

*WYOMING WILL BE YOUR  
NEW HOME . . . :*

RANCHING, FARMING, AND  
HOMESTEADING IN WYOMING 1860-1960

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WYOMING STATE PARKS AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

TIMELINE OF RANCHING, HOMESTEADING, AND FARMING IN  
WYOMING, 1860-1960

- 1861-1864: Horse and mule-drawn implements become more widespread in nation as a result of Civil War
- 1862: Creation of U.S. Department of Agriculture
- 1862: Homestead Act
- 1862: Pacific Railroad Act of 1862
- 1864: Pacific Railroad Act of 1864
- 1868: Wyoming Territory Authorized by Congress
- 1869: Wyoming Territory organized
- 1869-1870: Durbin brothers begin their sheep operation near Cheyenne
- 1870: Census shows only 165 people (164 men, 1 woman) occupied in agriculture, out of 6,645 pursuing an occupation in Wyoming Territory
- 1870: Cheyenne Land Office Opens
- 1870: Only small herds of cattle and flocks of sheep, mainly in southeast and southwest corners of territory

1870s, 1880s: Southeast corner of Wyoming becomes heavily populated with cattle ranches

1870s, early: Sheep taken into upper Green River valley

1870s: Sulky plow introduced in Midwest, reaches Wyoming gradually afterwards, slowly replacing walking plow

1873: Laramie County Stock Growers Association formed; becomes Wyoming Stock Growers Association

1873: Timber Culture Act

1876: Battle of Little Bighorn (removal of Native Americans from Powder River Basin follows)

1876: Destruction of sheep flocks in blizzard, some turn to cattle raising

1877: Desert Land Act

1877: Evanston Land Office Opens

1877: Laramie Plains the “backbone” of sheep industry in Wyoming Territory

Late 1870s to 1886: “Beef bonanza” of open range cattle ranching, especially in eastern Wyoming

Late 1870s: Cattle ranches emerge in Powder River Basin

1879: Although Charles Carter brings cattle into Big Horn Basin, cattle ranches are few until 1883

1879: Dan Budd takes cattle into upper Green River valley

1880: Census shows 457 farms / ranches in Wyoming

1880s: Consolidation and incorporation of ranches

1880s: Star Valley settled with herding cattle as dominant

1881: Blizzard sends a warning of climate limitations on open range ranching

1882: About 200,000 sheep on Laramie Plains

1882: Sheep from Oregon are driven to Wyoming, part of larger migration

1883: Probably 200,000 sheep on Laramie Plains

1883: Sheep are taken into Powder River Basin

1884: Maverick Law

1884: White settlers begin to move into Jackson Hole

1886: Territorial governor estimates two million cattle in Wyoming; other estimates suggest possibly one million

1886-1887: Severe winter and a series of storms that essentially destroy open range ranching

1887: Biggest ranches begin to decline in number, replaced by multiple smaller operations

1887: Swan Ranch bankruptcy and reorganization, prominent among many, with others to follow

1888: Buffalo Land Office Opens

1889: Hanging of Ellen Watson (sometimes called “Cattle Kate”) and Jim Averill

1889-1890: Killing winter in Green River Valley

1890: Census shows 3,125 farms / ranches in Wyoming

1890: 87% of owner-operated farms and ranches have no mortgage

1890: Douglas Land Office Opens

1890: Lander Land Office Opens

1890: Wyoming becomes a state

1890-1900: Number of cattle in Wyoming declines by about 40 percent  
1890s, 1900s: Sheep / cattle conflict grows, becomes increasingly violent  
1890s: Increase in number of farms / ranches reflects increase in homesteads and small operations  
1890s: Open range ranching increasingly replaced by ranching with fences and with winter feeding  
1890: 712,520 sheep in Wyoming  
1892: Johnson County War  
1893: Mormon migration to Big Horn Basin  
1893-1897: Depression in nation  
1894: Carey Land Act to encourage irrigation and settlement  
1895: Settlement emerges around LaBarge and nearby areas on Green River  
1900: Census shows 6,095 farms / ranches in Wyoming  
1900: 80.8% of owner-operated farms and ranches in Wyoming have no mortgage  
1900: 5,099,613 sheep in Wyoming  
1900: Dairy farming generally replacing beef cattle in Star Valley  
1900s: Creation of national forests with the regulation of grazing on forest lands  
1900s and 1910s: Arrival of steam powered traction engines to run threshing machines and pull plows  
1902: Basque population emerges in Buffalo and Johnson County; Basques already present in Sweetwater County  
1902: Newlands Reclamation Act provides funds for irrigation projects in western states  
1907: Rock Springs Grazing Association formed  
1909: Enlarged Homestead Act (also known as Dry Farming Homestead Law)  
1909: Spring Creek Raid, climax of sheep – cattle war  
1909: Wyoming Extension Service studies and publishes survey on dry farming techniques and success  
1909: Over six million sheep in Wyoming  
1910: Buffalo Bill Dam completed on Shoshone River  
1910: Census shows almost 11,000 farms / ranches in Wyoming  
1910: 79.9% of Wyoming's owner-operated farms free from mortgages  
1910: 5.5 million sheep in Wyoming  
1910s: Dairy farms become important in Big Horn Basin  
1910s: General ending of open range for cattle  
1911-1912: Severe winter for sheep in Wyoming with huge losses and decimation of flocks  
1912: Congress reduces five year residence requirement on homesteads to three years  
1912: First steam engine enters Star Valley  
1914: Elinore Pruitt Stewart, *Letters of a Woman Homesteader* published, after being published as articles in the *Atlantic Monthly*, encouraging women to homestead  
1914-1918: World War I in Europe creates market for Wyoming agricultural production  
1915: Australian shearing shed built at Bitter Creek  
1915: Holly Sugar builds plant at Sheridan, encourages single crop production in that area  
1915-1916: 17 Australian shearing sheds built around state

1916: Beet production increase in World War I (and stimulated by new sugar plants) in turn contributes to growth of migrant labor in beet fields

1916: Construction of beet plant at Lovell stimulates beet production

1916: Lambing sheds and winter feeding of sheep in use near Douglas

1916: Stock Raising Homestead Act

1917: Construction of beet plant at Worland stimulates beet production there

1917-1918: U.S. enters World War I

1918: Farm Loan Act creates Land Banks, helping and encouraging farmers and ranchers to expand their operations

1918: Government calls for farmers to use more machinery to help in war production

1918: Large scale commercial, mechanized agriculture emerging with vast farming operations near Sheridan and Lingle

1918-1920: Post World War I agricultural crisis produced by end of wartime demand, removal of price supports, increased debt burdens with a surge of foreclosures

1920: 6.2% of Wyoming farms have a tractor

1920: Average farm / ranch size in Wyoming: 749.9 acres (64% are under 500 acres)

1920: Census shows 15,748 farms and ranches

1920: 50.9% of the owner-operated farms in Wyoming have no mortgage

1920-1921: Banking crisis, "Contraction of 1920-1921"

1920-1924: Great Western Sugar builds colony for migrant workers at Lovell

1920s: Homesteading surge, especially in dry farm areas

1920s: Increasing specialization of farms and ranches: single crop production, dairy farms, wheat farms, dude ranches; each part of agriculture organizes by producer specialization to promote that particular commodity

1920s: Modernization takes hold increasingly on farms and ranches, undermining traditional purpose of agriculture and also ranching and farming practices

1921-1929: c. 20% of U.S. banks fail, including 101 of 153 banks in Wyoming; only 32 open during same period

1924: Banks fail in about 30 Wyoming communities

1924: International Harvester introduces Farmall, all purpose gasoline tractor

c. 1924-1929: Agricultural Depression of 1920s (merges with Great Depression, does not end until World War II)

1929: Stock market crash, beginning of Great Depression

1929-1930: Over 20% of U.S. commercial banks suspend operations and others merge or are absorbed so that over a third of the banks in the country disappear

1929-1933: Unemployment in U.S. increases to about 25%; with growing unemployment, demand for Wyoming food and fiber also drops

1926: Dude Ranchers Association formed, reflecting the spin-off of this part of ranching into a separate endeavor entirely

1927: Snake River Land Company (secretly owned by John D. Rockefeller, Jr.), begins to purchase lands in Jackson Hole to be added to Grand Teton National Park

1930: 25% of Wyoming farms have a tractor

1930: 30% of owner-operated farms free of debt

1930: Average farm / ranch size in Wyoming: 1469 acres

1930: 16,011 farms and ranches in Wyoming

1930: 3,749 farms had at least one tractor

1930s and 1940s: Mechanization of sugar beet agriculture  
1930s: Trucks become more commonplace on farms and ranches  
1931-1936: Drought of 1930s (especially severe in 1933, 1934, 1936)  
1933: Agricultural Adjustment Administration created to raise agricultural commodity prices by creating artificial shortages through subsidies  
1933: Civilian Conservation Corps created; pays young men to work in military-style units in national forests, grazing districts, national parks, state parks, and communities, to build livestock facilities, trails, plant forests, and construction recreation facilities  
1933-1934: Drought Relief Program seeks to reduce crops and herds  
1933-1941: U.S. remains in Depression, although increased government spending and job creation stimulates consumption; Depression does not end until spending on World War II raises Gross National Product to above 1929 level  
1934, 1936: Grasshopper infestation  
1934: Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace addresses Wyoming Stock Growers Association in Douglas  
1934: Taylor Grazing Act becomes law; regulates grazing on public domain, creates Division of Grazing, and ends almost all homesteading  
1935: 17,486 farms / ranches in Wyoming, highest number ever  
1935: Franklin Roosevelt creates Resettlement Administration to relocate poor farmers and ranchers hurt by economy and AAA  
1935: Wyoming Grazing District No. 1 (Worland) organized; first official grazing district in the U.S.  
1936: Mormon cricket infestation  
1936: Range Improvement Program includes variety of efforts including construction of dams, stock tanks, wells, improvement of springs, and fence building to increase grazing opportunities  
1936: Roosevelt appoints Great Plains Drought Area Committee to investigate drought, its origins, and its remedies; Committee tours Great Plains from Texas panhandle to Dakotas, stopping in Gillette and examining situation in Campbell and Johnson counties  
1939: World War II begins in Europe  
1940: Average farm / ranch size in Wyoming: 1,866 acres  
1940: Number of farms / ranches in Wyoming declines to 15,018 (below even the 1920 level)  
1940: 5,601 of the state's farms and ranches have a tractor  
1940: Average size of Wyoming farms and ranches: 1,866.2 acres  
1941: U.S. enters World War II  
1941-1945: Labor shortage stimulates increased mechanization of agriculture (stats on tractors, 539)  
1942: Heart Mountain Relocation Center opens for Japanese Americans removed from West Coast  
1943-1945: Prisoner of War Camps at various locations, often using former CCC camps, especially in southeastern part of state, house Italian and then German prisoners who are put to work as field labor

1943: Bracero Program begins; Mexican nationals are imported to work in fields, including in Wyoming

1943: Franklin Roosevelt executive order creates Grand Teton National Monument, and is protested by ranchers in Jackson Hole and Wyoming congressional delegation

1945: Heart Mountain Relocation Center closes; Prisoner of War camps close

1945: 13,076 farms and ranches in Wyoming

1945: Average size of farms and ranches: 2,532.6 acres

1945: 7,444 farms and ranches have at least one tractor

1945-1960: general post war period often referred to as “Productivity Revolution” or “Second Agricultural Revolution” because of dramatically increased production through mechanization and scientific agriculture

1945-1960: increased use of ammonia fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, antibiotics, additives, increased specialization of crops transform agriculture yet again

1945-1960: serious decline in number of farms and ranches in nation and Wyoming; small farms and ranches in serious trouble

1947-1950: Bureau of Reclamation opens land for homesteading by veterans at Heart Mountain and at Riverton Midvale Irrigation District

1949: Blizzard, or series of storms, wreaks havoc on Wyoming, the most serious winter since 1886-1887; emergency relief effort mobilized by state government; Operation Haylift by U.S. Air Force

1950: 9,250 Wyoming farms and ranches have 15,610 tractors

1954: Development of center pivot irrigation systems

1959: 9,744 farms and ranches in Wyoming

1959: Average size of farms and ranches: 3,715 acres