



Old News

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Saloon Ledgers Found

The Wyoming State Archives has recently acquired two saloon ledgers. One is the 1893-1894 ledger of Henry Sherard who operated a saloon in the Big Horn Basin. Sherard is well known in some circles for his saloon in early Andersonville north of Thermopolis where Butch Cassidy shot “Irish” Tom Walsh in the leg. Miscellaneous entries mark the first few pages and many pages up to page 43 are missing. Pages 44 and 46 contain an index to 63 customers who frequented the saloon. Each entry identifies individual purchases in general terms, such as “drinks” and “cigars” and when cash payments were made. Sometimes specific purchases are identified. There are more than pages of individual entries. Entries for other business transactions appear in the back of the book.

Included with the ledger are several business letters from 1903 to 1918. An interesting letter came dated June 24, 1904 from Rev. L.C. Thompson of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Thermopolis. The church had a \$50.00 note due at the Big Horn County Bank. Writing to Sherard, Rev. Thompson stated, “I wish you would pay enough to cover this note if possible at Once.” He wanted to get the church’s finances in order before he attended the state Methodist Church conference.

The second ledger is from the saloon of John Klett of Cheyenne from 1882 to 1890. While there is no index (the index pages were used for customer accounts), there are more than 200 pages of individual transactions. The writing is immaculate and the entries are quite detailed. At the beginning of the book are several entries from 1881, probably from another Cheyenne business for billing and cash balances.

An accompanying ledger dated 1884 to 1891 is a sales and expense ledger. Though originally thought to be part of the Klett Saloon, this seems unlikely as the

entries deal with taxes, rent, and purchases for liquor and other sundry items. It is not known whose ledger book this is.

The Klett ledger also contains many miscellaneous papers. According to the records, Klett lived in Leadville, Colorado, where in 1876 he acquired the cabin of Henry Weber in Gold Hill. In 1881, after Klett had moved to Boulder, Weber wrote a letter to his friend. Of particular interest is that the letter is written in German, a sign that there was a strong German presence in Leadville.

Women's History

For most Wyoming residents, woman's history brings to mind woman's suffrage and the lives of seminal women, such as Esther Hobart Morris and Nellie Tayloe Ross, about whom much has been written.

Yet in getting away from the "firsts," a wider social perspective remains wanting about women in society. A search of docket books from municipal, justice of the peace, and district courts provides some interesting insights. The western icon of prostitution is well documented in many court records. Keeping a lewd house, patronizing a lewd house, or practicing prostitution seem to be endemic infractions. But not all women who were arrested were prostitutes. Some were jailed, fined, or warned for swearing, disturbing the peace, bringing a weapon into town limits, and fighting. In some cases, they could be just as ornery and obnoxious on the streets as their male counterparts.

Women appear frequently in justice of the peace and district court civil dockets. Their presence suggests that they were at least somewhat familiar with the use of the legal system. They sued to collect on money, goods, and services previously agreed upon with a second party. Some women who operated houses of prostitution were just as comfortable in civil court as they were in criminal court.

Women bought and sold real estate and chattel property. In examining property transactions along with tax rolls, civil case files, and probate files, we can glean some insight into their ability to handle money and property.

Violence and personal crisis also characterized the lives of many women. Physical assaults and murder were not unknown. For married women, divorce and desertion transformed their lives as well as the lives of their families.

At the turn of the century, many women struggled to eke out a living and at the same time provide for their family. For some women, receiving public aid in any form was their last recourse of action.

Woman's history is a fascinating topic in general. Public records can be a good place to research.

Two Interesting Women

In August 1890, the Laramie Boomerang reported on the death of Ellen Rowan, an African American woman who lived in the mining town of Keystone west of Laramie. She was well known and well liked in Keystone, although rumor had it that she had been poisoned. At the time of her death, she was about 40 years old and had amassed a considerable amount of money. According to one report, she paid \$700 for the Keystone property and had \$1000 in the bank.

Martha Lee Ramirez was born in Missouri in July 1878, and married Dr. Joseph Ramirez, a physician. In 1919, the couple moved to Cheyenne where he practiced medicine for the next 30 years. In the late 1920s she decided she wanted to do something with her life, so she studied law at the University of Wyoming. According to a newspaper article, she did quite well, and graduated with honors in 1930. She is listed as a lawyer in the 1933-1934 Cheyenne city directory. Apparently, during the Depression, her legal career proved to be brief because she is not listed as a lawyer in the 1936-1937 city directory. When she died in 1963, she was remembered for being a member of the Cheyenne Woman's Club and the Cheyenne Mineral and Gem Society. No mention was made about her having a law degree.

From the Archives

William Edward Benjamin was born about 1869 in Omaha, Nebraska, and within a year, the family of four moved to Cheyenne. William's father, Edward, was born in Virginia and had been a servant to many US Army officers. After moving to Cheyenne, he did a variety of menial work, including being a cook, servant, and janitor. He died in June 1900. His wife of many years died in May 1913.

William showed a penchant for administrative duties. After completing elementary school William worked for a short time with the Union Pacific Railroad in Cheyenne, and the Rio Grande Railroad in Pueblo where he was chief clerk in the roadmaster's office. In 1889 he took classes at the Greeley Business College and graduated with honors. He later enrolled at the University of Nebraska, and also graduated with honors.

Upon returning to Cheyenne, he was a clerk with the county clerk's office, a position he would hold for nearly thirteen years. Because of his work in the county clerk's office, he became interested in the abstract business and worked for the Laramie County Abstract Company for the remainder of his life.

He was an active member of the African American branch of the Masons organization. Because of his work, he was well liked and well known in the Cheyenne community. He never married.

In late December 1934, he became ill as a result of diabetes. He died on January 2, 1935.

If you have questions, comments, suggestions, or complaints, please contact Carl Hallberg by phone at 307/777-6423 or by email at challb@state.wy.us.

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