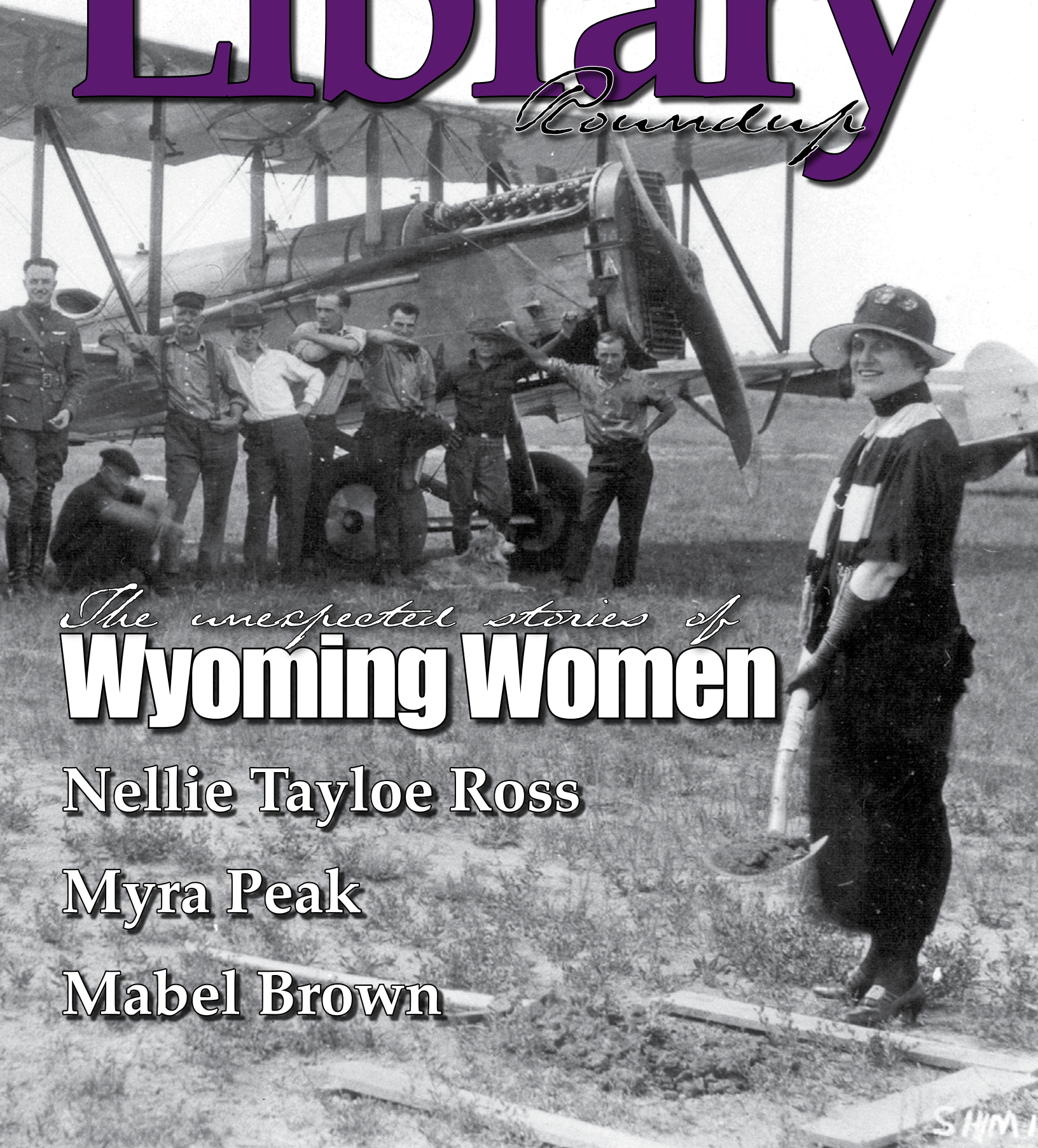


# Wyoming Library Roundup

Winter 2006



*The unexpected stories of*  
**Wyoming Women**

**Nellie Tayloe Ross**

**Myra Peak**

**Mabel Brown**

# Promoting women's self-sufficiency through entrepreneurship

If small business ownership is the path to economic self-sufficiency, the Wyoming Women's Business Center (WWBC) is on the trail providing maps and walking sticks.

The WWBC offers business counseling, training, technical assistance, networking and funding to current and prospective entrepreneurs. It serves any Wyoming resident, but targets its services to women, people of color and low-income individuals.

"Employment choices for women and people of color are often limited to low-paying, dead-end jobs. We help people escape the low-wage treadmill by promoting small business ownership," said Mary Beth Baptiste, WWBC Project Director.

"Women traditionally have not had access to the funding and networking opportunities available to men," she added. "The WWBC educates women and gives them those opportunities so they can compete on more level ground."

The WWBC, located in Laramie, is Wyoming's first and only U.S. Small Business Association (SBA) Intermediary Lender for microloans, very small loans (typically \$500 to \$10,000) to establish or

expand small businesses. These loans go to people who cannot obtain traditional financing. To ensure long-term success, the WWBC provides microloan borrowers with training and assistance.

A microloan helped Liz Bunya open Synergy Café in Cheyenne recently; it offers flavorful, healthy food and specialty drinks in an upscale atmosphere. Another WWBC success story was that of Joan Taylor, who received a loan in 2002 to expand her business, Rolling Hills



*Liz Bunya, WWBC microloan recipient, at the Synergy Café.*

Services, that offers rural trash collection in Natrona and Converse counties. Taylor hires disabled youth and senior citizens whenever she can.

The WWBC started in 1999 as a project of the Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault. Primary funding comes from the SBA. Other major partners are the Wyoming Small Business Development Center, University of Wyoming and Wyoming Business Council.

For more information on the Wyoming Women's Business Center, visit <http://www.wyomingwomen.org> or call 307-766-3084 (in Laramie) or 888-524-1947 (toll-free in Wyoming).



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## National and International Firsts for Wyoming

First in the World to Enact Women's Suffrage  
Signed into Law December 10, 1869

First Woman Jurist, appointed February 17, 1870  
Esther Hobart Morris, Justice of the Peace,  
South Pass City

First Woman to Vote, September 6, 1870  
Louisa Swain, Laramie, Wyoming Territory

First Woman elected to State Office in the  
United States  
Estelle Reed, Wyoming Superintendent of  
Public Instruction, 1894

First Woman elected Governor in the United  
States  
Nellie Tayloe Ross, January 5, 1925

## Wyoming Women Firsts in the State

First Woman elected State Treasurer  
Minnie Mitchell, 1952

First Woman elected State Auditor  
Minnie Mitchell, 1955

First Woman elected Secretary of State  
Thyra Thomson, 1963

First Woman elected Speaker of the Wyoming  
State House of Representatives  
Edness Kimball Wilkins, 1966

First Woman elected Representative to the  
United States Congress  
Barbara Cubin, 1995

First Woman appointed Wyoming Supreme  
Court Justice  
Marilyn Kite, 2000

First Woman elected President of the Wyoming  
State Senate  
April Brimmer Kunz, 2003

# Wyoming Library Roundup

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*Cover photo: Gov. Nellie Tayloe Ross at the groundbreaking of the  
Cheyenne airport. Photo courtesy of Wyoming State Archives.*

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Wyoming cherishes its “equality firsts.” Wyoming was the first state to grant women the right to vote. We had the first woman governor, the first woman justice of the peace, and the first all-woman jury. While we honor this history, does it improve the quality of life for women today? Let’s look at the facts:



- Wyoming women are more likely than men to face violence and fear. Over 90 percent of all victims of domestic violence are women and children.
- Wyoming women and children struggle in poverty. One in four families is a single-parent family, and more than one-third of these families live below the federal poverty level. Most single-parents are women.
- Wyoming’s best and brightest women are leaving the state. While more women enroll in college, fewer women than men enter the Wyoming workforce.
- Wyoming is last in the nation on gender pay equity, with women earning 67 cents compared to every dollar earned by men.

We can’t celebrate our history while ignoring our reality. It is affecting each of us -- our mothers, our sisters, and it will affect our daughters if we don’t take action today.

So what can we do? For one thing, we can support foundations like the Wyoming Women’s Foundation, which puts its million dollar endowment to work in improving economic self sufficiency for Wyoming women. (See story on back page.)

We can also look at the potential for wage disparity in our own workplace. One recent study found that wage disparity hurts Wyoming’s economy to the tune of an estimated **\$65 million** each year (not counting higher social services costs due to low wages and unemployment). Wage disparity is not just a problem for women; it is everyone’s problem! It robs our women of a fair wage and it robs our economy of jobs, productivity and taxes.

Finally, leaders at every level need to do a better job in promoting equal economic opportunity. As long as women remain in education, nursing, service, support and sales jobs, while men choose higher-paying mining, transportation and construction jobs, the wage gap will be a problem. Women should be encouraged to choose, and train for higher-paying occupations, and employers should allow them equal opportunity to enter these nontraditional jobs. Schools and parents can begin to break occupation stereotypes. Mentoring programs can help women understand what it takes to succeed and how to gain recognition for their work. And of course, Wyoming must continue its long-term efforts to diversify the economy so there are better career choices for women.

In short, we need to all become better informed and more fully involved. Let our incredible past be the template for our future, and help Wyoming reclaim its standing as the equality state for all its citizens!

*Nancy D Freudenthal*  
Nancy Freudenthal,  
Wyoming First Lady

## Mrs. Ross' Address to Women Voters

Cheyenne, Wyo., Oct. 18, 1924

*To the Women of Wyoming:*

Since the organization of our territorial government more than fifty years ago, the women of Wyoming have in common with men enjoyed, unquestioned and unchallenged, those rights and privileges of citizenship which have only recently been won, and at great cost, by the women of other states.

I would pay tribute to the generosity and chivalry of the founders of our state who were the first in our country to so honor womanhood.

Once more Wyoming pays signal honor to our sex, in that a great political party has conferred, unsought, upon a woman the nomination for the highest executive office in the state.

In view of these facts, it would scarcely become us as women to present my candidacy as a demand for recognition which had heretofore been resisted. However, there is now offered for the first time to the women of Wyoming an opportunity for representation that has never been achieved by the women of any state. That I should be the woman through whom such achievement might become possible fills me with profound appreciation, and, in case of my election, I should feel a deep sense of responsibility toward my sex, and should hope to so conduct my administration that it might never be said that women were unfitted for executive office.

It is my belief that the men of our state have no innate objection to a woman in any political position, if convinced that she possesses the requisite ability and integrity. Certainly, if this is the attitude of our men, the women of our state will not hesitate to exert themselves in my behalf, if they have confidence in my qualifications to demonstrate that a woman may creditably occupy so exalted an office, and if they are satisfied that the policies for which I stand will be beneficial to the state.

If such confidence is placed in me, I shall be grateful.

-Nellie Tayloe Ross



# Nellie Tayloe Ross



## From Wyoming First Lady to First “Governor Lady”

*Nellie Tayloe Ross and her secretary at her desk in the Capitol in 1925. Photos in this history are courtesy of the Wyoming State Archives.*



On January 25, 1925, Nellie Tayloe Ross was inaugurated as Wyoming’s thirteenth governor. She was the first woman governor in the United States.

She attended the inauguration in mourning clothes, promising to continue her late husband’s agenda. Only four months before, she had been Wyoming’s First Lady, the wife of Governor William Bradford Ross. Elected in 1922, William Ross was a progressive, populist Democrat in a predominantly Republican state. He died of appendicitis and surgical complications on Oct. 2, 1924.

Statute required that voters select his replacement in the regular election on Nov. 4. The Democrats nominated Nellie Tayloe Ross to the ballot, and she won readily.

Despite her historic first, relatively little has been written about Gov. Ross's life and achievements. Happily, this situation is changing. In 2005, the University of Missouri Press published a book-length biography, *Governor Lady: The Life and Times of Nellie Tayloe Ross* by Teva J. Scheer (see review p. 24). Work is also beginning on a public television documentary on her life.

"We're very intent on keeping her legacy alive and well," said Brad Ross, Nellie Tayloe Ross's grandson. "I do not want my grandmother's legacy in a box. I want it out, and I want the children of Wyoming and the people of Wyoming to realize what a rich history they have with the Ross family."

*Governor Lady* is the first book-length treatment of the Ross story. Scheer said what struck her was, "There was the official biography, the persona, and then there were all the elements that either interfered with the official biography or that she chose not to emphasize. Those were the aspects that I think rounded her out and made her an interesting person. Because she had not been given the treatment of a full book-length biography, no one had taken the time to look at other archives and sources, so many of those elements had never been assembled."

Governor Nellie Tayloe Ross was a Southern lady, born in Missouri in 1876, the year of the nation's centennial. Her family had deep roots in this country: she was a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and her family was related to George Washington's. Like many aristocratic Southern families, they had lost nearly everything in the Civil War and its aftermath. The family's impoverishment left a lasting impression on Nellie. Lack of money concerned her deeply when she was a wife and mother, and she was frugal almost to a fault.

The young Nellie Tayloe married

William Bradford Ross in 1902, and moved with him to Cheyenne, Wyo., where he established a law practice. They had four sons, one of whom died in infancy. Their two eldest sons, Ambrose and George, were in college and the youngest, Bradford, was 12 years old when William Ross died.

Her decision to run for governor was, in part, financial. After William's 1922 election, Brad Ross said his grandparents thought, "Pinch me, we made it. We ran three times, but we made it. And then, all of a sudden,



pinch me again, and there's no William, and I'm standing there all alone with all the debts and three kids, two in college, and no money and no job. And they're searching around to see if they can get kind of a little job for her, to give her a pension. So what was her choice? Nellie, do you want to be governor? I think I do."

As a grieving widow, Nellie did not actively campaign for governor. She did release two letters stating her intention to continue her late husband's agenda, and her supporters purchased

advertising on her behalf. On election day, she watched from the windows in the Governor's Mansion as voters went to the polling place in the mansion's carriage house. When the votes were tallied, she had won by a larger margin than any previous Wyoming governor.

As it turned out, it was the last chance the "Equality State" would have had to elect the nation's first woman governor. In Texas, Miriam A. "Ma" Ferguson was elected on the same date as Nellie Tayloe Ross, but was inaugurated two weeks later.

Gov. Ross has been described as an elegant, gracious woman. "If we met her, we'd be charmed," said Scheer, her biographer. "Everything I've read talks about her wonderful people skills, and yet when you were finished being charmed and you walked away, I'm not sure that you would have learned anything more than she wanted you to know about herself. She was very protective, perhaps because of the early, difficult years when her family struggled to make a living, and she was very conscious of her image. So she was a charming, gracious lady, who was, in many ways, very private."

Under the charm was a resolute nature. Gov. Nellie Tayloe Ross "really wasn't intimidated by anyone," Brad Ross said. She successfully faced a Republican-dominated Legislature that tried to wrest power from the Office of the Governor.

Wyoming's "Governor Lady" was deeply aware of her responsibilities to her family, her state and her sex. From the moment she was nominated, the eyes of the world were on her, and she had no intention of letting her performance reflect poorly on other women who might follow her into the political realm.

"The one thing that she always wanted to do while she was in Wyoming was be the very best governor and to



govern all of the people, not just her constituents,” Brad Ross said.

Another of Gov. Ross’s grandsons, Robert Tayloe Ross, said, “I know that she worked as hard as she possibly could to do a very good and competent job as governor. In that particular role, I believe she was conscious of the fact that she was the first woman governor elected.” Both grandsons describe her as deeply religious, intelligent and well-read, with high personal and ethical standards. She was generally considered an able administrator, and she was untainted by the widespread oil scandals of the day.

Her religious and ethical convictions fed her deepest concern as governor – that she might have to be involved in an execution. “She was so concerned about having to condemn someone to death,” Brad Ross said.

Nellie’s letters reflect the additional pressures placed on her as a woman. In 1925, she wrote to her son Ambrose, “I’m making this discovery, that no man Governor has the demands made upon him that are made of me. That’s because I am the first woman Governor. There is no end to the interviews and I must be nice to everybody. I’m sure many people in the state and from outside come in to see me just to see what kind of a looking person I am.”

Ross was narrowly defeated in her bid for re-election in 1926. Her experience as governor, however, opened an opportunity for her to join the Chautauqua circuit as a speaker. Prior to her governorship, she had spoken only before women’s groups. Once elected, she found herself sometimes making multiple speeches in one day, which she did without using notes.

“That is the one thing about the office I don’t like,” she wrote to her son, Ambrose, “this eternal speech making. It will either develop my mind, though, or ruin it so I’ll be ready for an institution soon. Really the strain of applying myself to so many subjects is terrible.”

Scheer found the Chautauqua period particularly fascinating, because so little had been written about it. Chautauqua

began as a summer camp for Sunday School instructors in the East. It developed into circuit Chautauqua, which brought new ideas and high profile speakers to communities all over the United States.

“During the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most Americans were still on the farm, and many people had never traveled farther than their county seat,” Scheer said. “News was hard to get, so the bottom line is that they saw the same people, did the same things, and thought the same thoughts, year after year. They were starved for enrichment”

At its peak, millions attended Chautauqua events. “What would happen is every summer, let’s say in Lander, there would be two weeks devoted to Chautauqua,” Scheer said. “The city fathers would put up the money to bring in the Chautauqua tour and performers like Nellie or William Jennings Bryan or Theodore Roosevelt, in addition to major opera singers and thespians and bands and all kinds of entertainment. Pretty much everybody in the town would turn out. It introduced Americans to all kinds of new ideas and cultures that they never would have encountered any other way.”

Nellie Tayloe Ross was a successful speaker on the Chautauqua tours for three or four years. After her governorship, she also rose through the Democratic Party’s ranks, serving as Wyoming committeewoman, then as vice chairman of the Democratic National Committee (DNC). She was the first woman to have her name placed in nomination for Vice President of the U.S. in 1928, and she seconded the party’s nomination for Alfred E. Smith that same year. She was active in both Smith’s campaign and Franklin

Delano Roosevelt’s, four years later.

In 1933, FDR appointed Ross as the first woman director of the U.S. Mint, where she worked until 1952. Under her

direction, the Mint automated many processes and increased efficiency. Again, her people skills bought her time while she learned the ropes.

“The metal came in, and the coins went out, and she

“I’m making this discovery, that no man Governor has the demands made upon him that are made of me. That’s because I am the first woman Governor.”

knew nothing about that kind of thing,” Scheer said, “but she had a very able assistant director, Mary Margaret O’Reilly who’d been there forever and ever and ever, and had really run the place despite working for a series of political bureau directors. Mary Margaret could have really resented Nellie. Instead, Nellie was able to win her over, so that the two formed a loyal partnership during the years Nellie learned the Mint business.”

Scheer said because Ross was a woman, some idealized her capabilities, and others claimed she was riding on the success of others. However, Scheer said, “The bottom line is, that in public administration or in any business, you’re only as good as the people that work for you. She would have been held accountable if they failed; conversely, the fact that she was able to pick and foster and support good people was part of her skill as a public administrator.”

Ross retired from the Mint in 1952 when Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower came to power. She continued to live in the Washington D.C. area, and spent time on the

*Edness Kimball Wilkins with  
Nellie Tayloe Ross at the U.S.  
Mint in 1934.*

family's farm in Maryland. During her retirement, she traveled and lived abroad, and enjoyed an active social life. She died, surrounded by family, in 1977 at the age of 101.

Despite Ross's achievements, the feminists of the time did not embrace her. In fact, a rift developed, which was one reason why her story was largely untold. "I'm intrigued by the relationship, if you want to call it that, with the feminist groups that swarmed around Eleanor

Roosevelt," Scheer said. "They just really didn't like Nellie much at all. It was Eleanor and Mary Dewson who left the most records about that period about women in national politics. They said next to nothing about Nellie, and what they did wasn't generally very positive. Nellie never spoke to it. At the end of her career, she said she'd always been treated well, and I just think she chose to overlook those kinds of things."

Brad Ross is more blunt about it: "I think in fact the suffragettes and the women of the time walked away from my grandmother because she found them to be so obnoxious. That's why you get this quote from her over and over, 'I was first a mother, I was first a wife for 20 years. Then I was a First Lady. Then I was a Governor.'"

Where her family and her biographer sometimes differ is on her motivations. Brad Ross describes her as a woman who put her family first above all, even when it meant heading into the political and professional arenas.

"Never be mistaken about the fact that Nellie was first a mother and interested in her family," he said. "She was more interested in her welfare and the



welfare of her family, and that was the underlying motivation for many of the decisions she made about her life."

Scheer, on the other hand, said, "She always claimed that her highest mission was that of wife and mother, but as I pointed out several times in the book, I'm not sure that her actions necessarily mirrored that highest calling. Not to say she didn't adore her family – she did. But, she certainly made decisions along the way that would suggest that she had other priorities as well."

Regardless, "Nellie always kept a balance that was very unusual for that time period between her personal life and her career," Scheer said. "She did a good job, and she worked hard, and she had high ethics, but she did not live for that career."

Nellie Tayloe Ross lived her life in phases that allowed her to concentrate on each phase: first motherhood, then the governorship, speakers' circuit and the Mint. "I suggest that Nellie's life pattern might be useful for the young woman of today," Scheer said. "If she's willing to postpone her career and have her kids and get them in school and then start thinking about coming back – if she has kids in her 20s, they're going to be gone when she's in her 40s.

If she has started her career gradually in her 30s, then she's in a good position to work for another 25, 30 years. So I think that's what Nellie has to offer us."

Robert Tayloe Ross said Nellie instilled in her family her values: integrity, honesty, character, hard work and earning what you achieve in life. "I believe that her legacy is one of a very strong citizen, who was called upon," he said. "She happened to be a woman. Her legacy is one of promotion of people of all backgrounds to leadership and to success. Simply stated, her legacy is one of success, hard work and dedication."

Brad Ross said that although her later career took her away from Wyoming, she never lost her connections with the state that gave her the opportunity to be governor. "The people of Wyoming, what I'd like to say to them is we have a wonderful heritage together, and I certainly have enjoyed being a part of that history. I hope they will remember that my grandmother first always loved the people and thanked them, because her family and her history started there. Her political career started there. And in a very humble way, we're all most grateful, and especially the generation living today."

# hard hats and hazmat

## Myra Peak's unconventional path



*Myra Peak at Pit 9 in 1986.*

Myra Peak just laughs when asked why she went into business for herself. “I thought I could make more money,” she said. The laugh clearly says she was proven wrong. “But it’s given me more freedom, more control over my life and more flexibility with my time and my interests.”

Peak is president and owner of Peak Environmental Management Inc., an environmental consulting firm she has operated in Green River, Wyo. since 1989.

“Half of our work is training, primarily hazardous materials training, although there are other things: environmental issues, health and safety. The other half is environmental field work generally related to sampling or contamination issues: soil sampling, groundwater sampling, air sampling, environmental assessments for property transfer.

“The two most important things I do with my work are to provide a service that my clients can trust and to provide training that keeps people safer at work and at home.”

Peak grew up in central Illinois where her family raised purebred hogs. She attended Knox College, a liberal arts school, where she earned a B.A. in physical science-mathematics. She earned her M.S. in agronomy (soil chemistry and fertility) from Purdue University.

“I may be one of the most un-liberally educated graduates of Knox from the perspective of course work,” she said. “I started out wanting to be a high school teacher, but the education courses seemed like a waste of time. I just kept taking more and more science

and math. Two-thirds of my courses were in math and science; I took the bare minimum of the others.”

After Purdue, she tried and dropped two PhD. programs before landing at Black Butte Coal Mine in Sweetwater County in 1981. She rose through the ranks, holding five jobs with the mine in the five years she was there.

Peak was the first woman to become a foreman at Black Butte. “I wanted to be a manager. I like organizing things and helping people do their jobs better. Those two things are what I really like about being a boss,” she said.

“That job defined me in many ways. It was the ‘good’ boom where Rock Springs was hell on wheels, or heaven, depending on what you got out of it. It was rough at work and on the home front, but I learned how to survive and suffer no fools.”

After five years in the coal mine, Peak switched career gears completely. “I took a year off to travel and then hunted through the “Wall Street Journal,” among other places, trying to figure out what I wanted to do.” She landed in Chicago, working for MAECORP Environmental Solutions, a hazardous waste cleanup contractor. In her two years there, she was their first woman foreman, and then their first project manager of either gender – she defined the position for them, since they hadn’t had one before.

“The combination of my mining experience and science background were a good fit. I had to convince my employer of that just to get the job and then had to convince them I could do more than type and file. Although there are lots of women scientists, my bosses weren’t convinced that women could do more.”

Peak counts MAECORP as one of the most important steps in her career. “It wasn’t so much the job – although it had its own elements of hell on wheels. Switching careers and industries is a huge challenge. That’s what consultants do on a daily basis.

“It looks like I can’t keep a job. I couldn’t from the standpoint that I got bored.” Since she went into consulting, “I’ve had this job for 16 years, but it’s quite varied with types of projects, clients and chances to do new things. I have a boss with lots of enthusiasm and encouragement. I’m not changing my job now on the outside, but on the inside I change many of my activities that the world doesn’t see. I don’t have to worry about mid-life crises.”

Peak made use of Sweetwater County’s public libraries extensively when she was first getting her business off the ground. The libraries offered many

business incubator tools: electric typewriters, fax machines, Internet access and a notary. She used city directories and library history books for her environmental assessments. Although she now has the equipment to do more at home, she is still a heavy library user.

“Maybe the best thing in all of this is

**“Once in a while I run into a woman who has given up waitressing or office work to make more money driving a truck in the oilfield or running a blade in a mine. Those women get dirty, get cold and get teased once in a while. They make more money, too.”**

that the librarians have been helpful, cheerful and kind when I had no clients,” she said. “They were just glad to see me and expected only to help me with nothing in return.”

Asked how she’s succeeded, Peak responded first with dry humor, “I smile a lot. I have good grammar. I look really good in a dress – I’ve been told that.”

She continued, more seriously, “I tell my clients what they need to hear and not what they want to hear. Most lines of work require people to tell customers what they want to hear. In this type of work, it’s a dangerous thing. My clients know they get the same information no matter how much or how little they

pay me. The answer will always be the same and in line with science and the regulatory climate and requirements.”

Peak’s business is “wholesale, not retail – for a reason. I deal more with what some people consider the hard science, the chemistry of things.” She doesn’t operate in the contentious world of public hearings and policy debates. It also allows her to close the door and quit smiling when she needs a break.

She focuses on the practical side in her consulting, but she has also taught and written extensively on environmental ethics. Although soil, air and water contamination are nothing to sneeze at, she sees ecosystem preservation as a more critical and intractable problem.

“Sagebrush doesn’t bleed. It’s not going to make the headlines. We have a lot of contamination in the world, and I don’t want to downplay that, but in some ways, that’s easier to control. Whether it’s point source pollution or non-point source pollution, it’s still easier to control than it is to control chopping up the ecosystem, because of how we own land and what we have a right to do with the land. And people will say, ‘Well, gee, I’m working on the oil rig and you know, the antelope still come by every day.’ That’s one oil rig. That’s just a few antelope you see. You’re

not seeing, for example, the entire Red Desert. People don’t read the things that the BLM writes or the Forest Service writes about how the populations of antelope or other animals are affected, or how the repopulation of various grass species or shrubs are affected. People just don’t read that stuff; it’s pretty dull and boring.

“So when people say, ‘I see the antelope go by every day,’ you’re just seeing a little corner of the world. You’re not seeing the entire impact of a huge industry.”

Peak’s career has given her a different perspective on mentoring women in nontraditional fields. She believes in helping men and women in the

workplace communicate better, to learn each others' perspectives and to learn to speak the same language. However, she does not believe in hand-holding and has no patience with whiners.

"Women who want opportunities sometimes don't take the ones they're given. When I worked at the coal mine, they had meetings where people from different jobs would come in and explain their jobs to women. Then when a job opened up, the concept was that women would more willingly put a bid in on it. Except it didn't happen. The women would say that they'd never run a dozer or whatever, so why should they apply? Gee whiz, some of the men who bid on jobs had never done it either. The women couldn't see themselves doing that job, which goes back to speaking the 'language.' Although I'd never been a foreman before, I knew that every man who was a foreman had a point in his life when it was his first foreman's job."

More bluntly, "I'm tired of women who don't try a new job, skill or trade even when given the chance and when their employers bend over backward for them. Once in a while I run into a woman who has given up waitressing or office work to make more money driving a truck in the oilfield or running a blade in a mine. Those women get dirty, get cold and get teased once in a while. They make more money, too."

Her science background allows her to work in the environmental field, but it is words that run through everything Myra Peak does. At heart, she is a communicator and a writer. For her business, Peak writes numerous tests, quizzes, written exercises, books, booklets, press releases, proposals and marketing information.

She is also a book author and an award-winning creative writer. In 1995, she published a children's book, *Prudence Recycles Paper*. Since then, she's received awards for several short stories and poetry, including the Wyoming Arts Council's Frank Nelson Doubleday Award in 2004. In 2005, Wyoming Writers Inc. honored her for personal achievements in creative writing

with the Milestone Award.

Her young daughter, Emily, shows up in several of her published poems. Peak juggles a hectic family life on top of her consulting and writing: a feisty toddler and a husband who is facing serious health problems.

"I couldn't do this unless I had the husband I have," she said. "He loves me for me with no notions about what else I should be. I dated pesky doctors and lawyers who want other kinds of wives. I got a good deal with this husband. He's the only one I've ever had. Hopefully, I can get him well."

Despite the poetry awards and publications, she doesn't like to call herself a "poet." In fact, she didn't even like it until she took a poetry class in 2002. "My philosophy was that if, after death, I found that I had to read poetry I would know I was in hell," she said. However, the poetry helped her write better fiction. Writing fiction – finding ways to tell stories – helped her find better ways to teach hazardous materials training. The same characters began showing up in both her short stories and her class exercises. Two seemingly disparate paths of science and poetry



*Myra Peak, owner of Peak Environmental Management, Inc.*

are, in Myra Peak's life, part of one whole.

"The creativity of writing allows my mind to stretch in new ways, helps me find different teaching methods and explanations for specific topics and helps me better understand how different members of my audience may think," she said.

"Everything I do – writing creatively, raising Emily, dealing with employees from other countries or explaining why it's not worth my time to clean up meth labs – plays into everything else. People may see the forest of my life, the 'brand' I've created or the service I provide specifically to them. The details – trees, moss, bubbling waterfalls, loggers cutting down trees, ruts in roads that go into the forest to bring out the trees – are what make my business what it is and makes me who I am."

# Casper College Library celebrates women's history

On March 23, 2006, longtime Casper resident Trula Cooper will share her recollections on everything from Prohibition to the 1949 blizzard. It's all part of the annual Women's History Celebration, an event hosted by Casper College Goodstein Foundation Library since 1984.

"People in the West think of men as the 'movers and shakers' in our history," said Lynnette Anderson, Casper College Library Director. "This event offers us a wonderful opportunity to reach out to our community and tell the stories of the women who were involved in Casper and Wyoming history.

Casper's Women's History Celebration takes place in March as part of the national Women's History Month observance. However, instead of using the national theme, Casper College draws on local resources – people and collections – to create its event.

"It's a chance to not only celebrate women's history, but to tie that to our library collection, particularly our local history collection," Lynnette Anderson said.

"I always let the speaker choose the specific topic," said Kevin Anderson, Western History Specialist at Goodstein Library. He chairs the committee that organizes the event. "Our Special Collections focus on Wyoming history. We ask each speaker to highlight the role of women in Wyoming. Then we have a natural fit that ties anything the speaker does in with our collection and its emphasis."

Themes have varied widely since the first Women's History Celebration that honored noted Wyoming educator and State Legislator Verda James. Every year is a new theme. The event has featured

*Unidentified woman, no date, Morrison Collection, Casper College Library.*

women who are writers, pioneers, volunteers, leaders, teachers, medical practitioners and soldiers. The event has explored Wyoming archaeology and life on the Wind River Indian Reservation. It is supported through donations and library funding, as well as by the work of Goodstein Library staff members.

Kevin Anderson first became involved with the Women's History Celebration in 1993, and that year still stands out in his mind. "It was the year of the Oregon Trail Sesquicentennial," he said. "I contacted Pauline Peyton and she agreed to talk about Women on the Oregon Trail. Starla Johnson was my co-chair that year, and we had a great time visiting her in her Douglas home when we planned the presentation.

"Since the Oregon Trail went right through her family's property, she had some great first-hand accounts of travelers who came through in the later years. People tend to forget that the trail was still used by covered wagons even as late as the 1890s, so her account helped to provide an unusual perspective."

This year's program will be "Recollections of Trula Cooper." Cooper has lived in Casper since 1922 and is an expert on Casper history. She will speak about historical events including early days at her grandmother's in Sheridan, Wyo., Prohibition, the 1923 Cole Creek railway wreck, World War II rationing, Heart Mountain and the 1949 blizzard.

Goodstein Library's unique collections provide background research for Women's History Celebration. To preserve the area's cultural heritage, the Special Collections Department develops and maintains a collection of non-circulating materials on Wyoming and the West with particular emphasis on Casper and Natrona County.

"Our local history collection is really something special," Lynnette Anderson said. "We have the largest collection of materials anywhere on the history of Casper and Natrona County, and our community can really take pride that its heritage is being preserved."

Topics covered in the Special

Collections Department include the many pioneer trails that traversed the state, the ranching and petroleum industries, explorers and mountain men, Native Americans, outlaws and lawmen, and archaeology.

The Special Collections include about 8,000 monographs, 2,000 blueprints or architectural drawings, 500 historical maps, almost 2,000 topographic maps and nearly 1,000 rolls of microfilm. There are 350 linear feet of archival material – manuscripts, typescripts, diaries, letters and other original materials. More than half a million images are available in the photograph collection, which includes 20 years' worth of images from two newspapers, the Casper Star-Tribune and The Casper Journal.

In one of the most labor-intensive Special Collections activities, staff and trained volunteers selectively index newspapers and keep a clippings file of items of historical interest. Also, the Natrona County Genealogical Society provided the collection with a database of the county's cemetery records.

Casper College's Special Collections get national and international use. Nationally, its users have included CNN, ABC News, Time, Newsweek, New York Times, Dallas Sporting News and MTV. Internationally, in just the last 15 months, it's been used by Science News (London), Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and Fuji TV (Japan).

Kevin Anderson said the library's collections are a great research resource for Women's History Celebration. For example, he found information and photos about Casper's Irish

community for Maureen Emrich's presentation on that subject in 2003.

Last year, Kevin Anderson helped R.C. Johnson with research for her program on "Nellie Garrett Lockhart (1874-1959): A Black Woman's Story in Context."

"I helped the speaker with research relating to her family and their arrival in Casper," he said. "I found a photo of her great-grandmother watching a parade around 1900."

Goodstein Library's Special Collections are open to the public during regular library hours. To preserve the collection, items are not circulated. They are, however, available for in-library use, and library staff offer support to researchers.

"Kevin does a tremendous job of providing access to the collections," Lynnette Anderson said. "He works incredibly hard, and local history really benefits from his efforts."

The Special Collections Department's motto is "The best way to preserve our heritage is to share it. The best way to share our heritage is to preserve it." Women's History Celebration is one way Casper College Library shares its local heritage.



*Nora Banner and Mrs. Harold Banner, Casper Concert Band, 1906. Francis Seely Webb Collection, Casper College Library*

# WYOMING COUNCIL FOR WOMEN'S ISSUES:



## KEEPING "EQUALITY" IN THE "EQUALITY STATE"

The Wyoming Council for Women's Issues (WCWI) works to improve equality and quality of life for women.

It works to provide education and training for living-wage employment, eliminate the disparity between women's and men's wages, ensure an adequate safety net for women and families, and guarantee a legal system that eliminates gender bias.

The council was first created in 1965 as the Governor's Commission on the Status of Women. The next year, the commission presented a study to Gov. Clifford Hansen.

The study, *Wyoming Women*, examined the same four areas the WCWI focuses on today: employment practices, educational opportunities, home and community, and legal rights and responsibilities. In its introduction,

Commission Chairman Margaret C. Tobin wrote, "The study indicates that the citizens of the State of Wyoming should be aware that problems do exist and that a reputation of the 'Equality State' established some seventy-six years ago needs to be continuously kept current."

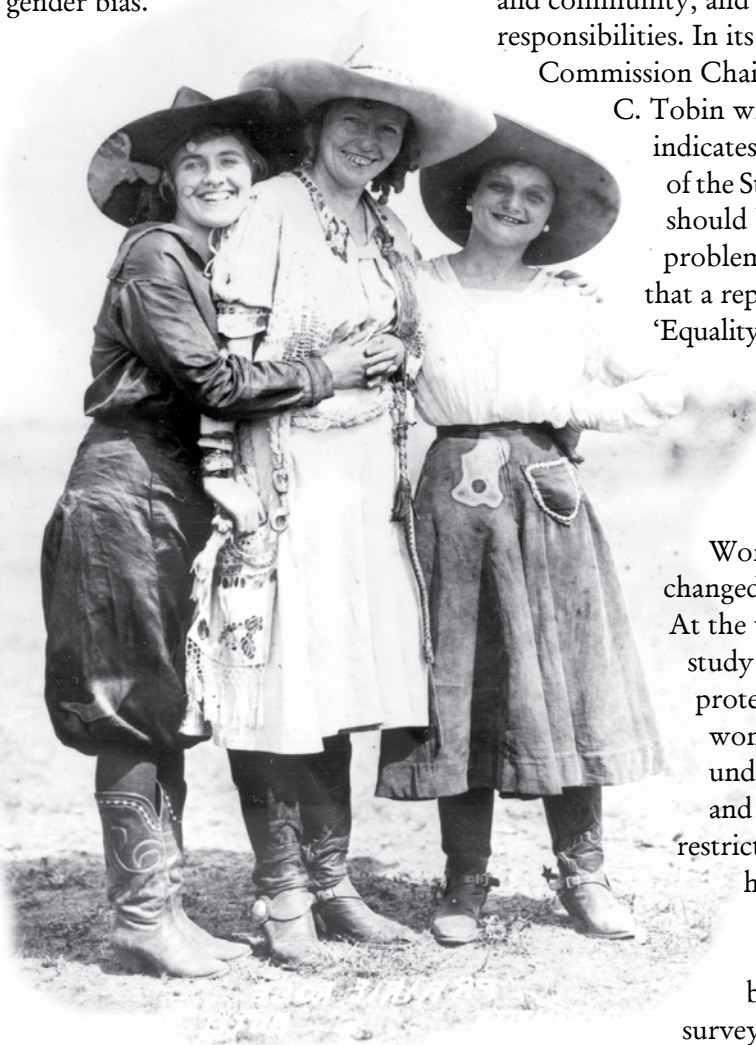
Women's issues have changed over the years. At the time that first study was conducted, protective laws barred women from jobs in underground mining and bartending and restricted the overtime hours they could work. Nearly a third of small businesses surveyed in *Wyoming*

*Women* said they would not promote a qualified woman to a position where she supervised men.

"I'm sure that even a lot of the problems that we see now, like wage disparity, existed actually in a much larger form in years past" said Teresa de Groh, chair of the 13-member council. "It's been I guess a matter of priorities. And this is going way back, before the council was ever formed, that if you've got something that you're working on like the right to vote, some other things aren't quite going to make it to the top. I think that the problems that we see, or the issues that we see have been around for a long time, and we're just going to keep working on them."

Today's WCWI council has representatives from each of the nine judicial districts and four at-large members, all appointed by the governor. The Wyoming Business Council provides an ex-officio member and administrative support for the newsletter and other activities. Recently, WCWI received a boost in funding that will allow it to accomplish more.

WCWI is involved in a number of activities intended to promote the status of women. Annually, it gives the Wyoming Woman of Distinction Award to one woman who has achieved significant positive effects on women and families. The Wyoming Summit Award honors businesses whose policies broaden and strengthen the workforce.



Photocourtesy of Wyoming State Archives.



In 2003, the council headed a wage disparity study that was conducted by the University of Wyoming. In 2004, they did a telephone survey on issues of concern to Wyoming women. Results from both are freely available on the WCWI web site at <http://www.wyomingwomenscouncil.org>.

“We did this survey so that we felt more confident in having a handle on what types of issues we should be focusing on,” de Groh said. “WCWI constantly works to identify programs that will help women and girls improve their self-image and bring these programs to Wyoming women for their benefit.”

In the issues survey, Wyoming women reported they were most concerned with substance abuse, employment issues and domestic violence. When asked what problems personally affected them, health care topped the list, followed by family issues and employment.

De Groh said they are looking more closely at the difference between what problems women perceived and what problems affected them personally. She believes the perceptions are valid; the differences may reflect either reluctance to admit to personally experiencing these, or they may reflect a gender difference in their prevalence.

“There’s so much evidence that there truly are substance abuse problems in the communities in Wyoming, that we think the women are on point with that.”

WCWI serves as a focal point for gathering and disseminating information on issues with which girls and women struggle daily. The council actively promotes Connect Wyoming (<http://wind.uwyo.edu/connect/>), a source for information on more than 3,500 human services programs. It also publishes and distributes a legal guide for women and materials on sexual harassment. Plans are in the works to translate some of their resources into Spanish. WCWI distributes their

resources both online through their web site and through physical locations, such as public libraries.

“We use libraries extensively as a dissemination point for the publications that we do,” de Groh said, “because they’re free. So we bring our publications to the libraries and that’s a place where people can come and pick up that kind of information resource.”

The WCWI works in partnership with numerous entities. Through its involvement in the Habitat for Humanity, Wyoming Tech Prep Consortium for Construction Technology and the Wyoming Contractors Association, it encourages women to enter the building trades.

The council is part of the statewide Wellness in Wyoming (WIN Wyoming) collaboration that encourages active living, healthy eating and respect for body size diversity. It participates in and promotes Love Your Body Day, Women’s History Month, and breast cancer awareness through the Komen Wyoming Race for the Cure.

“As long as we see wage disparity between men and women, and as long as we see inequities in the way in women’s living situations and the difficulties that we see women facing,” de Groh said, “as long as those things are out there, we have a job to do. We are trying to make sure that these don’t just become subsurface, ‘that’s how life is’ kinds of things.”

## WYOMING WOMEN OF DISTINCTION SINCE 2000

2005, FRANCES MERLE HAAS  
2004, KAYNE PYATT  
2003, CINDY KNIGHT  
2002, DENICE WHEELER  
2001, MARY K. SCHWOPE  
2000, ORALIA MERCADO

“They show other women in Wyoming – and young women and girls – the types of accomplishments that women have made in this state and the great things that they’ve done and that this can be done. You can serve in the Legislature. Even if you had a baby as a teenager and on welfare, you can pull yourself out of that and become self-sufficient and a wonderful family provider. We’ve had all kinds of examples like that, and that’s why we do it – to thank the women that have shown such dedication to issues that affect women as well as spreading the word about what they’ve done so that they can be seen as role models.”

-Teresah de Groh, WCWI Chair



# MABEL BROWN:

“I was born with a pencil in my hand”



Mabel Brown was “born with a pencil in my hand” in 1914, but she was first published as a high school sophomore in the local newspaper, *The Sheridan Post-Enterprise*. That article marked the beginning of her lengthy career as a Wyoming journalist, author, historian, photographer and teacher.

Mabel has been called the “First Lady of Northeastern Wyoming History.” She conceived, edited and wrote large chunks of the book *First Ladies of Wyoming*, and has authored or co-authored several others. She helped found the Weston County Historical Society, is a past president of the Wyoming State Historical Society and is a member of the Wyoming consulting committee to the National Register of Historic Places. For many years, she crisscrossed the state teaching Wyoming’s past and passing on her love of history to others. In 2004, Mabel was featured in *Wyoming Voices*, a three-part Wyoming history documentary created by Wyoming Public Television.

Perhaps her greatest contribution to the state’s history was founding and publishing her *BITS AND PIECES* magazine. *BITS AND PIECES* was published from 1964 to 1987. Not only did it preserve many of the stories of old Wyoming, it also encouraged many aspiring writers who were first published in the magazine. At one time the magazine had more than 2,100 subscribers, including major university libraries in the U.S., Europe and the U.S.S.R.

“I always wanted history to be right,” Mabel said. “I hope that I do well with writing, but I really strive for accuracy.

That’s how come I started my magazine in the first place. They had all these wild tales about ‘Wild Bill,’ and it made me disgusted with people. Anyway—‘where angels fear to tread.’ I think I probably was pretty much of a fool, because it was a big undertaking, and although I did it for 20 years, it was never a financial success.”

Nevertheless, *BITS AND PIECES* did get her an interview with Barbara Walters, an event she describes as one of her proudest moments. “Barbara Walters interviewed me, had a book signing, and it was big. And that was really due to people who have helped me. The people who have helped me have been absolutely unbelievable.”

As a writer and journalist, she contributed to numerous books, magazines and newspapers. She wrote two books for young readers, *Tales Your Grandfather Told* and *Wesley and the Wolves*, and two historical novels, *Belle of Old Cambria* and *Rosa*. She was a radio talk show host on KASL for many years. In the 1970s, she worked as a public information officer for School District #1 in Newcastle. She is the only honorary lifetime member of the Wyoming Press Association who is not actually a member of the WPA. In 1991, she was named Wyoming Communicator of Achievement for Wyoming Media Professionals, then the Wyoming Press Women.

She also worked in libraries, as the Weston County Librarian from 1959-60 and in the Gertrude Burns School Library in Newcastle in the 1970s. In the 1990s she donated a large number of history books to the Weston County

Library; the Mabel Brown Collection at the library in Newcastle has more than 180 books on local, state and regional history from her personal collection.

“I was a volunteer in the first place in Newcastle, then I was a member of the board. I just grew into it. I loved it.”

Mabel Edwards Brown was born in 1914 in Golden, Colo. Her family moved around to Arkansas and Oklahoma before settling in Sheridan, Wyo. in 1922.

“It was hard to say where we stayed before we came to Wyoming because we went all over the country. My dad had, you might call it ‘itching heels.’ He went from place to place; he was looking for a better place always. And Mom was a teacher school, although she couldn’t teach regular in Wyoming. But anyway, that’s how we landed. She said Wyoming had good schools and we could go anyplace else, but when school came, we had to be where there were good schools.”

In Wyoming, married women were not permitted to teach at the time. “My mom was one of the early degreed teachers,” Mabel said. “She could teach in any school the other places she lived, but not in a one-room schoolhouse in Wyoming. She was principal in all the grades in Arkansas, and it was in a big building. But not only her – I’ve seen the other teachers that were so wonderful, and it used to be that if they were married, they had to keep it a secret if they wanted to teach.”

She’s seen things change a lot for women since those days. “It has changed in a lot of ways for the good, but we are still not equal on the pay



levels and things like that. I do think that some of our legislators are more cognizant of the fact and trying to do more than they used to.”

Mabel Brown married Charles Wesley “Wes” Brown in 1931, just one credit shy of her high school diploma at the time. It would be 40 years before she tested for her GED in 1971 and then earned her bachelor’s degree in history from Eastern Wyoming College. The couple had seven children, although all but two daughters died in infancy. “Just lived like a couple days,” she said. “If they could have known why, it would have helped.” She weathered those bad times and others – including bouts with cancer – with faith and optimism. “You just do what you have to do, and I’m sure the good Lord had something to do with it. Not easy, but there are others who’ve had a lot worse.”

Mabel has known many of Wyoming’s governors and first ladies over the years, including Nellie Tayloe Ross (see story p. 5). “She was my hero – actually this is why they asked me in the first place to be on that Voices program, because I had known her – and because she was my hero, I also instilled a love of her in my students. She just was such a decent, common sort of woman. I always was angry because so many said that she was just voted in because of her husband. When she was elected governor, she had the highest record of any governor that had ever been at that time. And I admired her. She reminded me of my mom in a lot of ways, and I guess part of that was it.”

She is still researching and writing, although a broken hip last year slowed her down slightly. “Let’s face it,” she said, “92 years old, you know

that’s kind of late to practice falling.” Currently, she is working on *Marie Dorian: Forgotten Woman*.

“They talk about Sacagawea, all this,” Mabel said. “Marie Dorian was a counterpart and contemporary of Sacagawea. She was with the same enterprise. She, too, was part of Thomas Jefferson’s Westward Expansion – the only woman with a party of 32 men. She also took along two sons, one two years old and the other four. Her husband, the expedition’s guide, refused to go unless he could take along his woman and children.

“If I hadn’t had this terrible fall and gotten all broken up this last year, I would have had the book finished. I would like to have given her the honor that she deserved. And I still will get it finished.”

# GRACE RAYMOND HEBARD

## First University of Wyoming Librarian

Dr. Grace Raymond Hebard – professor, historian, librarian, suffragist – was a woman of many firsts.

Among them, she was the University of Wyoming's first librarian. In that role, she has been credited with building UW's library from scratch. She also helped form the first state library association and was its first president.

Hebard's background was in engineering, not librarianship, when she first arrived in Laramie in 1891 as secretary to and member of the UW Board of Trustees. Nevertheless, she went looking for the library.

UW had only been signed into existence five years earlier in 1886 and had opened its doors in 1887. The library she found was a small locked room, devoid of furnishings, with sacks of books piled in the center.

In 1894, she began serving unofficially and without pay as the librarian. She rounded up whatever books she could and educated herself in library administration. In 1908, she

was officially appointed as UW's first university librarian.

Hebard continued in that position, still unpaid, for more than a decade. When she stepped down in 1919, the library's cataloged collection had grown to 42,000 books. She didn't get the library building she wanted under her tenure, but it was built a few short years later. The next university librarian, Reba Davis, designated the Hebard Room to house a collection of books on Wyoming history in the University Library Building in 1924.

When she died on Oct. 11, 1936, Dr. Hebard bequeathed all her historical materials to the University of Wyoming. The published materials were added to the Hebard Room, and the unpublished materials formed the first collection of the University Archives, now the American Heritage Center.

Today, the American Heritage Center is one of the largest and best-used collections of primary source material in the United States, drawing researchers from around the world.

The Hebard Collection is a comprehensive library of Wyoming print materials that has grown to more than 45,000 cataloged titles.

Libraries were just one piece of Dr. Hebard's influential and sometimes controversial career in Wyoming. From 1891 to 1908, she wielded tremendous influence on the growing university through her position on the Board of Trustees; too much, her detractors argued. Some

*1915 photograph of Wyoming Librarians: Agnes Wright, Frances Davis, Grace Raymond Hebard and Geneva Brock.*

*Photocourtesy Wyoming State Archives.*

questioned the merit of her M.A. and PhD degrees; both were earned largely through correspondence, although that was not uncommon at the time.

As an historian, she was a prolific writer. Her numerous works included *The History and Government of Wyoming*, *How Woman Suffrage Came to Wyoming* and *Sacajawea*. Some scholars argue that Hebard's history was suspect, particularly in the case of *Sacajawea*. Caught up in the romance of the West, Dr. Hebard could be inspiring in the classroom, but inaccurate in the details.

Nevertheless, her tremendous influence is undeniable. Dr. Grace Raymond Hebard was one of several strong-willed women who made their marks on Wyoming's history.

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### Grace Raymond Hebard was the first woman to:

- Graduate with a Bachelor of Science from the State University of Iowa (1882)
- Be admitted to the Wyoming State Bar (1898)
- Practice law before the Wyoming Supreme Court
- Win the Wyoming State Championship in golf (1900)



# Women's Museum honors Wyoming achievements

When Estelle Reel became the first woman elected to statewide office in Wyoming in 1894, her opponent in her bid to be superintendent of public instruction charged that she won by sending provocative photographs of herself to “the lonesome cowboys of Wyoming.”

The story of Reel's political debut and her subsequent service as head of the nation's Indian schools will be told in a display at The History House in downtown Laramie when it opens for its first summer season this May.

The Reel exhibit, along with displays honoring women's suffrage advocate Esther Hobart Morris and pioneering nurse Edith Miller will join a major exhibit already in place celebrating Nellie Tayloe Ross, the nation's first woman governor. This display included such memorabilia as the delegate's badge Ross wore at the 1928 Democratic convention that nominated New York Governor Al Smith for president.

Smith lost to Herbert Hoover, but four years later Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected and named Ross director of the U.S. mint. After her retirement, she lived to be 101. Her grandsons, Bradford Ross of Washington and Robert Ross of Richmond, donated to the museum some of her artifacts and papers, including letters written to her by Wyoming school children on her 100th birthday.

The museum on 2nd Street just north of Garfield was dedicated last September, culminating a four-year effort by the Foundation for Laramie, Wyoming. Visitors approach through a plaza dominated by a statue of Louisa Swain of Laramie, the first woman voter in Wyoming – or, some contend, anywhere else. The statue is called “The Franchise.”

After her four-year term in Cheyenne was completed, Reel was nominated by Republican President William McKinley to the Indian school post and became

the first female nominee to be confirmed for federal office by the Senate. She later married a rancher and lived in eastern Washington state.

Weldon Tuck, director of the Foundation for Laramie, said he hopes to borrow photographs and other memorabilia of Reel from a Spokane museum that now has them. If indeed she did send photos to lonesome cowboys, they might have been pleased.

“She was a very nice looking woman and dressed very uptown for that time in history,” Tuck said. “She didn't exactly wear sackcloth.”

The plaza is open to the public daily except Sunday and the museum from noon till 4 p.m. during the winter season. In the summer season, from May through September, hours will be 10 to 5 daily.

Attendance has been sparse so far, said Tuck, but is expected to pick up as the weather improves. “It's not that they are passing us by,” he said. “There's nobody downtown. Wal-Mart is definitely the biggest gathering place for people.”

A miniature version of Laramie artist the John D. Baker's statue of Swain was presented to Lynne Cheney, at a ceremony in Washington on Dec. 1, to be placed in the vice president's residence on the Naval Observatory grounds.

Swain cast her historic vote in a primary election on Sept. 6, 1870, after the Territorial Legislature became the first in the nation to adopt women's suffrage. She was not exactly the first woman in the country to vote, however. The New Jersey Constitution limited voting to owners of property, but the drafters neglected to say this meant men only, and it was interpreted to cover widows who inherited land.

Some historians have cast doubt on Morris's role in the suffrage movement also. It has been said that Morris, the



first female justice of the peace, held a tea party for two legislative candidates to extract a promise that they would introduce a suffrage bill. Nice story, said University of Wyoming historian Phil Roberts, but no such party was held.

Other women to be honored in the History House include Eliza Stewart, the state's first female juror; Mary Symons Boise, the first woman bailiff; Rep. Barbara Cubin, first woman elected to federal office; Marilyn Kite, first woman on the Wyoming Supreme Court; and members of the all-female city council elected in Jackson in 1920.

The land for the plaza and the building, previously marked by an ugly excavation, was donated by Jon Johnson, owner of the Edward Jones brokerage next door, and his wife, Sheila. The cost of the building, erected by Spiegelburg Lumber and Building Co. of Laramie, was estimated at \$300,000. Tuck said donations came from 44 states and two foreign countries.

- W. DALE NELSON

*W. Dale Nelson, a former prize-winning White House reporter for The Associated Press, is a freelance writer in Laramie.*

# No trappers or transients — just women true stories

*"No one has ever heard us before. No one has ever listened if we tried to speak. We're always just kept on."*

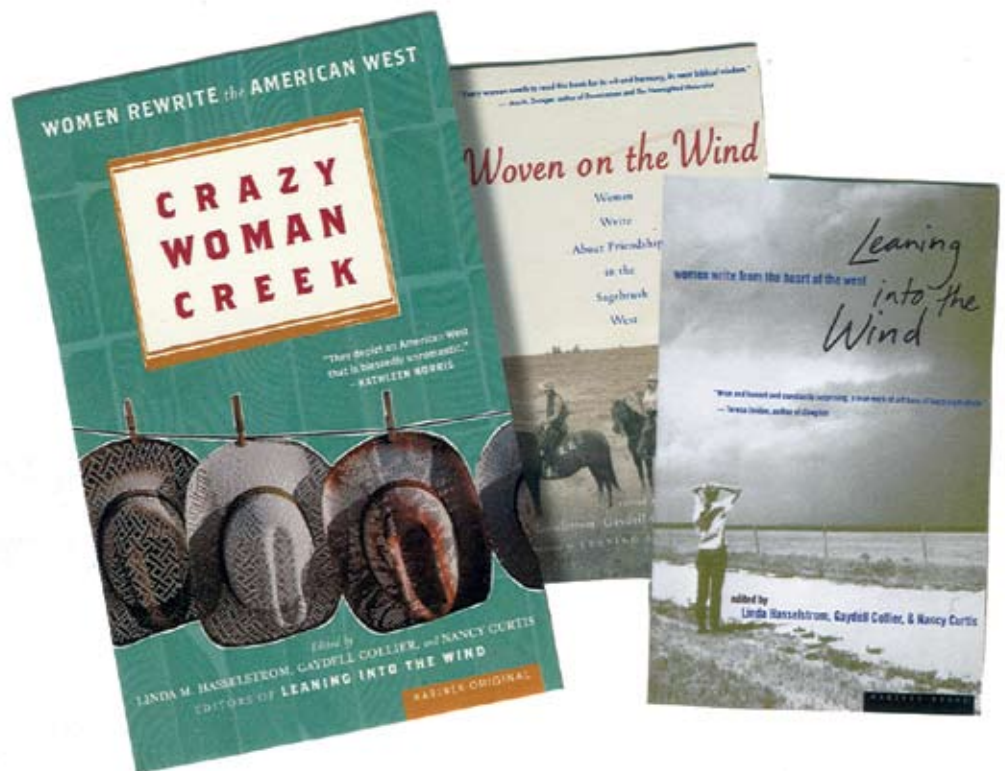
*— Gwen Petersen, Montana  
Wind series contributor*

*Leaning into the Wind: Women Write from the Heart of the West* was conceived in frustration and faith: frustration with how western women were portrayed in print, and faith in their real stories.

Co-editors Linda K. Hasselstrom, Nancy Curtis and Gaydell Collier wanted stories of women who lived and worked in the West, who had a deep connection to the land and who lived what they wrote. They were tired of fictional stereotypes and off-kilter generalizations by big-city "bungee-jump journalists." They knew real stories existed, but hadn't gotten much notice.

"If you picked up something at a museum, you might find a little book of local stories where women were telling their stories," Curtis said, "but we hoped to bring them to a wider audience."

When *Leaning into the Wind* was published in 1998, it gave voice to



more than 200 women in six western states. It was a powerful book that garnered national recognition. *Leaning into the Wind: Women Write About Friendship in the Sagebrush West* followed in 2001. The final book in the series was published in 2004: *Crazy Woman Creek: Women Rewrite the American West*, was about women and community.

All three books in the Wind series are non-fiction essays and poetry, published by Houghton Mifflin and edited by Hasselstrom, Curtis and Collier. In all, more than 400 women contributed their work.

Wyoming Past Poet Laureate Robert Roripaugh said the state's history was written mostly by "trappers, travelers, traders, transients, tourists and transplants." Leaning's editors didn't want to replicate that formula. "We wanted stories that showed women who really had lived what they were writing about," Hasselstrom said.

The Wind series co-editors are all ranchers and writers themselves. Hasselstrom's poetry, fiction and non-fiction have appeared in 11 books and more than 100 magazines. She has edited or co-edited four books, and she conducts writing retreats at her ranch in South Dakota. Curtis is publisher



*Wind Books editors, Gaydell Collier, Linda Hasselstrom and Nancy Curtis with a statue of Mari Sandoz at Chadron State College.*

of High Plains Press in Glendo, Wyo. Collier is a retired library director, widely published in magazines and anthologies, and co-author of three horse books.

Before *Leaning*, Curtis and Hasselstrom knew each other and Collier from writing circles, although neither can place exactly when and how they met. When Curtis was starting High Plains Press, “I still had my publishing company,” Hasselstrom said. “We were the only two women we knew that had ranches and publishing companies: two of the lowest paying jobs in the universe, not to mention the West.”

All three brought different strengths to the table. Hasselstrom was the “literary diva,” with extensive writing and editing credentials. Curtis was the “ruthless one,” the one who enforced word counts and who could read even the most emotional pieces without crying. (Hasselstrom and Collier sometimes had to leave the room.) Collier was the undisputed “grammar queen,” who either knew or could find the rule every time and could explain to the publisher why “Big Horn” had to be spelled three different ways.

They wanted stories from farm and ranch women who weren’t necessarily professional writers. To get them, they broke a few anthology publishing rules. They accepted handwritten

manuscripts, diaries, poetry, letters – any format that told the story. They advertised for manuscripts in ranch publications and small-town newspapers, not writers’ magazines.

They didn’t ask for publishing credits or biographies. Initially, they didn’t even have a publisher, because they weren’t sure what material they would get.

They got more than they bargained for: submissions from 550 women. They had polished manuscripts and handwritten letters. There were photo albums, bound family histories and tattered decades-old notebooks.

Although some came from professional writers, many in *Leaning* did not.

“I think sometimes people have one good story to tell,” Curtis said. “In *Leaning*, I think we got more of those where they had one good story to tell. This one moment in my life that nobody else had, that maybe set the path for the rest of my life. I saved my dad on his horse. I got the pigs out of the fire.”

“There was that magic, too,” Hasselstrom said, “of someone who saw this and said, ‘Oh, I have a story to tell.’ They didn’t know they had a story to tell until then.”

As they looked through materials, certain themes recurred: feeding bum lambs, calving heifers, the Blizzard of ’49. Background choruses began chanting: “we were poor, but we didn’t know it,” and “you can take the girl out of the country, but you can’t take the country out of the girl.”

On a more serious note, Curtis said,

“was the idea of ‘It made us stronger.’ These things happened living in Wyoming or living in the West. I may have had some unique experiences, some experiences other women didn’t have, but it made me what I am.”

Another common thread was that women felt validated because someone was interested in their stories. Hasselstrom said, “It seemed to me that theme was struck again and again: ‘You know, we feel like we’re alone out here,’ and, pick one, ‘The environmentalists get more attention than we do. The men get more attention than we do. The women wearing stiletto heels on the East Coast get more attention. Nobody pays any attention to us.’”

*Leaning* encouraged its contributors, Hasselstrom said. “They felt like their voices were being heard after all this silence. Their own voices.”

“A lot of people say that they don’t know what they think until they write it down,” Curtis added. “We asked people in *Leaning* to write about the land and the animals and people on the land, their connection to the land, and I think that it helped them define and refine what they really did think – the connection to the land that actually mattered.”

Hasselstrom said she was interviewed by South Dakota Public Radio, “and the young woman who interviewed me, she had just moved to South Dakota a couple of years ago. She said she came out to the Black Hills for a vacation, she loved it, she decided to stay, she found a job at South Dakota Public Radio. Her parents went berserk, ‘My God, you’ve moved to the end of the Earth. What a terrible place.’ She sent them *Leaning*, because she said, ‘That was the book I read that made me want to stay, and I thought it would help explain to them why I stayed here.’”

The editors didn’t know many of the contributors’ backgrounds. They intentionally did not ask for contributor

biographies until they selected pieces, so they wouldn't be influenced. As *Leaning* took shape, Curtis said, "There were questions raised about had we represented women of the West. Did we have lesbians? Did we have Buddhists? Did we have...? We didn't know. We had stories."

"And it's not exactly even – I mean it's not legal to ask," Hasselstrom said, "but it's also, we thought, 'That's not polite!' Even if we could come up with a way to ask, I like your story. I don't care if you're a Buddhist or a Catholic, what difference does that make? If you're a lesbian, if you didn't see fit to tell me in the course of your story what your sexual orientation is, what business is it of mine? And what effect could it possibly have?"

Hasselstrom said Houghton Mifflin raised many of these questions when they realized *Leaning* could be a bigger seller than first anticipated. "Those questions occurred to them: is this multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, how do we promote it, and are we going to be criticized if those people don't exist in this book?"

The first anthology took five years and innumerable hours to complete. At times they'd meet at Crook County Library, where Collier was director, and go through stacks of manuscripts. On their website (<http://www.windbooks.com>) they say at first, when one mentioned "our next anthology," the other two threw heavy objects at her.

Apparently, their arms got tired, or they ran out of things to throw, and they began work on *Woven*. Again, they defied the rules a bit. Logic suggested they approach *Leaning's* contributors. Instead, Hasselstrom, Curtis and Collier put out another call for submissions, across a larger geographic area. As with *Leaning*, they looked for good stories, not specific writers.

It's appropriate *Woven* is on friendship, given the apparent closeness between Hasselstrom, Curtis and Collier. When

they started *Leaning*, they didn't know each other all that well and didn't know how well they would work together.

"I think if we got right up to it – I know this was how I felt – I got right up to it and then I panicked," Hasselstrom said. "I thought, 'Well yeah, they're nice women, but what are they going to be like when we actually start working?'"

"I think even we imagined that we might have more differences than we actually did," Curtis said. "When we were doing *Leaning Into the Wind*, I think we thought, 'this is going to be a battle.' It's a nice thing as we got to know each other and we discovered that there were many things that we agreed on."

"The bond came out of doing the work," Hasselstrom said. "The cautionary tale, of course, is it might not work that way with everybody."

Women were transformed by writing their stories, even those whose pieces weren't accepted. "They would call us and say this has changed my life, this gave me the courage to leave my husband, submit my work to be published, write my own book," Hasselstrom said.

She described one woman as a shy single mother working part-time in a sale barn when they first met her, who went on to become a church minister. "First time she got up to read her piece, she was so nervous, the podium was shaking. About the third time, her kid was crawling around on the floor, and she said, 'Oh, yeah – I was pregnant with him when I read this the first time.' So we watched her change. And certainly the book had something to do with that – we don't know how much."

Readers connected with the writers. One woman read the stories to her children, and wrote to say her children wanted to donate books to a one-room school in mentioned in *Leaning*. Another woman drove 600 miles to

Wheatland, Wyo. to attend a book signing.

The books also act as a conversation on Western issues: land use, wildlife management, water, weather. "We kind of had a discussion within the book," Curtis said. "We tried to organize things so that it would be fairly noticeable. For instance, there's a story by a woman who loves elk. Maybe not right next to it, but I think maybe it is, is a story by a woman who hates that the elk come in and eat the cows' hay. She thinks we ought to shoot them all."

"I'd like to see more environmentalists and social leaders and political leaders reading them," Hasselstrom said, "because there's still these foolish generalizations: ranch women think this way, and loggers think this way, when there's plenty of evidence from real people – some of it's in these books – about what people think."

What is the *Wind* anthologies' impact? "I think you will not be able to assess that for years and years," Hasselstrom said. "I think these books are going to be around and circulated and rediscovered and re-read. I think in 50 years, you would be able to look at these books and say, 'Oh look – this woman went on to write this, and this woman went on to be governor, and this woman did this, and this woman did this.' And some of them will say, 'It never would have occurred to me unless I had done this.'"

"Some of them may not realize it, but I think those are a little group of books that the influence is going to go on and on in quiet ways."

Visit the *Wind* books web site at <http://www.windbooks.com> for more information, reviews and readers' guides.

Gaydell Collier was featured in the Fall 2005 Wyoming Library Roundup. Visit <http://www-wsl.state.wy.us/roundup/> to see the article.



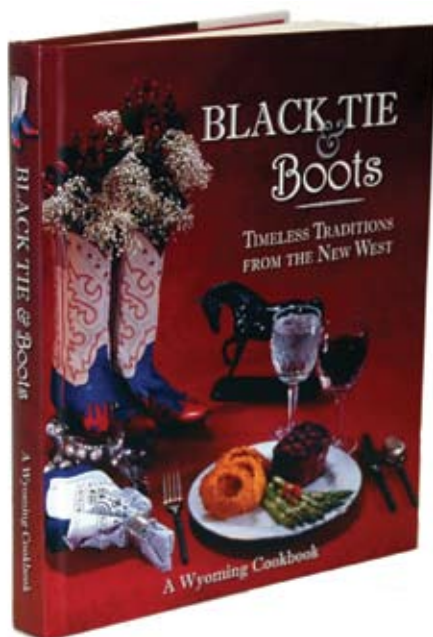
# Does Wyoming deserve its nickname?

On a side note, Linda Hasselstrom, an editor of the Wind Books, (see story on page 20) shared her thoughts on this subject:

"Sure, it passed this legislation so women could vote, but you really look at the facts surrounding that – it was a little bit of a joke. They really didn't think it was going to be all that serious. They didn't think the women were going to go out and vote. Some of the prominent figures associated with that really weren't as crazy about having women vote as it would be easy to make it sound like they do. So, does the state deserve to be called 'The Equality State?' And I really am intrigued by that, because my answer to it – the short answer – would be whether they meant to do it or not, they did it, and it didn't get rescinded. And there were a bunch of women in South Dakota that were fighting for the vote. They were about that same time just scratching tooth and nail to try to get the vote, but it happened in Wyoming. As a South Dakotan – dang, I wish South Dakota had gotten on the stick and done it, but needless to say, it happened here. Then what happened after that, I think, made it something to live up to, and generally, I think the state lives up to it. And it gives women in this state something to be proud of, something to shoot for, and I think that's even behind some of those women writing in those anthologies. Thinking, 'We have a right to speak up, because we're Wyoming women and this is the Equality State.'"

## Cranberry Sorbet

Erin Kinney, Digital Initiatives Librarian  
Wyoming State Library



- 1 envelope of Knox plain gelatin
- 1 cup cold water
- 1 12oz. bag of cranberries
- 1 ¾ cup boiling water
- 2 cups sugar
- 4 Tbsp. lemon juice
- dash salt

### Step-by-step directions:

- Soak the gelatin in 1 cup of cold water in a bowl. Set aside.
- Rinse and clean the cranberries, discarding the bad ones, and removing the stems.
- Place cranberries, boiling water, sugar and lemon juice in a large saucepan (4 qt. or larger)
- Cook on medium heat until cranberries are soft, about 5 minutes. Beware, as the cranberries will pop as they cook.
- Strain into a bowl to get rid of skins and most of the seeds, pushing most of the liquid through the mesh strainer. Discard the skins.
- Add gelatin mixture and a dash of salt to the cooked cranberry mixture.
- Place in a freezer-safe container, and freeze overnight, or until solid.
- When frozen solid, blend the mixture in a blender or food processor until creamy and light pink. Refreeze.
- Serve frozen.

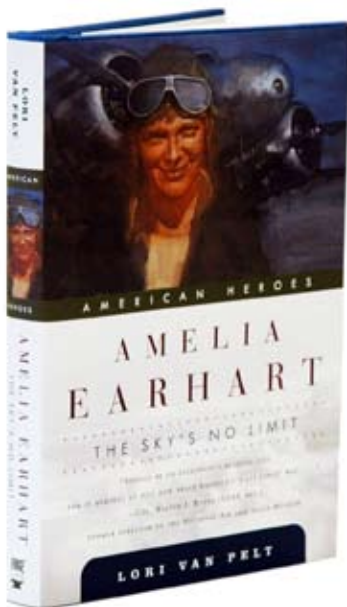
**Comments:** This recipe is my great-grandmother's recipe, and is Norwegian in origin. It has been converted to the 12 oz. bags of cranberries.

Recipe courtesy of *Black Tie & Boots, Timeless Traditions From the New West, A Wyoming Cookbook*, published by the University of Wyoming.

To order *Black Tie & Boots: Timeless Traditions from the New West*, send a check or money order to the University of Wyoming Bookstore, Black Tie & Boots, Dept. 3255, 1000 E. University Ave., Laramie, WY 82071-2000 or order at [www.uwyo.edu/cookbook](http://www.uwyo.edu/cookbook). The price for each book is \$29.95; Wyoming residents must add state and county sales tax. Shipping is \$9.95 for one-to-four books per address. For shipping on more than four books, call the UW Bookstore at 1-800-370-2676.

## Amelia Earhart: The Sky's No Limit

by Lori Van Pelt  
2005. New York: Forge, 239 p., \$19.95  
ISBN: 0765310619



This book was truly a delight to read! After avoiding biographies for years, this was a true gem to get me back into the genre. Not content with a mere recitation of names, dates and places, the author has given us insight into the person behind the legend. From her tomboyish exploits as a child, to her pioneering efforts for women in fields dominated by men, we are shown a view of this extraordinary woman that is easy to read, yet complex enough to be enthralling. Best remembered for her accomplishments in the field of aviation, Amelia's earning her wings at age 24, her part in the 1928 transatlantic "Friendship" flight, her solo crossing of the Atlantic in 1932, and her attempt to circumnavigate the world at the equator (approximately 27,000 miles) in 1937 are truly examples of what an individual can accomplish when they set their mind to it! This series, American Heroes, looks very promising. I hope the rest of the series continues to show the same quality that Lori Van Pelt has brought to Amelia Earhart.

**Paul Pidde,**  
Branch Manager, Glenrock Branch Library

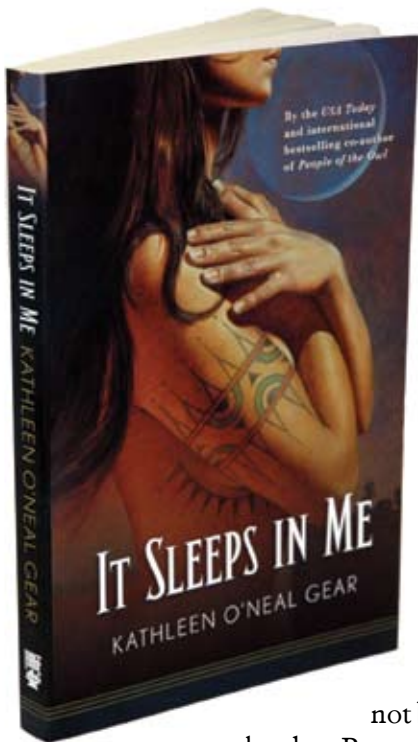
## Governor Lady: The Life and Times of Nellie Tayloe Ross

by Teva J. Scheer  
2005. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 287 p., \$34.95  
ISBN: 0826216269



The narrative of this book is an interesting and easy read. *Governor Lady* takes the time to place Nellie Ross in history the way she would have liked it. Teva Scheer paints a splendid picture of a woman who was not ahead of her time, but most certainly a part of it. The first woman governor's roots are traced from pre-civil war to the present, and the book shows how she is viewed by current historians. Nellie Tayloe Ross was a strong southern woman who thought candidates for public office should not be chosen on the basis of sex, and that being a woman should not mitigate for or against her – good service should be the only issue. She was a part of the first generation of female politicians and federal executives. She was also a wife and a mother. She was the future of women. She went from being a governor to being the vice chairman of the Democratic National Committee, and later the Director of the U.S. Mint. Teva Scheer has told a story about a woman who is sometimes overlooked as important in history. Ms. Scheer makes the point gracefully without sounding bitter. Her book is informative and well done.

**Marilyn Pederson,**  
Carbon County Library System, Rawlins



## It Sleeps in Me

by Kathleen O'Neal Gear  
2005. NY: Forge, 256 p., \$13.95.  
ISBN: 0765314150 (pbk)

Gear returns to Native America without her usual co-author Michael Gear in a sexy page-turner about Sora, high chiefess of a clan in 15<sup>th</sup> century pre-Florida. In addition to Sora's heart-pounding romantic rendezvous, Gear's story explores the treachery of political plotting, the intrigues of clan leadership, and the mysteries of the human mind. Sora must determine whether the events she perceives are mystical or are instead a treasonous plot to undermine her authority. Uncertain of who to trust, she ultimately must rely on her own instincts, a decision that may cause irreversible damage.

Gear's dialogue and action keep the pages turning, and readers will race to an ambiguous ending that left me wondering about Sora's future. The observations and historical details are well-observed, and the descriptive writing is engaging. I appreciated the non-fiction historical note at the book's close, in which Gear briefly describes the archaeological record that inspired her setting and the central action of the novel.

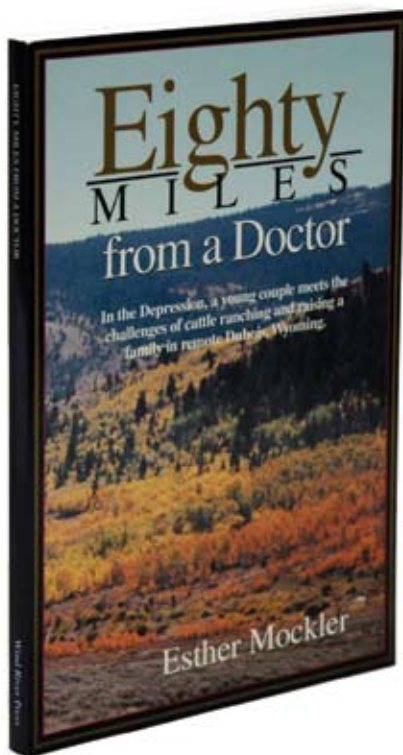
Gear plans to continue the themes of this book in a proposed trilogy. Her fans will not be disappointed in *It Sleeps in Me* and it will certainly create anticipation for the next two books. Recommend this book to fans of pre-historical fiction.

**Cass Kvenild,**

Reference Librarian, University of Wyoming Libraries, Laramie

## Eighty Miles from a Doctor

by Esther Mockler  
1997. Longboat Key, Fla.: Wind River Press, 159 p.  
ISBN: 0965741109  
(Out of print. Available through many Wyoming libraries)



*Eighty Miles from a Doctor* is a charming look at an almost vanished way of life. Mrs. Mockler's simple writing style conveys her courage and determination while keeping its sense of humor. This book is written in a diary style and jumps about a bit, but shares stories that range from frightening to funny.

Esther Mockler and her husband Frank established and ran a successful ranch near Dubois during the Depression. They relied on their own grit and determination to succeed and met many interesting people along the way, from transients looking for a meal, to the hired hand's bride who not only stole and ate eggs, but the hens that laid them as well!

Mrs. Mockler tells the reader of her fears and doubts as well as her triumphs. When her young daughter Helen is lost to leukemia, her bravery and perseverance shine through. She must bear the absence of her other children while they are at boarding school, as there are no good secondary schools near. Other illnesses and injuries touch her family, and Mrs. Mockler is responsible for the care of most of them, since a doctor is so far away.

All in all, this story is an inspiring chronicle of a couple that does a lot with just a little.

**Sherry Willis,**

Children's Librarian, Big Horn County Library, Basin

# Wyoming Women's Foundation: *Funding a Brighter Future*

The Wyoming Women's Foundation (WyWF) makes grants to nonprofit organizations that work to create economic self-sufficiency for women and brighter futures for girls.

"We truly believe that when women and girls prosper, communities thrive," said Laurel Parker West, WyWF executive director. "We want to fund innovative programs that help women and girls succeed right now while also helping change the system of economic inequality currently in place."

The Wyoming Women's Foundation has an endowment of just over \$1 million within the Wyoming Community Foundation. The WyWF got its start in 1999 when Merle Chambers of the Chambers Family Fund in Denver proposed a funding challenge: \$500,000 for the initial women's endowment if it was matched dollar for dollar by other donors. Over five years, the foundation raised enough to meet the match.

In an endowment, the principle remains inviolate, but interest and investment earnings can be used. In the case of the Women's Foundation, the \$1 million endowment generates about \$50,000 annually to be used for grants.

"We have created a permanent funding source for investing in women and girls in Wyoming," said West. WyWF grants have supported projects that addressed everything from homelessness and transitional housing to teen sexuality and self-esteem to training for non-traditional employment fields.

The WyWF is part of the Women's Funding Network, a

national organization of women's and girl's funds. Women have raised and granted funds for their own causes since the late 1900s, but these efforts picked up steam in the 1960s and 1970s from the women's movement's emphasis on economic equality.

Women's funds fill a specific niche; on average, national foundations make only seven percent of large grants – grants over \$10,000 – to women and girls. They often lead with innovative programs that benefit women and girls. For example, 25 years ago, women's funds led the way in supporting domestic violence prevention programs and rape crisis centers.

Wyoming has its own specific strengths and challenges when it comes to women's issues, West said.

"Despite its nickname, Wyoming is far from an 'Equality State.' Wyoming's wage gender gap is the worst in the nation; Wyoming women make only 66 cents for every dollar a man makes in the state. One of WyWF's top priorities is to create greater economic equality for the women and girls of Wyoming."

On the other hand, "One of the more positive legacies of our heritage as the 'Equality State' is that Wyoming women have a strong history of resilience and hard work and if given the right tools – education, child care, training, family support, health care – they will succeed."

For more information on the Wyoming Women's Foundation, visit their web site at <http://www.wywf.org> or call 307/721-8300.

<http://will.state.wy.us/roundup>

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