

Wyoming History News

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HONORING WYOMING'S MILITARY LEGACY Celebrating Military Appreciation Month through History

by Aley Philp

Wyoming, a state known for its rugged landscapes and resilient people, holds a deep and enduring connection to the military history of the United States. From the earliest frontier forts to the vital role played in modern defense initiatives, Wyoming's contributions - both military and civilian - have shaped the nation in profound ways. As we celebrate Military Appreciation Month, it is fitting to recognize the sacrifices and dedication of Wyoming's service members and the broader influence of the state's military heritage.

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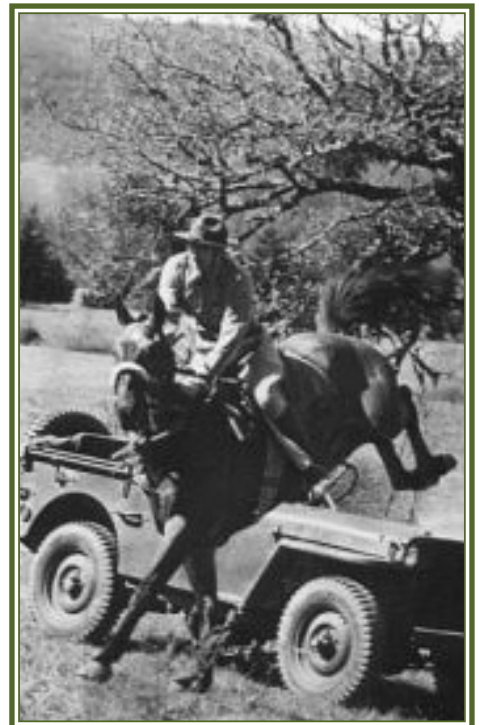
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FRONTIER DEFENDERS: WYOMING'S MILITARY ORIGINS

Before Wyoming became a state in 1890, its vast plains and mountainous terrain were home to key military outposts established to protect settlers and trade routes. Fort Laramie, founded in 1834 as a fur trading post before becoming a military fort in 1849, played a pivotal role in the westward expansion of the United States. It served as a hub for soldiers, pioneers, and Native American diplomacy during an era of great transformation. Other notable military installations, such as Fort Bridger and Fort Washakie, were instrumental in securing the region, ensuring safe passage for travelers, and maintaining stability. These forts stood as symbols of the growing presence of U.S. military forces in the West while also serving as critical points for interaction with Native American tribes.

In Wyoming, we are blessed that so many of these historic sites are so easily accessible and well preserved that we can visit them and immerse ourselves in their history; to honor all those who came to these open lands, including the military men and women who came before us.

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An Officer of Wyoming's 115th Cavalry jumping over a Jeep. during training in 1941 at Ft. Lewis, WA.

(COURTESY WYOMING STATE ARCHIVES)

UPCOMING EVENTS

May 2 to 4th - Wyoming Archaeological Society Spring Meeting 2025

Details on registration, scheduling, and accommodations are available on the WAS/WAPA website: www.wyomingarchaeology.org.

Cheyenne, WY

May 13 to 15th - Living History Days

Every May since 2001, the Museum of the Mountain Man has welcomed hundreds of school-children from southwestern Wyoming for an immersive journey into the world of fur traders. Led by members of the American Mountain Men, this interactive event features hands-on demonstrations of black powder firearms, Native American sign language, beaver skinning, tipi construction, trade goods, and more.

This event is free and open to the public. Join them to experience the daily life of the early mountain men firsthand.

*Museum of the Mountain Man
Sublette County Historical Society, Inc.
700 E Hennick, Pinedale, WY
307.367.4101*

May 16 to 26th - Old West Days Festival

Step back in time and experience the spirit of the American West at Old West Days in Jackson Hole. This beloved Western festival brings cowboy culture, live entertainment, and family-friendly fun to the heart of Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

*Jackson Hole, WY
www.jacksonholechamber.com/old-west-days/*

May 23 to 24th - Paranormal Lockdown

Professional Ghost Hunter Marie Mason is Coming to the Historic Occidental Hotel!

Join world-renowned paranormal investigator and author Marie Mason for an exclusive two-night public paranormal investigation at the legendary Occidental Hotel!

This is not a tour—this is a real investigation. Bring your courage, your curiosity, and prepare for two unforgettable nights locked in with the spirits of the Occidental.

Tickets: <https://theoccidental.eventbrite.com>

*7:00 PM
Occidental Hotel
10 N. Main St., Buffalo, WY*

May 20th - History of the Quadra Dangle Dance Club

Built in 1928 by the Union Pacific RR, the log building is home to the Quadra Dangle Club.

7:00 PM

*Quadra Dangle Square Dance Club
East 3905 Grays Gable Road, Laramie, WY*

June 1st - DEADLINE WHS Student Awards Nominations

Nominations should be mailed to

**WHS Awards Committee
541 S Thurmond St.
Sheridan WY 82801**

with a postmark no later than June 1, 2025. Reach out to pres.whs@gmail.com for more information.

June 7th - Carbon County Museum Block Party

This is a fun event for all ages featuring vendors, live demonstrations, food trucks, scavenger hunts and much much more!

*11:00 AM TO 4:00 PM
904 West Walnut Street, Rawlins, WY*

June 12 to 13th - Gold Rush Days

Step back in time and experience the excitement of Wyoming's gold rush at South Pass City Gold Rush Days! This annual celebration brings history to life with vintage baseball, anvil blasting, gold panning, and live music. Enjoy a cold sarsaparilla, take a stagecoach ride, or watch historic mining demonstrations.

Explore the town's rich past with guided tours, special hikes, and hands-on activities for all ages. Kids can join in classic games, while visitors of all ages enjoy delicious food, horse rides, and much more.

Don't miss this unforgettable weekend of history, adventure, and Old West fun!

*10:00 AM
South Pass City, WY*

WYOMING’S ROLE IN MAJOR CONFLICTS

Although Wyoming’s population has always been comparatively small, its citizens have consistently answered the call to serve. During World War I and World War II, thousands of Wyomingites enlisted, contributing to decisive military campaigns.

Famed Wyoming veterans, such as Medal of Honor recipient Vernon Baker, exemplified heroism and service. Baker, an African American soldier from Cheyenne, demonstrated extraordinary bravery during World War II, challenging discrimination while leading his men to victory in battle.

In 1997, President Bill Clinton presented the long-overdue honor to Baker, making him the only living recipient among seven African American soldiers who were retroactively awarded the Medal of Honor for their valor during the war.

On April 16, 2025, a bronze statue was dedicated in his honor at the Civic Commons Park in Cheyenne, WY.



B-17 Flight Crew outside a hangar at Casper Army Air Base.

(COURTESY WYOMING MILITARY DEPARTMENT)

Despite facing unjust internment at Heart Mountain Relocation Center, many Japanese Americans demonstrated extraordinary patriotism by enlisting in the U.S. military during World War II. Though a difficult chapter in history, it reminds us of the complexities of wartime policies. They served with distinction in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, one of the most decorated units in American history, proving their loyalty and courage even as their families remained behind barbed wire.

The state’s commitment to military preparedness extended beyond enlistment. Casper Army Air Base, established in 1942, served as a crucial training site for bomber crews, providing essential wartime aviation support.

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF WYOMING

Wyoming continues to hold a critical role in national defense. F.E. Warren Air Force Base, located in Cheyenne, is one of the nation’s oldest continuously active military installations. As home to the 90th Missile Wing, it plays a vital part in the country’s nuclear deterrent strategy, housing intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) essential for national security. The Laramie County Historical Society arranged a recent tour of F.E. Warren Air Force Base this past March.

The Army National Guard Camp at Guernsey is surrounded by history on all sides with some of the best preserved Oregon Trail ruts, Register Cliff,

continued on page 4



"The 300,000 round," Photo of Wyoming Army Guardsmen deployed during World War II, 1944. (COURTESY WYOMING ARMY NATIONAL GUARD)

"Military," continued from page 3

and the Castle, a project of the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930's, in Guernsey State Park. The Wyoming Army National Guard has been active over 150 years, since 1871.

The first federally recognized Wyoming National Guard unit was the "Laramie Grays," organized in 1888. The "Grays," Company A, 1st Wyoming Regiment, was followed the same year by Company B, known as the "Cheyenne Guards."

Since 2001, Guernsey has served as an important high altitude training ground for troops from all branches.

MILITARY APPRECIATION AND THE WYOMING SPIRIT

The values of service, resilience, and

commitment run deep in Wyoming culture. Communities across the state actively support their military members, honoring veterans and current service members through initiatives such as the Wyoming Veterans Memorial Museum and annual remembrance ceremonies. Military Appreciation Month is a time to reflect on the dedication of Wyoming's service members, past and present. Their contributions, from the days of the frontier forts to modern strategic defense operations, continue to shape both Wyoming and the broader United States.

Native American warrior traditions emphasize courage, duty, and a deep sense of responsibility to protect one's people—values that closely align

with the United States military code of honor. For generations, Native American warriors have upheld principles of sacrifice, loyalty, and resilience, making military service a natural extension of their cultural heritage. This profound connection to warrior traditions is one reason why Native Americans enlist in the armed forces at higher rates per capita than any other ethnic group. Service is often seen as a continuation of their ancestors' legacy, defending not only their tribes but the nation as a whole, embodying the spirit of warriors past and present.

Wyoming's military legacy stands as a testament to the strength and determination of its people—men and women who have defended the nation with valor. As we take time this May to honor those who serve, let us recognize Wyoming's enduring role in safeguarding American freedom. From the wind-swept plains to the strategic installations that define modern defense, Wyoming remains steadfast in its commitment to the nation and the brave individuals who answer the call to serve.

CALL TO ACTION:

SUSTAINING THE FUTURE OF THE WHS IN ORDER TO PRESERVE WYOMING'S HISTORY



Beki Speas, WHS President

At the April 12 WHS Executive Meeting, I addressed those present about the current state of the Wyoming Historical Society and the Executive Committee's plans to ensure the longevity of the Society. Through re-evaluating our current position, we can better embody our core Statement of Purpose as established in 1953 and carry out our Mission in everything we do as the Society.

Following is the transcript of what I shared that day:

Hello to our Wyoming Historical Society Members! To those who are not familiar with me, I have been a member of the Wyoming Historical Society since 2006. I have lived in Wyoming for 42 years (Gillette, Cody & Big Horn/Sheridan). I have loved Wyoming History since my 4th grade class at Stocktrail Elementary in Gillette, WY, as it was the curriculum to learn all of our Wyoming counties, county seats, trees, birds & flowers, etc. I also attended Mallo Camp near Newcastle learning about local plants, rocks, landscape and hear a few fun local historical stories. I also remember going to Buffalo Bill Center of the West in Cody as a child and wanting to learn everything that I could about Annie Oakley & Buffalo Bill. I was also fascinated with the Hole in the Wall Gang, Liver Eating Johnson, and Jim Bridger. I began collecting books in my 20s as I could afford them throughout my life. I now have a full cabinet, being more particular as I've gotten older.

Although my over 27 years professional career is not directly in history, as it's been in Accounting & Business within Oil & Gas, Pharmaceuticals, and the past 12 years working for a brokerage in Sheridan, my heart has always been in Wyoming History. I've raised my two sons in Wyoming, both graduating from Big Horn High School and from University of Wyoming and Northwest College. My kids will tell you that Mom took them to all the museums and antique stores that I could. While living in Cody Country, I was able to fly fish and hike with my children in the surrounding areas and Yellowstone. I love our state and I am proud that those of us living here are the way we are: strong, independent and can handle weather of all kinds at any time.

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“Call to Action,” continued from page 5

Wyoming History & genealogy are what I love, I’ve spent so many personal hours searching, taking notes all because it’s interesting and really matters to me.

I deeply value the Wyoming Historical Society, the supporters and donors, our committees, all of our volunteers, and all the good things that we have done. I have a personal drive and mission to protect and encourage the study of our Wyoming history, statewide. I tell you all of this because I want you to know me and to know that my intention is to help and support all Wyoming historical organizations, museums, societies, and preservation projects across the state.

The “WY”:

When I joined the board this past fall initially as Northeast Rep & Second Vice President, I was so excited to connect with the Northeast Region; to get to know all the historical societies and organizations in our area and our museums directors and teams. I was hopeful of adding Sheridan County and Campbell County back to our Northeast Region Chapters. These counties are where I have lived, and they mean a lot to me. Reality came in the fact that there was turmoil in our WHS. We lost Executive Committee members due to differences in opinion, also truthfully some downright toxic discussion and after reviewing all of this, our Executive Committee had to make some hard decisions.

I personally have a difficult time understanding why members, with all the same appreciation for our Wyoming history, could be so flippant, and at times, downright rude, to each other.

After studying our bylaws, it was clear



that Wyoming Historical Society was founded in 1953 as its own 501c3 and then Wyoming Historical Foundation (WHF) founded in 1966 has its own 501c3. We are, and always have been, two separate entities. We have a shared endowment that was originally created to house a gift given to Wyoming Historical Society. Later, it was decided to then give those funds, in the form of an irrevocable gift, to the Wyoming Community Foundation (WCF).

Practice has been that 40% of all the donations that came to the Wyoming Historical Foundation, as well as any Above and Beyond donations to the Society above \$40, or the amount equivalent to a membership fee, were also assigned into this endowment fund. As an irrevocable

gift, these funds can never be cashed out. The WHF receives an annual dividend from that endowment at the WCF; of which historically 40% is re-gifted back to the Wyoming Community Foundation. The Society's relationship with WHF and the those practices provided limited operating funds and further restricted the Society from any additional fundraising.

To address our current, immediate need to raise operating funds for the Society, the Executive Committee chose to inform the Wyoming Historical Foundation that they would no longer be in charge of the Society's fundraising. We wish the Wyoming Historical Foundation well in their future endeavors.

Another recent change is that the Society's original ad-hoc project, WyoHistory.org, has outgrown us. We are truly happy for them. They have been just one of our many success stories, and we fully support their transition into an independent non-profit organization. They are currently working towards setting up their entity and we see this as a very positive outcome of everyone's hard work on this project.

Challenges Facing the Society:

Here are some additional facts that the WHS Executive Committee have discussed:

- **Our chapter participation has dropped to 12 active paid chapters:**

- 12 additional counties do not have active WHS affiliated chapters, of those most of which house significant towns in Wyoming (Gillette, Rock Springs, Sheridan, Green River, Evanston, Jackson, and Pinedale).

- Other local Wyoming historical societies, not currently directly affiliated with the Society, could benefit from partnerships, but our current Bylaws limit their ability to join us and restrict how we can support them when they are not affiliated.

- **What are the benefits of being an Historical Society Member?**

Members receive the WHS Annals, Wyoming History News, a discount on the registration fee to the Annual Trek and the ability to attend the Annual Meeting.

- **What are the benefits of being a WHS associated Chapter?**

Chapters receive membership renewal documentation which places time-consuming reporting requirements.

Chapters submit their tax information to WHS so that the Society is able to submit a group tax form at the Society's expense.

NOTE: The WHS is currently paying our CPA approximately \$800 per chapter, regardless if it is active or not, at least \$12,000, to file a group return with the IRS. It would be free for each chapter to independently file their single tax form.

These lead to the following questions:

- **What is the benefit to the Society in being the administrative umbrella and oversight of Chapters?**

- **Are having affiliate chapters still the best way to fulfill the Society's Mission?**

- **Are our members, our statement of purpose, and our mission better addressed in other ways through different uses of the Society's limited funds and time?**

Valuable staff time, energy, and effort; which, in speaking in terms of returns on investment, that could be better spent on outreach, partnerships, and fundraising, are currently being consumed by the minutia of administrative duties and membership tasks with limited financial return.

Chapters need to spend their volunteer efforts to support their local societies and museums. Let the WHS gain funding from donations, endowments, and fundraising and assist all of you. This would be more in line with our Wyoming Historical Society Mission and Statement of Purpose.

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“Call to Action,” continued from page 7

The How:

As the Executive Committee, we feel that these are best addressed by aligning to our 2022 Strategic Plan and our Mission. Through an overall re-evaluation and re-configuration of the Wyoming Historical Society, we can better address the changed landscape of non-profit, membership organizations in today’s world.

The Wyoming Historical Society is facing declining membership and seeks to reinvigorate engagement by shifting from a dues-based system to a donation-driven model. The goal is to strengthen partnerships with Chapters and local historical organizations, streamline operations, and better serve the broader historical community.

We draw guidance from our Mission, Purpose, and the 2022 Strategic Plan Goals which are:

- **Hire a Full Time Executive Director focused on outreach, growth, and partnerships.**

- *The Society hired Wyoming native Aley Philp, whose qualified background uniquely fits our current needs, to lead the Wyoming Historical Society as the Executive Director. The Executive Committee appreciates her drive and commitment to Society’s sustainability.*

- **Evaluate the Operational Structure of the Society**

- Donors / Supporters (Members)
- Engagement
- Benefits of Chapters / Members

- **Revamp and Streamline the 1953 Bylaws**

“Bylaws should work FOR you, not against you.”

Proposed Bylaws are available for your vote at wyshs.org/documents. Deadline is May 31, 2025. It is an online vote limited to one vote

per member. You should have received an email April 22. If you did not, please reach out to the WHS Main Office at 307.322.3014 or info@wyshs.org.

- **Create Policy and Procedures**

This is currently in progress and will be finalized based on the outcome of the Bylaws vote and before the Annual Meeting in September.

- **Establish Visible and Partner Based Programming**

Since October 2023, the Executive Director has been developing partnerships and programming with other stateside agencies. Watch for our upcoming projects of Two Lights for Tomorrow and Oregon Trail LIVE! Across Wyoming. Please contact Aley at executivedirector@wyshs.org for more information.

Myself, the rest of the Executive Committee, and the WHS Staff are all excited and committed to the sustainability of the Society. **The fact is: we are going to move forward, we have to.** We have set our focus on actively planning and assisting our statewide historical entities with our mission.

The Executive Committee will be working on an updated Strategic Plan and will have that completed before the Annual Meeting in September 2025.

Know that in my heart and those of the WHS Executive Committee, of whom we are all volunteers, are just here for the betterment of Wyoming history and how we can better serve our statewide historical entities with no ulterior motives.

Thank you for letting us serve you!



CALL TO ACTION RECAP & CONCLUSION

SUSTAINING THE FUTURE OF THE WHS IN ORDER TO PRESERVE WYOMING'S HISTORY

• As the WHS currently operates, is it sustainable for the long-term?

No, the Society, as it currently operates with only member dues as its income and minimally supplemented with funds from endowments, would only be able to sustain itself for a few more years.

Change is vital, and therefore roadblocks to this change must be removed; some of which are already in the works, (i.e. separation from the Foundation) and others are up for member approval within the Bylaws update.

• Why do the Bylaws need updating?

The current Bylaws have seen only limited updates since their inception in 1953. Functional limitations are imposed on the Society which inhibit the development of partnerships and other measures needed for sustainability.

The Bylaws contain some minor housekeeping errors and do not align with non-profit best practices; which requires the transferring of operational guidelines, Committees, Membership, and staff duties to a Policy and Procedures Manual for formal adoption.

Copies of the Bylaws, along with a link to the ballot for each section of the Bylaws, are available at wyshs.org/documents

• What can you, as a member, do to support the longevity of the Wyoming Historical Society, now?

1 **VOTE** - cast your vote for the updated changes to the Bylaws so that the Society can take the needed steps to secure our future while preserving Wyoming's History.

2 **DONATE** - donate to the WHS through WyoGives Day on July 16, 2025, or any other time via check or online at store.wyshs.org under "Support our Mission."

3 **VOLUNTEER** - lend your time, talent, energy, and passion for Wyoming history to the Society through being on a Committee, or volunteer at your local historical chapter, museum, or other entity.

4 **COMMUNICATE** - Share with us your specific local needs to promote the Wyoming Historical Society's mission. What do you need and where can we help you? How can we help you grow your support network? One thing we can do is help with local & statewide networking, marketing & ads, events, fundraising, websites.

5 **BE POSITIVE** - promote the Wyoming Historical Society in an encouraging way, look for ways that we can support others in our mission, vision, values, and through our Statement of Purpose.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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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 501 (c)3 non-profit organization and is funded through donations and membership dues. The Wyoming Historical Society is not part of the Wyoming State Government.

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Aley Philp, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
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BLAST FROM THE PAST

HISTORY OF THE WYOMING HISTORICAL SOCIETY

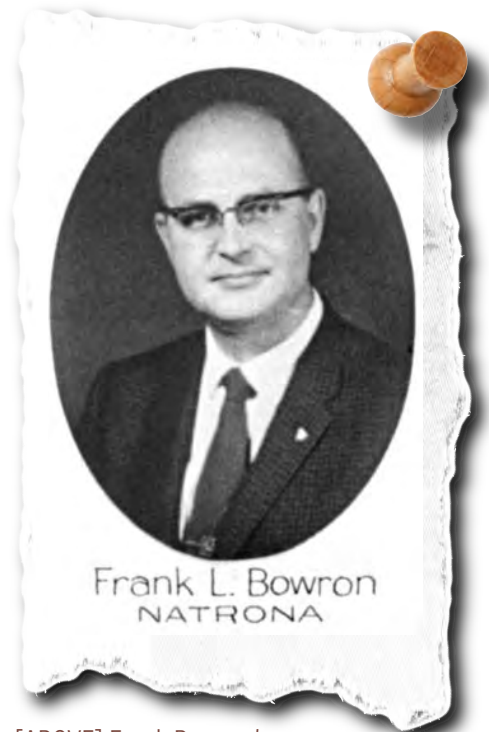
by Aley Philp

In the early 1950s, Mrs. Lola Homsher traveled the state of Wyoming discussing the importance of establishing an Historical Society and encouraged people to participate in an organizational effort. Her work resulted in a meeting held at the Woman's Club House in Casper on October 18, 1953, attended by more than seventy people from all areas of Wyoming.

For dues of \$3.50 per year WHS members received copies of *Annals of Wyoming* and the Society's newsletter, *Wyoming History News*. The *Annals of Wyoming* was previously published as the Quarterly

Bulletin (1923-1925), *Annals of Wyoming* (1925-1993), *Wyoming Annals* (1993-1995) and *Wyoming History Journal* (1995-1996). These historical journals still serve today as essential records of Wyoming's history. Digital indexes of most of the past issues exist, and efforts are underway to have searchable, indexed, digital records of all issues through 2020. The ambitious goal is to have this completed by the Society's 75th Anniversary in October 2028.

The attendees to the first annual meeting selected Frank Bowron of Casper as President of the new Wyoming [State] Historical Society, adopted a



[ABOVE] Frank Bowron's photo from Wyoming's 35th Legislative session, 1959.

(COURTESY WYOMING STATE ARCHIVES)

constitution and bylaws, and determined that its purpose shall be "to collect and preserve all possible data and materials including historical relics, relating to the history of Wyoming and illustrative of the progress and development of the state; to promote the study and preservation of such data and materials and to encourage in every way possible interest in Wyoming history."

continued on the next page

[LEFT] Lola Homsher, Henryetta Berry, Dorothy K Taylor, Reta Redings & Lillian Stratton, near Cody, WY, in 1957.

(COURTESY WYOMING STATE ARCHIVES)



Ann Redman, longtime Society member, shares her personal connection with founding member Lola Homsher:

“In the 1950’s I attended St. Mary’s Catholic High School in Cheyenne. After school, I worked as a waitress at the Sky Trail Restaurant, owned by three brothers, the Yarters. The Sky Trail was at Sky Harbor by the airport, and they also owned the Trail Restaurant located where Wyoming Homes is now, as well as the Trail Steak House on West Lincolnway, now Harmony Hearth and Homes.

Two of our regular customers were Lola Homsher and Henryetta Berry. One day I was late due to a test at school and I apologized. Ms. Homsher asked me about school and offered me a part-time job at



After graduating, Patty planned to attend the University of Wyoming. Ms. Homsher offered me a job when Patty went to the University. I could work 8 am to 5 pm at the museum and as a waitress in the evening. When Ms. Homsher’s secretary left, I

[ABOVE] Ann Redman at her desk at the Wyoming State Archives.

(COURTESY ANN REDMAN)

purpose of the endowment was to fund three awards and the operations of the Society in perpetuity. The awards are the Lola M. Homsher Research Grant Awards, which we will announce in the June issue of the WHN, the Judge and Mrs. Percy W. Metz Memorial Award, and the Henryetta Berry Memorial award. We are incredibly thankful for her generosity and forward thinking in securing the longevity of the Society in a positive and accessible way.

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*.

“... to encourage, in every way possible, interest in Wyoming history.”

- Wyoming Historical Society's Purpose Statement, 1953

the Wyoming State Museum after school. I was interested, but unable to accept at the time due to limited hours after school. I needed to help my family with what I earned as a waitress. I recommended one of my classmates. Ms. Homsher hired her to work as a greeter and run a small gift shop.

was offered the position as her assistant.

When I left for Business College I continued to stay in touch with her. I am grateful she believed in me.”

Lola Homsher bequeathed the Wyoming Historical Society an endowment in 1985. The



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Permit No. 71

JUNE 19 - 22, 2025
CONVERSE COUNTY, WY (DOUGLAS)
Register today for the
Wyoming Historical Society's 71st Annual Trek!

Thursday to Sunday, June 19 - 22, 2025.
Check-In is Thursday Afternoon.
Register online or via a mail-in form, both
available at www.wyshs.org/events.
Room rates are also listed online.
Contact Heidi at tres.whs@gmail.com
for more information!