

Wyoming History

Wyoming Territory was created on 25 July 1868, mostly from Dakota Territory. Forts, fur trading, and the Oregon Trail had been a part of its early history. The coming of the Union Pacific Railroad through Wyoming, from 1867 to 1869, left a string of towns—Cheyenne, Evanston, Green River, Laramie, Rawlins, and Rock Springs—along the railroad line. Much of the business history of present-day Wyoming is connected to the Union Pacific Railroad. The construction of the railroad brought a number of Chinese laborers to Wyoming.



The mining influx during the late 1860s and 1870s brought settlers into Sweetwater country. As mining broadened out to encompass several additional industries, towns such as Atlantic City, Miner's Delight, Red Canyon, South Pass City, and others were formed.

Statehood was achieved 10 July 1890. One-fourth of Wyoming's population at that time was foreign born, originating from England, Germany, Ireland, Scotland, Sweden, Canada, Russia, Denmark, Wales, China, Norway, Italy, Austria, and France.

In January of 1890 two hundred African Americans, mostly from Harrison County, Ohio, were brought to Dana (near Hanna) to work the coal mines, but most did not stay long. A small German-Russian colony from Chicago arrived in the Big Horn Basin in 1896.

Although land opened up for settlement in 1890, very little was filed or patented from 1890 to 1897. In 1909 dry farming was tried in Wyoming, and the enlarged homestead acts brought more dry farmers to the state. Congress changed the homestead residence requirement in 1912 from five years to three years and permitted the homesteaders to absent the property for five months each year. These concessions gave renewed emphasis to dry farming and settlement.

The great era of public land entries in Wyoming was in the twentieth century, with the peak years being 1920–21. But the growth of Wyoming's agricultural industry was severely challenged by years of drought and the Depression. Following World War II, the economy focused on cattle, crude oil, and petroleum, along with industries that support them. Wyoming still remains a sparsely populated state that draws considerable tourism related to year-round recreation.

This section is from *History of Wyoming* in the Ancestry.com Wiki, and was originally published in *Red Book: American State, County and Town Sources*, ed. by Alice Eichholz, CG, Ph.D., chapter by Dwight A. Radford.

Wyoming State Research Guide

Family History Sources in the Equality State



State Census Records

Federal censuses for the state of Wyoming begin in 1870. Before that time, some Wyoming residents were included in Utah Territory in the 1850 census and with Nebraska Territory in 1860.

Related Censuses Available on Ancestry.com:

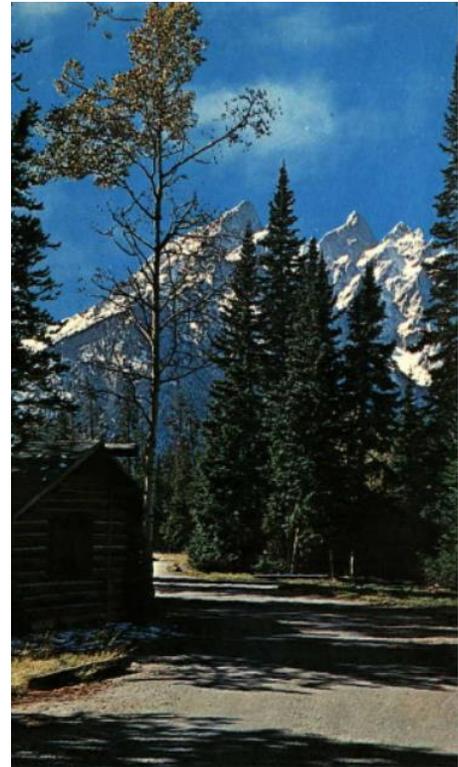
- [1890 Veterans Schedules](#)
- [U.S. Enumeration District Maps and Descriptions, 1940](#)

Wyoming Vital Records

Wyoming began recording births and deaths in 1909. Very few birth and death records were kept on the county level before that time. Marriages have been recorded statewide since 1941. Earlier marriages were recorded by the county clerk in the county where the license was issued.

All Wyoming marriage records from 1869 to 1970 are available from the [Wyoming State Archives and Historical Department](#) for all Wyoming counties.

- [Wyoming Vital Statistics Services Program](#): Holds birth and death records since July 1909 and marriage records since May 1941.
- [Wyoming State Archives](#): The Archives holds marriage records from 1869 to 1970



State Vital Records on Ancestry.com

- [Web: Western States Marriage Index, 1809-2011](#)

Other Collections

- [U.S., Indian Census Rolls, 1885-1940](#)
- [U.S., Women of the West, 1928](#)
- [History of Dakota Territory](#)
- [Historic Towns of the Western States](#)
- [U.S. Map Collection, 1513-1990](#)
- [U.S. City Directories, 1821-1989](#) (Use the browse box in the upper right corner to determine what directories are available for your ancestor's area. If they lived in a rural area, check to see if that area was included with a larger city in the vicinity.)

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Other State Resources

The organizations listed below provide information about Wyoming history and genealogy. In addition to these state-level resources, many counties and towns maintain important genealogical collections in local libraries, genealogical societies, or historical societies, so check for a local resource when researching.

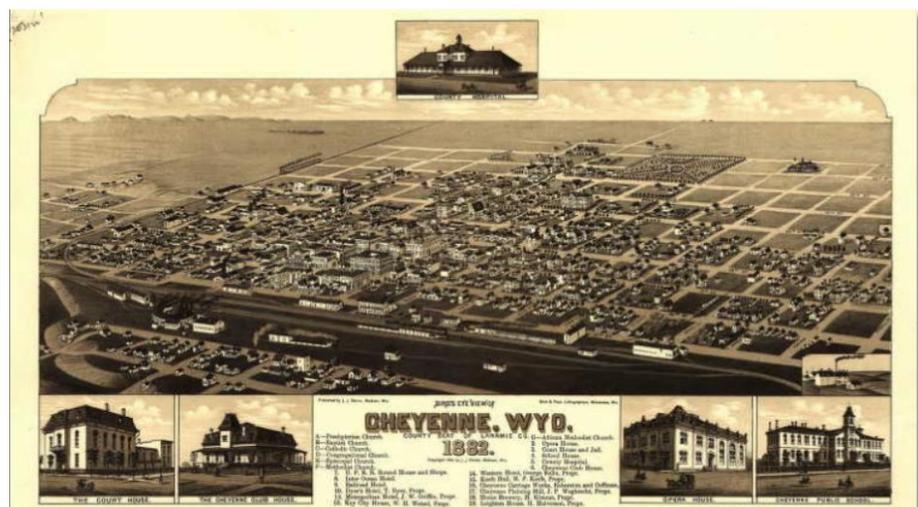
- [Wyoming State Archives](#): The Archives' extensive on-site collections in Cheyenne are supplemented by online maps, oral histories, photographs, and the [Wyoming Newspaper Project](#), a searchable collection of digitized Wyoming newspapers from 1849 to 1922.
- [Wyoming State Historical Society](#)
- [Wyoming GenWeb](#)
- [Wyoming Memory Digital Archive](#)
- [National Archives and Records Administration \(NARA\) Denver](#): This facility maintains records from Federal agencies and courts in Wyoming, including census, military, court, naturalization, and immigration records.
- [Bureau of Land Management \(BLM\) General Land Office Records](#): The BLM administers Federal Land for public land states including Wyoming, and maintains land patents from the federal government to individuals. Use the **Land Patent Search** to locate land grants by name. Many record images are available on the web site. See the FAQ for more information on how to locate and use land patents.
- [Wyoming Newspaper Project](#): a searchable collection of digitized Wyoming newspapers from 1849 to 1922.

Help and Advice

- [Wyoming Family History Research](#)
- [Counties of Wyoming](#)

[View all Wyoming collections on Ancestry.com](#)

[Cheyenne, Wyoming, 1882](#), from [U.S. Map Collection, 1513-1990](#)



Significant Dates (through 1930)

Native American tribes living in present-day Wyoming throughout the years include the Arapaho, Bannock, Cheyenne, Comanche, Crow, Dakota, Kiowa, Pawnee, Shoshoni and the Ute tribes.

1803 – The United States acquired most of present day Wyoming via the Louisiana Purchase; all inhabitants other than Native Americans received full citizenship.

1804 – The Lewis and Clark expedition arrived in the area that is now Wyoming.

1804 – Most of the Louisiana Purchase became the District of Louisiana with disputed sections of Louisiana and Texas being reorganized.

1805 – The Louisiana District became Louisiana Territory.

1807 - John Colter explored the geysers and beautiful area that would in 1872 be designated Yellowstone National Park.

1811-12 – On a return trip east from Astoria, Oregon, where the ship he sailed on was blown up, Robert Stuart explores the route through the “South Pass” of the Rocky Mountains in Wyoming. His route to St. Louis would be used by thousands of emigrants on the Oregon, Mormon, and California Trails.

1812 – Much of the area acquired with the Louisiana Purchase is organized into Missouri Territory, including what is now Wyoming.

1819 – Oregon Country was formed and included part of western Wyoming.

1821 – The part of Wyoming that remained in Missouri Territory became was an unorganized territory.

1834 – Fort Laramie was established under the name Fort William. First established as a fur-trading post, it was later a major stopping point for travelers on the Oregon Trail, Pony Express Riders, and riders on the Overland Stage.

1840 – Fort Platte was built a mile from Fort William and competed for travelers with Fort William, spurring that fort to be rebuilt and named Fort John.

1842 – Fort Bridger was established on the Blacks Fork of the Green River.

1848 – The southwestern corner of what is now Wyoming became part of the U.S. with the ratification of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican-American War. Also that year, a section of what would become west central Wyoming became part of the Oregon Territory when it was organized.

1849 – Oregon Territory was formed and included that portion of Wyoming that was included in Oregon Country in 1819

1849 – The U.S. Army bought Fort John and renamed it Fort Laramie.

1850 – Utah Territory is formed, including portions of what is now western Wyoming.

1852 – William Vaux, and his daughter Victoria opened the first school in Wyoming at Fort Laramie.

1853 – Washington Territory was formed, including part of what is now northwestern Wyoming.

1854 – The unorganized territory that included most of Wyoming became Nebraska Territory.

1859 – Platte Bridge Station was established near what is now Casper on the North Platte River. It was purchase by the Army in 1862.

1860 – The Pony Express began its brief period of service.

1861 – With the completion of the transcontinental railroad, the Pony Express stops service.

1861 – The area that is now Wyoming was split between Dakota Territory and Nebraska Territory

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1861-65 – The U.S. Civil War was fought.

1863 – Most of Wyoming became part of Idaho Territory, with the exception of the southwestern corner, which was in Utah Territory.

1864 – A western sliver of what is now Wyoming remained in Idaho Territory, while the majority of the state once again fell in Dakota Territory.

1865 – Bands of Lakota, Cheyenne, and Arapaho Native Americans attack the Platte Bridge Station, killing 29 and injuring 10. After the battle the station was renamed Fort Caspar after Caspar Collins who was killed in the battle.

1867 – The city of Cheyenne was founded the same year the Union Pacific reached Wyoming, at the spot where the railroad crossed Crow Creek.

1868 – Present-day Wyoming became Wyoming Territory with the current state boundaries.

1869 – Wyoming Territory became the first government to grant suffrage to women.

1870s – The cattle industry is booming as cowboys drove cattle from the south into Wyoming and Montana.

1872 – Yellowstone was designated as the first national park.

1872 – Wyoming Territorial State Prison was established at Laramie.

1883 – Electrical lighting was introduced in Cheyenne.

1886-1887 – An especially severe winter killed thousands of cattle in “the Great Die-Up.”

1890 – Wyoming became the 44th state.

1892 – Johnson County War (or War on Powder River) erupted between ranchers in the area around the Powder River Basin.

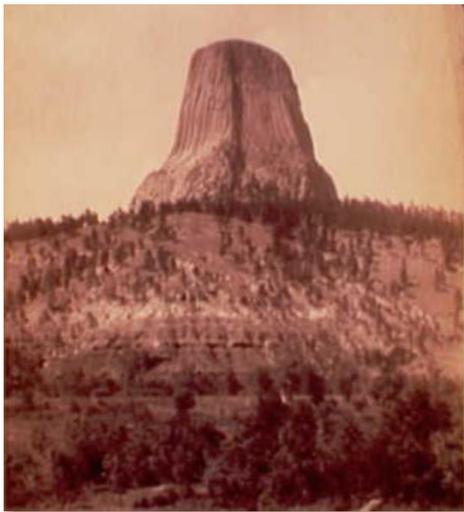
1901 – The Wyoming Frontier Prison opened with 104 cells.

1902 – J.C. Penney opened his first store in Kemmerer, Wyoming.

1906 – Devil’s Tower became the country’s first national monument.

1915-16 – A large number of Russian-German people moved into Worland and Lovell.

1927 – A dam that was formed in 1925 by a landslide on the Gros Ventre River gave way and flooded the town of Kelly, killing six people.



Devil's Tower, Wyoming, from the Library of Congress Photo Collection, 1840-2000