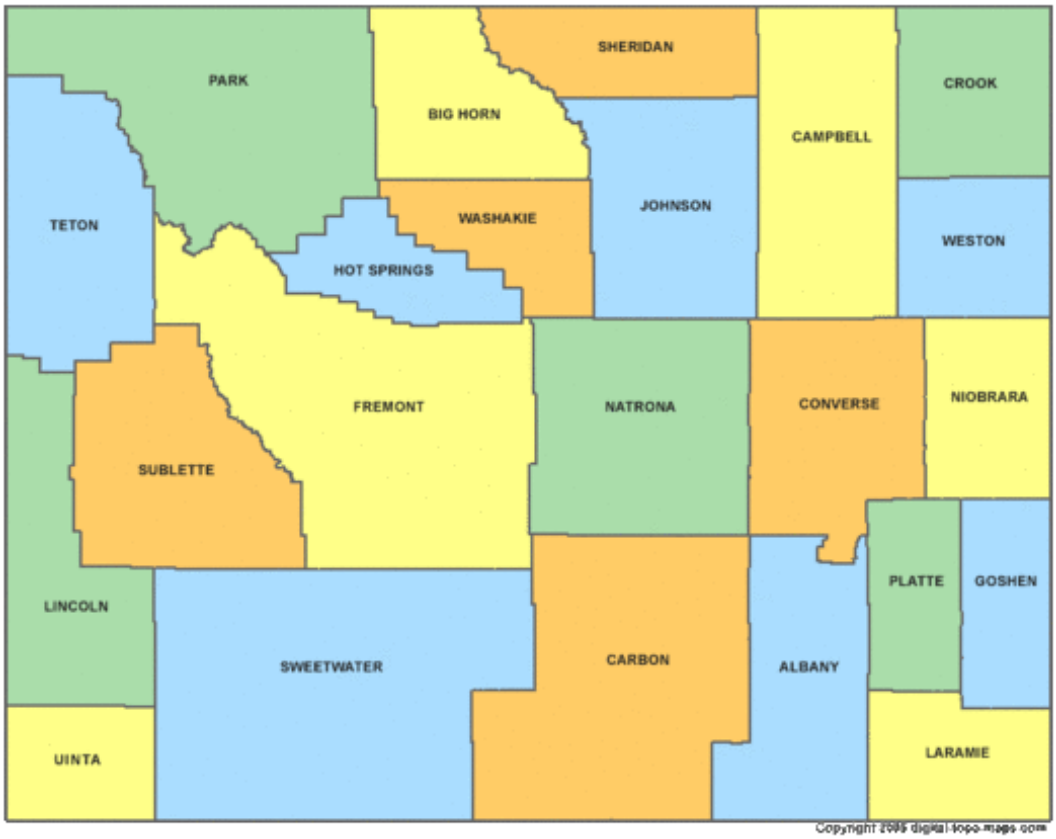
Private Land Sales
After land was transferred to private ownership, it could be sold again, inherited, lost by foreclosure of a mortgage, or distributed through a divorce. Deeds and mortgages are recorded by the county district courts. Obtain copies from the appropriate County Office that stores private land records.

Wyoming Migration Routes
North Platte River | Sweetwater River | Bozeman Trail | Chisholm Trail | California Trail | Mormon Trail | Oregon Trail | Union Pacific Railroad

See more information about trails in the west in the books "American Migration Routes, Part I and Part II", by William Dollarhide.

The Atlas of Historical County Boundaries – Interactive maps and text covering the historical boundaries, names, organization, and attachments of every county, extinct county and unsuccessful county proposal from the creation of the first county through December 31, 2000. - http://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp/index.html

Wyoming Counties



Genealogical/Historical Archives and Societies

American Heritage Center - historic documents and artifacts about western history, emigrant trails, Native Americans, women's suffrage, ranching, politics, authors, minorities, mining, entertainment, etc.

Cheyenne Genealogical & Historical society

NARA Denver - Wyoming census, military, court, naturalization and immigration records

Wyoming State Archives: Genealogy Research

- microfilms of pre-1965 marriage records and of divorce certificates 1941 - 1962
- copies of county marriage indexes and registers, 1867 - 1960's
- delayed birth certificates plus copies of a few county birth and death records

Wyoming State Historical Society

Wyoming Genealogy Websites

- Find the *GenWeb* and *Genealogy Trails* of the county in which your ancestor lived.
- *Ancestor Hunt* and *Cyndi's List* - links to genealogical websites for many states and counties

Bureau of Land Management General Land Office - Land Patent Search: copies of original written records and patent maps - public domain land purchases in Wyoming - https://glorecords.blm.gov/

Western States Marriage Index - early marriage records from counties in Wyoming and other western states - a work in progress - https://abish.byui.edu/specialcollections/westernstates/search.cfm

Wyoming Black Sheep Ancestors - 1930 Wyoming census of prisoners, insane residents, Wyoming executions 1884 - 1965, Wyoming lynchings 1874 - 1918 - https://www.blacksheepancestors.com/?s=wyoming

Wyoming State Archives Online Resources - historical photos, maps, oral history interviews, local histories and personal memories - https://wyoarchives.wyo.gov/index.php/find-it-in-the-archives/stuck-at-home

Wyoming African American Research

AfricaMap – track the slave trade with historical overlays and geographical data - http://worldmap.harvard.edu/africamap/

African American Digital Bookshelf - a curated list of and links to free *virtually accessible books* that provide information on specific African American ancestors, historical context, and guidance to other resources - the list is organized geographically by the U.S. and state - https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/African_American_Digital_Bookshelf

African Ancestry - DNA testing of maternal and paternal lineages of African descent -results are specific countries and specific ethnic groups of origin - uses database of over 30,000 indigenous African DNA samples - https://africanancestry.com/

International African American Museum Center for Family History - African American funeral programs, obituaries, marriage records, photos, historical documents and family histories - https://iaamuseum.org/center-for-family-history/digital-archives/

Last Seen: Finding Family After Slavery - search thousands of "Information Wanted" advertisements taken out by former slaves in all states searching for family members lost by sale, flight, or enlistment – the collection currently includes newspapers from 1853 to 1911 - http://www.informationwanted.org/

Wyoming Cemetery Research

FindaGrave and ***Billion Graves*** now have grave memorials of burials in many cemeteries in the U.S and in other countries.

Wyoming Native American Research

Tribal Nations and the United States: An Introduction – the history and underlying principles of tribal governance – American Indian and Alaska Native people today – the relationship between local, state, U.S. federal government and tribal governments – https://archive.ncai.org/about-tribes

Wyoming Newspaper Research

Plains to Peaks Newspaper Database - search > 1000 newspapers published in all counties of Colorado and of Wyoming from 1849 to 2021 – papers were published in various languages - https://www.ppc-historicnewspapers.org/

Wyoming Digital Newspaper Collection - search or browse various Wyoming newspapers published from 1849 - 1989 - https://wyomingnewspapers.org/

Above information courtesy of:
Cheyenne Genealogical & Historical Society - http://cghswyoming.org/vitals.html
Mr. Nussbaum - https://mrnussbaum.com/stop-5-along-the-oregon-trail-fort-laramie
The Oregon Trail - http://oregontrail101.com/
Wyoming History.org - https://www.wyohistory.org/encyclopedia/topics/indigenous-people-wyoming-and-west
Wyoming Genealogy Research - FamilySearch.org WIKI
Wyoming's Online Library Resources; Wyoming Vital Records - https://gowyld.libguides.com/c.php?g=737612&p=5272936
Wyoming State Research Guide - Ancestry.com