

Wyoming History News

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WILDLAND FIRES THREATEN HISTORICAL LANDMARKS: PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE AMIDST THE FLAMES

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by Aley Philp

Summer of 1988 brought a hot dry season that resulted in many wildfires, most famously the Yellowstone fire. This year has seen comparable conditions and left many wondering when our fire season would inevitably start, and where.

Late July and early August brought fires roaring through our prairies and forests, threatening Wyoming's historical sites.

Southeast Wyoming is rich in historical buildings, landmarks, and cultural heritage along the border of Platte and Goshen Counties.

The fear was palpable as the fire neared Wyoming's first settlement, Historic Fort Laramie. An irrigation canal was instrumental as the boundary that successfully stopped the fire before it reached the historic grounds.

The fire surrounded the towns of Sunrise and Hartville, home to the historic iron-ore mine, a Paleo-Indian archeology site, and the 'oldest bar in Wyoming.' All residents were forced to evacuate several times.

Guernsey is also home to some of the best-preserved Oregon Trail ruts and Register Cliff.

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The La Grange Fire Department's Tender and Tactical Tender were out all night the night of August 2nd / 3rd helping battle the blaze of the Pleasant Valley Fire.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE LA GRANGE FIRE DEPARTMENT

A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT



Hello
Friends,
I'm looking forward to seeing some of you at the Society's

Annual Meeting this month. I always enjoy my visits to Newcastle and it will be great to see what the Weston County Chapter has in store for us.

This will be my last column as Society President, and I wanted to particularly thank you all for your patience and support as I tried to help the Society the best way I could. I'm looking forward to joining you all in the crowd because I've never been fond of being at the front of the room.

Despite this sentiment, someone from the Society of Rocky Mountain Archivist (SRMA) nominations committee has been asking me to run for their board for the last few years. It seemed like a good time to step up. I'm serving as Vice-President this year and will transition to President next year. Any archivist from the region (Wyoming and Colorado) is encouraged to join.

Membership is only \$25 per year, so I invite any Wyoming archivist who doesn't belong to become an SRMA member. Sara Davis has also joined the board as the Continuing Education Coordinator. We are joking that Wyoming now has a "contingent" on the board.

Back to the State Historical Society, I'm pleased to hear that there has been a slight increase in the Society membership this year. It is a step in the right direction. Hopefully, it will continue. I am biased, but I feel the Society and the Chapters are so amazing – I do not understand why anyone interested in history, and Wyoming history in particular, would not want to join.

The 250th Task Force now has a website, <https://wyoming250.com/about/>. There is quite a bit more information that will be added later, including how to apply for local event and program grants, a guidebook to help organize local events, etc. In particular, the Task Force is planning a great event at the Capitol Complex on July 4th. The committee planning the

event is coordinating with Cheyenne's America 250 Commission. In case you're interested their website is not live yet, but here is a link with some general information,

www.cheyennecity.org/News-articles/Cheyenne-launches-planning-efforts-for-America-250-celebration.

I've heard that some other local organizing committees are being established and encourage everyone to consider how you can help with this commemoration.

Thanks for all of your support. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Cindy

WHS President



YELLOWSTONE ABLAZE: THE FIRES OF 1988

adapted by Aley Philp from Dan Whipple's 2005 article on WyoHistory.org

The summer of 1988 marked a turning point in the history of Yellowstone National Park. A series of unprecedented wildfires swept through the park, burning over a third of its land and capturing the nation's attention. The fires were a complex interplay of natural processes, park management policies, and extreme weather conditions.

The ignition point came on June 30th with the Fan Fire, sparked by lightning in the park's northwest corner. Despite its initial growth, the fire eventually slowed. However, this was just the beginning. Over the following weeks, a constellation of fires ignited across Yellowstone, fueled by high winds, low humidity, and a record-breaking drought. These fires, including the North Fork, Clover-Mist, Hellroaring, Storm Creek, Mink, Snake, and Huck, eventually consumed over 683,000 acres of the park.

Central to understanding this disaster is Yellowstone's fire policy. Since the mid-1970s, the park had adopted a policy of allowing natural fires to burn, believing that fire was a crucial component of the ecosystem. Many plant species in Yellowstone, such as lodgepole pine, are fire-adapted, relying on fire to reproduce. This policy was rooted in the park's mandate to preserve "primitive ecological conditions."

However, the 1988 fires were unlike anything seen before. The combination of extensive drought



The fires put to rest the Bambi myth—that wildlife flees in panic from approaching flames. Few large animals died.

PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVE HENRY, NPS

and extreme weather conditions created a perfect storm for catastrophic fire behavior. Fires spread rapidly, jumping natural barriers like rivers and roads. Despite a massive firefighting effort involving thousands of personnel, the fires continued to grow.

The 1988 fires had a profound impact on the park. While the initial reaction was shock and dismay, the long-term ecological effects have been a subject of ongoing study. The fires transformed the landscape, creating opportunities for new plant growth and wildlife adaptation. However, the fires also had significant impacts on the park's infrastructure and tourism.

The events of 1988 forced a reevaluation of Yellowstone's fire management policies. While the core principle of allowing natural fire to play a role in the ecosystem remains,

the park has implemented more active management strategies to mitigate the risk of catastrophic fires. Lessons learned from the 1988 fires continue to shape fire management practices in Yellowstone and other protected areas.

The Yellowstone fires of 1988 serve as a powerful reminder of the complex relationship between humans and nature. While the fires were a devastating event and the effects can still be seen today if you visit the park, they also offered a unique opportunity to study the resilience and adaptability of ecosystems. The legacy of the 1988 fires continues to shape the management and understanding of Yellowstone National Park.

For more information on the historic 1988 Yellowstone fire, read "Yellowstone Ablaze: The Fires of 1988" on WyoHistory.org.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

At Large

Bob & Maureen Eason
Christine Gerlach

Converse

Carol Chizek

Natrona

Bond Architects

THANK YOU DONORS

Above & Beyond

Ron Dean

Karen & Ronald Dickenson

Geoffrey Dobson

David Foreman

Janeen Morevee

Beki Speas

WANTED!

The WHS is looking for
new committee
members across all
committees.

If you are interested, please
reach out to WHS Main Office.

executivedirector@wysh.org

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Within a few miles in Guernsey State Park, the recognizable CCC "Castle" historic building sits high on the hillside; all were threatened in the fire.

Fortunately, very few structures were lost in the flames and there was no loss of human life.

A structure that was lost was the historic homestead of US Rep. Harriet Hageman's family. The cabin-like building situated in the side of a hill near McGinnis Pass, Wyoming, was lost to the flames. The homestead sat empty for almost

four decades and was a sad loss of a for their family's history.

The Pleasant Valley Fire in southeast Wyoming consumed close to 30,000 acres and burned for more than a week. Igniting near Guernsey, the cause of the fire is still under investigation.

The Clearwater Fire, near Wapiti and the east entrance to Yellowstone, while smaller at approximately 3,000 acres, was only a little over 60% contained as of mid-August.

When the town of Upton was evacuated near the end of July



Photos above show the Hageman's homestead prior to the fire and below, while it was engulfed in flames during the Pleasant Valley Fire in early August.

PHOTO BY HUGH HAGEMAN AND COURTESY OF HARRIET HAGEMAN

One of the many amazing stories to come out of the fire near Wright was the tale of a man who was out grading roads. The fire surrounded him on all sides. Luckily, being in a grader, he was able to build burms and survive the flames.



PHOTO BY BRANDON DILTS

Aerial photo of the surviving grass inside of the burm built by the lucky survivor. The faint line in the middle of the photo shows the way out that the survivor took. The thicker white lines are the burms.

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due to a fire, there was concern about plans for the Wyoming Historical Society's Annual Meeting. The Weston County Historical Society has arranged for a visit to Upton on Friday night before the Annual Meeting on Saturday in Newcastle. The fire is now 100% contained with the help of both Crook and Weston County Emergency management teams.

Wyoming has at the time of publication had 540 wildfires in 2024 burning approximately 53,500 acres.

Over 70% of firefighters in Wyoming are volunteers.

The Wyoming Historical Society encourages you to thank and support your local firefighters, including their traditional "Fill the Boot" campaign that typically takes place of Labor Day weekend every September. They are on the frontline of preserving Wyoming's historic and cultural sites for years to come.

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Heard Along the Historic Trail:

Your Place for Local News

Albany County member **Kim Viner**, recently had an article about the women who served on the first female jury in "Wyoming Lawyer," the publication of the Wyoming State Bar.

...

The town of Afton celebrated their 100th year on

August 10th with the help of the **Star Valley Historical Society**.

...

The **Sweetwater County Historical Society**, helped to celebrate the listing of Morris House on the National Register of Historic Places on August 6th.

...

The Wyoming Arts Council has announced the recipients of its Native Art Fellowships.

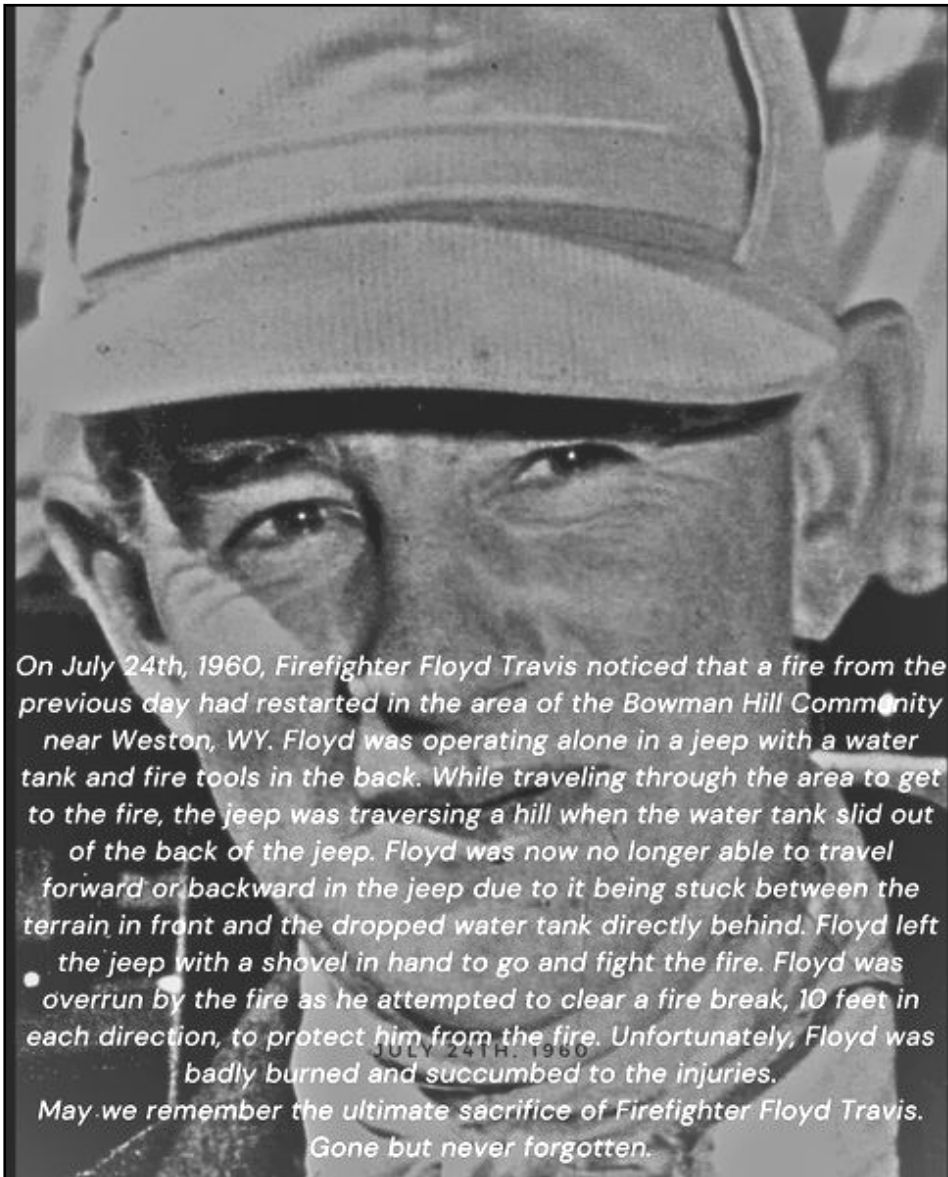
This year's honorees are **Jackie Dorothy**, an Arapaho and Eastern Shoshone writer, podcaster, and journalist based in Thermopolis, and Bruce Cook, a Haida artist residing in Riverton.

Dorothy is a distinguished figure in Wyoming journalism, with a wealth of experience and numerous awards recognizing her work. Her focus on Wyoming's history, particularly through her podcast "Pioneers of Outlaw Country," demonstrates her commitment to preserving the state's heritage.

Cook, a Haida artist, has adapted his craft to the challenges of resource scarcity. His work seamlessly blends traditional Haida elements with contemporary styles, reflecting the resilience and innovation of Native artists. Cook also explores his Arapaho heritage, incorporating it into his artistic expression.

The Native Art Fellowship is a competitive award that recognizes the exceptional work of Native artists living in Wyoming. The Wyoming Arts Council hopes that this fellowship will elevate the profiles of these talented individuals and celebrate the richness of Native art and culture in the state.

...



On July 24th, 1960, Firefighter Floyd Travis noticed that a fire from the previous day had restarted in the area of the Bowman Hill Community near Weston, WY. Floyd was operating alone in a jeep with a water tank and fire tools in the back. While traveling through the area to get to the fire, the jeep was traversing a hill when the water tank slid out of the back of the jeep. Floyd was now no longer able to travel forward or backward in the jeep due to it being stuck between the terrain in front and the dropped water tank directly behind. Floyd left the jeep with a shovel in hand to go and fight the fire. Floyd was overrun by the fire as he attempted to clear a fire break, 10 feet in each direction, to protect him from the fire. Unfortunately, Floyd was badly burned and succumbed to the injuries.

JULY 24TH, 1960

May we remember the ultimate sacrifice of Firefighter Floyd Travis.
Gone but never forgotten.

ABOVE PHOTO AND REMEMBRANCE COURTESY OF CAMPBELL COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENT

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

SEPTEMBER

5th - Warren Borton Book Signing

Author and Bottle Collector Warren Borton will be signing copies of his book "Wyoming Bottles, Crocks, & Collectables 1868-1930."

Books will be available for purchase.

Uinta County Museum

1020 Front St, Evanston, WY 82930

10th - Night at the Museum

Lucas Keeler presents Slim Clifton.

Bingo at 5:00PM - Presentation at 6:00PM

Hot dogs will be available.

5:00PM

Red Onion Museum

729 Birch St, Upton, WY 82730

13th & 14th - Homesteaders Days

Celebrate spirit of community, local Park County history, harvest, and so much more at the

Homesteader Days in Powell, WY. Be sure to stop by so you don't miss the Nostalgic Fun Events: Antique

Farm Equipment, Demonstrations, Kids Games,

Artisans, Food Trucks, and more! There will also be a Vehicle Visions Car, Truck, & Tractor Show.

10:00AM - 3:00 PM

Homesteader Museum

324 E 1st St, Powell, WY 82435

14th - Living History: Mountain Men

On the Second Saturday of the month from May to September, we will have a mountain man setup at the Fort from 10am to 1pm. This event is free with paid museum admission.

10:00AM - 1:00PM

Fort Caspar Museum

4001 Fort Caspar Rd, Casper, WY 82604

14th - Apple Fest

Instead just reading about Lander's rich apple orchard history, come to Lander's Pioneer Museum to experience it for yourselves!

The Wyoming Historical Society will be there with historic games for all ages with prizes!

We invite you to this event to learn about cider pressing - and drink some fresh cider yourselves, try your luck with the Apple Fest Sling Shot, go for a horse-back ride, and do some crafts!

This event is free and fun for the whole family.

10:00AM - 1:00PM

Lander Pioneer Museum

1443 W Main, Lander, WY 82520

21st - Vintage Car Show

Spend the afternoon viewing vintage automobiles as period music plays in the background. The cars will be parked in the driveway and visitors will be able to vote for their favorite one! If you own a pre-1969 car and want to bring it up, let them know! Please email teguilids@gmail.com.

1:00PM - 4:00 PM

Trail End State Historic Site

400 Clarendon Avenue, Sheridan, WY 82801

21st - Mark Warren Presentation

Speaker and author Mark Warren comes to the Ruthe James Conference Center to share his presentation on Nate Champion and the Johnson County Cattle Wars. This program reveals one of America's most egregious acts of insurrection and how one man prevented the crime of the century and became a martyr to the common laborer. Warren's years of research reveal why Western scholars consider Nate Champion to be one of the unsung heroes of American history.

2:00 PM

Ruthe James Williams Conference Center

400 W Center Street Douglas, WY

6th thru 8th - ANNUAL MEETING OF THE WYOMING HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Registration deadline has been extended and is OPEN online at wyshs.org/events.

Please visit the website for more details or contact the WHS Main Office at 307.322.3014.

CAN'T COME IN PERSON? JOIN US FOR THE MEMBER MEETING SATURDAY 9/7 BY ZOOM!

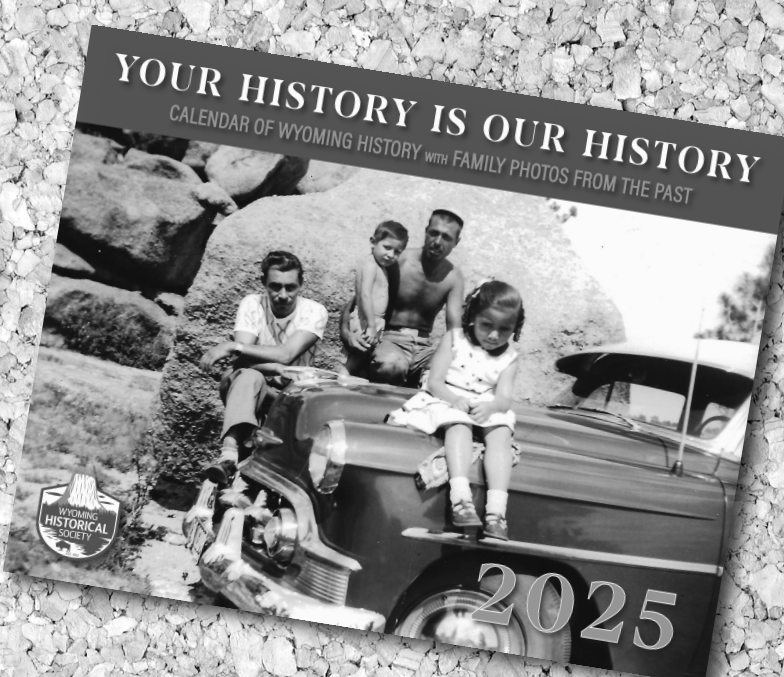
Please send events for this calendar list by the 10th of each month prior to lainpriorwyshs@gmail.com.



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CALENDAR OF WYOMING HISTORY WITH FAMILY PHOTOS FROM THE PAST

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