

Wyoming History News

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SIGNED IN STONE: Where Past and Present Collide in Converse County

by **Heidi McCullough**

Host of the Wyoming Historical Society's 71st Annual Trek, Converse County, Wyoming, stands as a chronicle to the enduring spirit of the American West; a place where the echoes of the past resonate with the vibrant pulse of the present. Established on March 9, 1888, and named for Amasa R. Converse, a pioneer and Cheyenne banker, this county, carved from the vast territories of Albany and Laramie, is more than just a geographical designation. It is a living chronicle, a narrative etched into the very landscape.

Long before its formal establishment, Converse County served as a vital crossroads. Native American tribes, nomadic and rooted, traversed its plains and valleys, their histories interwoven with the land. The arrival of European explorers, driven by the allure of uncharted territories, marked a turning point. The westward migration, fueled by dreams of gold and fertile lands, left indelible marks along the Oregon, California, and Mormon trails. Landmarks like "Child's Trail," Deer Creek Station, and the Rock in the Glen, stand as silent witnesses to

the hardships and hopes of the early pioneers.

The legendary Fort Fetterman, a sentinel against the backdrop of the "Bloody Bozeman" trail and Crook's Campaign, further underscores the county's pivotal role in the tumultuous era of westward expansion.

The advent of the railroad transformed Converse County, ushering in an era of unprecedented growth and change.

Towns sprung up along the iron rails, becoming hubs

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of commerce and community. This progress, however, was not without its trials. Tragedies, such as train disasters, violent clashes with Native populations, and the haunting echoes of plane crashes, have left their scars, shaping the resilience and character of the county's inhabitants. These events, though painful, are integral to the county's story, reminding us of the human cost of progress and the enduring strength of the community.

Converse County's military history is particularly rich and compelling. During World War II, the county played a crucial role in the nation's war effort. The establishment of a Prisoner

of War camp, housing Italian and German soldiers, brought a unique and complex chapter to the county's history. Simultaneously, the skies above Converse County became a training ground for bomber pilots from the Casper Air Base, with target bombing ranges echoing the urgency of the global conflict. This dual role, as both a place of confinement and a site of military training, underscores the county's contribution to a pivotal moment in world history.

Beyond these grand narratives, Converse County is a tapestry woven from the lives of its people. Governors, legislators, judges, and sheriffs have shaped its governance, while livestock

growers, rodeo heroes, and everyday citizens have shaped its culture and identity. These individuals, with their diverse backgrounds and experiences, have contributed to the unique character of the county. The land itself, with its vast open spaces and rugged beauty, has instilled a sense of independence and self-reliance in its residents.

Today, Converse County stands at the intersection of its rich past and its promising future. The echoes of wagon wheels and the rumble of locomotives mingle with the hum of modern industry and the aspirations of a new generation. We look forward to sharing our county's history, preserved in its landmarks, museums, and the stories passed down through generations, serving as a foundation for its continued growth and development. By embracing its past, Converse County forges a path toward a future that honors its heritage while embracing the opportunities of tomorrow. It is a place where the stories signed in stone continue to inspire and resonate, inviting all who visit to discover their own connection to this remarkable corner of Wyoming.

Join us and your fellow Wyoming History Enthusiasts for a journey through Converse County at the WHS 71st Annual Trek June 19-22, 2025, and find part of your history.

BLAST FROM THE PAST

HISTORY OF THE WYOMING HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Wyoming Historical Society has had its own growth pangs throughout the years since first being authorized by the Wyoming Legislature in 1895. That effort didn't take hold and in 1921 the formation of a state historical society was attempted once again. Mrs. Cyrus Beard took the lead and her efforts led to encourage membership at \$1.00 a year.

In 1924 the Society began publishing what is today the *Annals of Wyoming: The Wyoming History Journal*.

By 1932 Wyoming again was without a statewide organization. Several county historical societies remained active at this time, but it was not until the early 1950s that a stronger effort prevailed thus launching the organization as we know it today, thanks to the efforts of Mrs. Lola Homsher.

Learn about what happens next in the history of the Wyoming Historical Society in our on-going feature "Blast from the Past" in the subsequent issues of the *Wyoming History News*.



The Wyoming State Capitol as it appeared in 1895, when the Wyoming Legislature first authorized the formation of the Wyoming State Historical Society. The initial phase of Wyoming's Capitol, designed by David Gibbs of Toledo, Ohio and built by Adam Feick and Brothers of Sandusky, included the section that is now the center portion of the building. It was completed in 1888 while Wyoming was still a territory.

PHOTO FROM WyoHistory.org, COURTESY OF THE WYOMING STATE ARCHIVES

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For a full calendar of events,
please visit wyshs.org/events.

For comments
or questions regarding
Wyoming History News,
please call 307.322.3014
or email info@wyshs.org.

**WHS Member names
appear in bold.**

The Wyoming Historical Society (WHS) is a
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The Wyoming Historical Society is not part of the
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PLAINS, TRAINS, AND WAGONS: THE WYOMING HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S 71ST ANNUAL TREK

CAREYHURST

Careyhurst, the vast 15,000 acre ranch in Boxelder Valley, established in the 1870's, was named after the famed Joseph M. Carey.

The ranch, that was originally part of the CY holdings, represents a chapter in Wyoming's history where ranching and political influence intersected, leaving a lasting mark on Converse County and Wyoming.

In 1869, Joseph M. Carey was appointed as the first Wyoming Territorial District Attorney as a reward for helping General Ulysses S. Grant win the East for his successful presidential bid. Carey had a long political career from 1872 to 1915, which included being Wyoming's 8th Governor and US Senator.

Joseph M. Carey established ranching operations with his brother. They contributed to the growth of the cattle industry and helped to show that large scale cattle operations could survive the harsh Wyoming winters.

Joseph's son, Robert Davis Carey moved to the ranch in 1900 to help with the operation. He too served as Wyoming's US Senator from 1931 to 1936.

The Trek will stop by the ranch as part of Friday, June 20 agenda.

...HEAR THAT WHISTLE BLOWIN'

Train at the Interpretive Center.
PHOTO COURTESY TRIPADVISOR.COM



Douglas, Wyoming, stands as a account to the transformative power of the American railroad, offering history enthusiasts a captivating glimpse into the nation's westward expansion. Its deep-rooted railroad history is centered around the arrival of the Fremont, Elkhorn & Missouri Valley Railroad (FE&MV).

The FE&MV's 1886 depot, now the Douglas Railroad Interpretive Center, is a preserved landmark that vividly illustrates the era's railroad architecture and its vital role in frontier development. This depot, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, serves as a museum displaying a collection of historical rail cars, and other railroad memorabilia.

For an exclusive visit to the Douglas Railroad Interpretive Center, join your fellow history enthusiasts at the Welcome Reception of the Annual

Trek Thursday, June 19, 2025.

The railroad's arrival in Douglas spurred the town's growth, transforming it into a crucial shipping point for cattle and other goods. The railroad was the reason the town of Douglas was created. The towns history is intrinsically tied to the railroad's expansion.

Douglas has made significant efforts to preserve its railroad heritage, allowing visitors to experience the sights and sounds of a bygone era. The displays of the rolling stock at the interpretive center, allow visitors to see the evolution of railroad equipment.

For history buffs seeking an authentic railroad experience, visiting Douglas during the WHS 71st Annual Trek in June 2025 provides a tangible connection to the era that shaped the American West.

HISTORIC FORT FETTERMAN



Pencil drawing Fort Fetterman, 1875

PHOTO COURTESY VINTAGE CITY MAPS

Nestled on the rugged plains of Wyoming, Fort Fetterman stands as a testament to the challenges and conflicts of the American frontier. Established in 1867 along the North Platte River, near present-day Douglas, the fort was named after Captain William Fetterman, who lost his life during the Red Cloud War in the infamous Fetterman Fight.

Fort Fetterman was strategically built to protect settlers and travelers venturing westward along the Bozeman Trail—a pathway fraught with danger as tensions between the U.S. Army and Native American tribes, including the Lakota Sioux and Northern Cheyenne, ran high. Serving as a remote outpost, the fort became a hub for military operations during the Indian Wars.

Life at Fort Fetterman was harsh. Soldiers stationed there faced isolation, extreme weather, and limited resources. Despite its significance, the fort's existence was short-lived. By the mid-1880s, its military importance dwindled with the decline of the Indian Wars and the establishment of more secure settlement

routes. In 1882, the fort was officially abandoned, leaving behind its weathered structures and a legacy of resilience.

Today, Fort Fetterman is a Wyoming State Historic Site, offering visitors a glimpse into its storied past. A museum and interpretive center on the grounds share artifacts and tales from its pivotal role in shaping the region's history. The remaining structures, including the officer's quarters and the ordnance building, provide a tangible connection to the era of westward expansion.

Exploring the grounds of Fort Fetterman during the Trek, you can immerse yourselves in a chapter of Wyoming's history. You may recognize the enduring significance of how complexities and conflicts of frontier life are etched into the wild Wyoming landscape.



Fort Fetterman today.

PHOTO COURTESY CONVERSE COUNTY TOURISM

ECHOS OF THE PAST:

**JIREH COLLEGE,
PRAIRIE VIEW,
AND SHAWNEE**

In the vast expanse of east central Wyoming, the echoes of bygone communities resonate through the stories of Jireh College, Prairie View, and Shawnee. These locations, though largely faded from the modern map, offer a glimpse into the pioneering spirit and the challenges faced by early settlers.

On Saturday, June 21, join the Wyoming Historical Society during their 71st Annual Trek as they visit these once thriving communities.

Jireh College, founded in 1909 by the Christian Church, stood as a beacon of education and community for homesteaders in eastern Converse County, Wyoming. The college, along with the town that grew around it, aimed to provide a liberal arts education and a center for religious life. Wilkinson Hall was the main building of the



Photo of students arriving at Jireh College, approximately 1910.

PHOTO COURTESY WYOMING TAILS & TRAILS

college. Despite initial optimism and a thriving community, the arid climate and the economic pressures of the post-World War I era led to the college's closure in 1920. Today, only the cornerstone remains, silent record to a dream of higher learning on the frontier.

South of Jireh, the story of Prairie View unfolds with the construction of the Prairie View Church in 1913. Settlers from Northern Kansas,

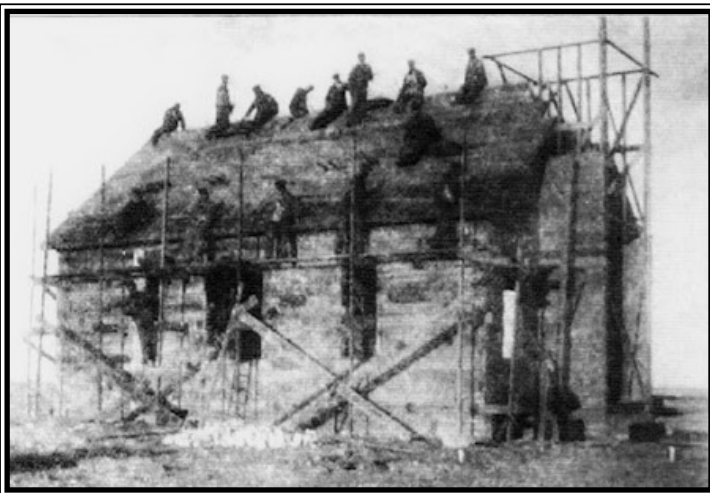
longing for a place of worship, built the church themselves, naming it after their former home. A small community blossomed around the church, complete with a school and

a cemetery.

While the community has vanished, the cemetery stands as a reminder of the families who sought a new life in this corner of Wyoming.

West of Lost Springs, Shawnee emerged as a hub for coal mining and dry-farming. The town boasted a bank, a hotel, and even a newspaper, showcasing its early vitality. The Onyon Coal Mine fueled the local economy, and the Shawnee School served the educational needs of the community. Though the post office closed in 2007, Shawnee's legacy lives on through the stories of its industrious past.

These three locations, Jireh, Prairie View, and Shawnee, offer a poignant reflection on the ebb and flow of frontier life. They remind us of the aspirations, the struggles, and the enduring spirit of those who shaped Wyoming's history.



Prairie View Church under construction, March 13, 1914.

PHOTO COURTESY WYOMING TAILS & TRAILS

THURSDAY
CHECK-IN &
PACKET PICK-UP 1-4p
Camp Douglas
115 S. Riverbend Drive

PROGRAM 2:30p
Program on Camp Douglas

RECEPTION 5-7p
Douglas Railroad Museum
121 Brownfield Rd

WALKING TOUR 6p
Historic Downtown Douglas

FRIDAY
LEAVE DOUGLAS 8a

FORT FETTERMAN
CASPER KID
GLENROCK
DEER CREEK MUSEUM

LUNCH PROGRAM
COLE CREEK TRAIN
WRECK
CAREYHURST

DINNER AT
NATURAL BRIDGE

SATURDAY
LEAVE DOUGLAS 8a

GRAY RANCH
SHAWNEE
MANVILLE
LANCE CREEK
BULLDOGGING MUSEUM
LIGHTNING CREEK
JAMES EDWARDS
HOMESTEAD
WALKER CREEK SCHOOL

DINNER AT THE MOOSE



71ST ANNUAL STATE TREK

Registration Form

THURSDAY, JUNE 20th - SUNDAY, JUNE 23rd, 2025
DOUGLAS, CONVERSE COUNTY, WYOMING

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____
MAILING CITY STATE ZIP

EMAIL _____ PHONE _____

ADDITIONAL ATTENDEE NAME(S) _____

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____
MAILING CITY STATE ZIP

EMAIL _____ PHONE _____

REGISTRATION IS DUE NO LATER THAN MAY 15, 2025

Cost \$75 per Person; includes 4 meals & featured trek transportation.

Non-members \$100.

Wyoming Historical Society Members get a \$25 discount for full attendance.

Includes bus transportation, all trek presentations and in-town tours.

TSHIRT SIZE(S): _____ DIETARY RESTRICTIONS: _____

WYO. HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERS _____ x \$75 = \$ _____
or

TOTAL NUMBER OF NON-MEMBERS _____ x \$100 = \$ _____

TOTAL AMOUNT DUE \$ _____

ONLINE REGISTRATION PREFERRED.

Please visit wyshs.org/events to sign up and pay by credit card.

If registering by mail, please send a check to WHS and this form to:

Wyoming Historical Society Annual Trek

PO Box 247

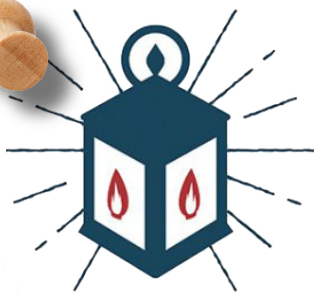
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For more information and **Volunteer Opportunities** please contact Heidi at tres.whs@gmail.com



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TWO LIGHTS FOR TOMORROW APRIL 18 & 19, 2025

Two Lights for Tomorrow is a nationwide initiative to commence the celebration of the 250th birthday of the United States of America, the Semi-quincentennial, more commonly known as America 250.

The famous ride of Paul Revere occurred on the overnight of April 18 – 19, 1775. Two Lights for Tomorrow commemorates that famous ride and uses the imagery of that shining light today as a uniting call to action for our citizens to celebrate and serve.

The Wyoming Historical Society's goal is to have every County Courthouse illuminate two lights on the overnight of April 18-19, 2025 in commemoration, followed by a day of service to your local historic places.

For more information, please contact the WHS Main Office at 307.322.3014 or at info@wyshs.org.



**DECLARATION OF
IMAGINATION**