If you need to find facts about the lives of Wyoming’s pioneers and early settlers, for school, personal, or professional research, where do you look? If you’ve ever tried, it can be quite a challenge. Let’s face it, few have been singled out to be honored with an entire book. And yet there are hundreds of biographical sketches collected in books and the information is often provided by the person you seek, close family members or contemporaries.

Locating biographical sketches can often become an extended process. The first step is to identify books that contain biographies, locate the books, and then check each one to see if your person of interest is included. For most of us, that can be an extremely tedious process. The Wyoming Biography Database (WBD) project is helping to open up the contents of these published collections for quicker access and is gradually moving into the realm of digitization. Janis Leath, Collection Development Librarian at University Libraries, has developed this tool to index and abstract vital information about biographical sketches contained in larger collected works. So far, the WBD has more than 13,000 entries from thirty eight books that have significant parts devoted to biographies. There are an additional twenty books in various stages of production. The database is provided through University of Wyoming Libraries and can be accessed directly at www–lib.uwyo.edu/db/bio/index.cfm, from the library’s list of databases, or from the WYLD list of databases.

For the subject of each sketch, the WBD provides the book citation and page number so the user knows exactly where to look. It also indicates if a photograph is associated with the biography. In addition, vital information is abstracted, including the subject’s name, birth date and place, parents’ names, marriage date and spouse’s name, and death date and place.

A book goes through a significant process to be included in the WBD. First, Leath identifies the book to be indexed through a combination of library catalog records and both colleagues’ and her own knowledge of the literature. In no way is the current title list exhaustive. Happily, there are always new titles that come to her attention.

Once identified, the section of the book containing biographies is photocopied to use as the working copy. Then the time-consuming part of the process begins as each biography is read and pertinent vital facts are highlighted. It isn’t perfectly straightforward. For example, some sketches have a very obscure mention of a previous marriage that has to be ferreted out or parents’ names are woven into a larger family history and have to be pieced together. Biographies of immigrants often include both their European and American names. A goal of the project is to do as little interpretation as possible. So personal and place
A Message From The Dean

It seems as though it was yesterday as we celebrated graduation and began our summer projects taking advantage of a slower pace to work on facility improvements. But we spun around to find students returning for the fall semester and we wondered where the time disappeared. While the construction for the Coe Library addition and renovation finished last fall, we are continuing to work on furniture and final finishes for the main library. This summer has seen significant improvements in the Learning Resource Center in the Education building. The LRC is a unique library serving the curriculum needs of teacher education and modeling best practices for school libraries. The outstanding children’s literature collection also serves the Albany County Public School District lab school and this university library is filled with elementary students studying, reading, and enjoying the collections and services of this distinctive library. Tamara Meredith, head of the LRC, is continuing to upgrade the facility and furniture so stop by to see how this library is meeting the needs of young students as well as university students.

We are pleased to announce that the collections budget has been mostly restored following budget reductions during the last fiscal year. $4.3 million was cut from the collections budget in 2009 but for this fiscal year, $3.3 million was restored putting the Libraries back on track in building and developing a research collection. It is expected that the remaining $1 million will be restored in next year’s budget. The restoration is primarily due to a student tuition increase that is being directed toward collections and other university priorities. I appreciate the support of the university and students in funding our collections that will further our research and teaching goals.

In addition to restoring the collection budget reductions, the university is intent on developing a research library and the best metrics for that effort is membership in the Greater Western Library Alliance (GWLA) and the Association of Research Libraries (ARL). Additional legislative funding is required to build UW collections to research levels at similar levels with our comparator universities. This multi–year effort will result in increased collections and digital initiatives that support students and faculty in addition to exposing UW research collections to researchers and students around the world.

Coe Library is hosting an Art Invitational this year featuring local artists and enhancing the ambiance of the building. The Libraries have been a supporter of the Student Art Show conducted by the UW Art Museum. This show provides an opportunity to purchase student art and the Libraries’ art collection is growing. But with the expanded space, the Libraries do not have enough student art for the building so Jennifer Mayer, Art Bibliographer, and David Kruger, Special Projects Librarian, have developed and overseen the solicitation, selection, and installation of art in Coe Library. Be sure to read the article on this exciting project and consider a donation to permanently add one of these lovely pieces to the Libraries.

I hope this fall is productive and interesting for you as it will be for our students!

Maggie Farrell
farrell@uwyo.edu
University of Wyoming Libraries announced that Mary Ann Harlow is the recipient of the Agnes Milstead Distinguished Librarian award recognizing Ms. Harlow’s many contributions to education and librarianship. Ms. Harlow has been a librarian at the University since 1991 demonstrating a sustained commitment to education and the role of librarians supporting teaching and learning. Ms. Harlow led the initiative to incorporate information literacy into the University Studies Program working closely with faculty to teach information literacy skills across the university. The Libraries’ information literacy objectives are embedded within existing coursework with librarians partnering with faculty to ensure UW students have information skills that will contribute to successful careers and lifelong literacy capabilities. One nominator commented that “Mary Ann has a way of leading and creating excitement for changes she would like to implement” that helped to build the university support for building information literacy into the USP program. “Her foundational work in this area leaves a lasting legacy, the importance which cannot be overstated.”

As a bibliographer, Ms. Harlow has strengthened the Libraries’ business and communications programs organizing library activities for the COJO courses. “She works closely with faculty in our (Communication and Journalism) department to revise the lesson and materials as library technology changes over time. This is valuable to our undergraduates and the graduate assistants who teach these classes…” As a result of her bibliographic skills, Ms. Harlow has strengthened our business, economic, zoology and physiology collections. “Her willingness to embrace change that impacts the way she does her work has allowed her to remain effective and relevant as technology has revolutionized the work of libraries and librarians.”

Ms. Harlow was instrumental in securing funding for the digitization of the Grant Teton National Park Herbarium resulting in a collection of high resolution photographs documenting the unique plant species in the park while preserving fragile plant specimens. This project is the foundation for ongoing work with the UW Herbarium and a model of specimen digitization and metadata. It was Ms. Harlow’s vision to bringing the UW research to the world that created this opportunity and is promoting UW herbarium research.

There are numerous projects during Ms. Harlow’s UW career that are a result of her leadership and contributions; too many to articulate but the University has benefitted from her stepping beyond her role and title to carefully and thoughtfully develop UW Libraries’ instructional and digital programs. For her many contributions to the University and librarianship, the Libraries are pleased to honor Ms. Harlow with the Agnes Milstead Distinguished Librarian Award.

The Milstead Award honors individuals who have made a significant contribution to the UW Libraries through, among other things, scholarship of librarianship, distinctive work with faculty and students in both teaching and implementing information resource use in academic curriculum, and improving the access to the scholarly record for the University community, specific groups and state of Wyoming.

Mary Ann Harlow receives distinguished librarianship award

By Maggie Farrell
Dean of Libraries
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Wyoming Biography Database:

Continues to digitize a few of the books. In that way, the user can see the real image, fully searchable. This will eliminate the need to track down the book in order to get the entire sketch. At this time, only four of the books are planned for digitization – I.S. Bartlett’s *History of Wyoming*, Clarence Peterson’s *Men of Wyoming*, *Progressive Men of the State of Wyoming*, and the *Wyoming Historical Blue Book*. These images are not yet incorporated into the WBD but work is currently underway to scan, process, create metadata, and link sketches to the entries already in the WBD.

Leath has thoroughly enjoyed reading these biographies and the amazing stories, experiences, feats, joys and struggles of Wyoming pioneers and citizens. They were an astonishing group of people who endured, improvised, and tackled every obstacle to settle the areas that today we call home. The literature sheds light on women’s lives as well as men’s and provides a clear picture of events in the lives of both genders. Many of the accounts were written by settlers’ grown children, so you get the perspective through youthful experiences. Some settlers viewed the experience as a lark and a great adventure, talking about summer picnics in nearby mountains which included berry picking for winter provisions. And there are numerous accounts of young, single women who came west to homestead their own place. Many families came from difficult circumstances and were hopeful they could make a new start but some moved on or returned home. There are stories of men who immigrated to Wyoming to earn money to send for the rest of the family waiting in the old country. Occasionally, a wife arrived in complete despair after viewing the dry and barren landscape.

One family’s account included the destruction of their crops by a hailstorm, only to have the father instruct the family to collect hail to make ice cream. There is the story of a bachelor homesteader who was welcomed home after extended absences by his cat laying a fresh trout at his feet. Many folks lost their homes and family moments to fire. And women often went months without seeing or speaking to another woman. Range cattle would pass by homesteads, trampling the family garden which was their source of healthy food for the coming year.

One common thread among young married couples, who worked hard to realize their dream to establish their ranches and farms, was for these couples to build or purchase homes in town so their children could continue higher grades of schooling. Education was clearly of the highest priority. Overall, the hardships were great and the faith to overcome obstacles was tremendous.

Frankly, “I’ve learned more about the history of Wyoming from reading these biographies than all the history books I’ve read and courses I’ve taken combined,” noted Leath.

ABOVE: Portrait of William M. Summers from *Progressive Men of the State of Wyoming*. 
Websites Designer Mike Obenchain was awarded the 2010 Outstanding Service Award.

Obenchain earned a BA in Communication from the University of Nebraska in 1991, and did his graduate work in Information Systems Management at Doane College. He joined UW Libraries in 2001 and has been instrumental in providing a web presence for the libraries ever since.

Fellow employees who nominated him all cited his most recent work on the Web Team, guiding a complete overhaul and redesign of the libraries’ website and giving Obenchain a chance to show off his “exceptional work and vision.” In the words of another colleague, “Mike’s creative design sense and technical expertise were essential in establishing UW Libraries’ virtual presence.” His innovation was mentioned multiple times as being one of his many assets.

Employees also consistently noted Obenchain’s attention to detail, his calm, easy-going demeanor, listening skills, and his great sense of humor—making him not only a valued web designer but a terrific colleague to work with as well.

The website redesign wasn’t the only project Obenchain undertook last year. He was also a key player in implementing several other systems including Library a la Carte, Encore, and Illiad as well as the OPAC web interface, ensuring that they all work seamlessly with one another. On this, there is unanimous appreciation for his work.

All of those projects speak to another characteristic that fellow library employees praised: his dedication and hard work. Words like “steadfast” and “tireless” were used in describing his work ethic, with one nominator noting, “His performance on the job is more than exemplary; it is inspiring... UW Libraries are truly lucky to call Mike Obenchain one of their own.”

The Outstanding Service Award bestows special recognition upon a member of University Libraries’ staff who has demonstrated exceptional service and dedication to the libraries, the university, and/or the community. The Award is funded by the McMurry Library Excellence Fund and is open to any employee of UW Libraries. Employees may nominate anyone of their choice and a committee chooses the recipient.
For those interested in learning about a particular time and place in history it is important to consider material outside of the usual resources. One subject area that researchers can overlook are books about cooking and recipe collections. Food plays an important role in the daily lives of people around the world and often has cultural significance to those preparing and eating it. Using recipe books or food history books in historical studies allows historians to create a more complete picture of the time being studied and gives them a closer understanding of daily life. In fact, some historians focus their studies just on food culture and there are centers for historical food study such as the Research Center for Historical Food and Drink in Adelaide, Australia.

The Emmett D. Chisum Special Collections Room at William Robertson Coe Library focuses on collecting books connected to Wyoming history. A portion of the collection that library users might be unfamiliar with are books related to cooking and recipes in the west. These books include Wyoming recipes, such as recipes from Yellowstone and Jackson Hole, and family recipe collections. Besides the general fun of looking through the books and seeing what classifies as Wyoming style of cooking, the books also have historical value.

Some books were purposely created as historical backgrounds such as Jacqueline William’s Wagon Wheel Kitchens: Food on the Oregon Trail, which offers an overview of the food experienced on the Oregon Trail and how travelers utilized new foods like buffalo meat. For researchers examining life on the trails, these books can provide insight on how pioneers dealt with preparing and storing food for a long journey.

Family cook books also provide a way to understand the past through passed down recipes and stories. Some of the more interesting books in this category are Martha’s Past and Repast: Reflections on the Peter Hansen Family and a Collection of Favorite Recipes. This book is interesting not so much for the actual recipes, but for the family stories and childhood memories of Martha Hansen Larsen. These include stories about her life growing up in Rawlins, Wyoming that include her family as well as little introductions to some recipes that explain their background or importance. Overall, this book provides readers with wonderful images of growing up in early twentieth century Rawlins.

Another family recipe collection is Naomi Stanley Kulp’s Wagon Wheel and Wild Roses: Heirloom Recipes and Oregon Trail stories from the McCaw Family, 1847–1995. Kulp’s book contains short stories about her family’s history on the Oregon Trail, including information about the family’s visit to the doomed Whitman Mission, family photographs, and both historic and modern day recipes. The recipes are particularly interesting as they often contain short introductions with background information about them. For the recipe called “Grandmother Amanda McCaw Erwin’s steamed Bread, 1880s,” Kulp introduces the recipe saying that “There is a family story that great grandmother Sarah took her bread starter to bed with her every night to keep it warm and ‘working.’ The starter was poured into a jar with a tight lid, then wrapped in a towel and tucked into her bed…” (p. 17). Wagon Wheels and Wild Roses is an easy to read, enjoyable collection of family recipes and stories from the Oregon Trail that might appeal to both historians and to the general public.

Another way to explore the past through cooking is by looking at recipes and cook books from a particular period of time, such as books from World War I. One such source is A Round–Up of War–Time Recipes from 1918 and produced in Cheyenne, Wyoming. The collection of recipes, from local housewives, included wartime slogans including, “This is everybody’s war. This is your war. What are you doing to win it?” (p. 9). The book included efforts to encourage rationing supplies needed for the war effort. One section on breads stated that “if you eat potato bread, many soldiers will be fed,” which is based on the government’s effort to save wheat for military use (p. 11). Numerous advertisements were included in the book for local companies like the Kelly Mercantile and the Hopper and Bartley Hardware store in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

The Powder River Cook Book, created by The Bide–A–Wee Club ladies of Kaycee, Wyoming in 1923, is a useful and often has a significant historical event like World War I, the recipes represent common food that women cooked and families ate in the 1920s. A number of the recipes, including suet pudding, may seem strange to us today but appear to have been a highly enjoyed dish. In addition, recipes for pickling vegetables document how women preserved food. In addition to the recipes, The Powder River Cook Book also contains advertisements from local businesses that may be useful to researchers investigating merchants of Kaycee, Wyoming during the early 1920s.

So next time you are researching a particular time and place, consider examining recipe and food history texts found in the Emmett D. Chisum Special Collections at University Libraries. Food plays an important part in the lives of all people and by using cook books or food histories in historical study it is possible to gain a fuller understanding of daily life from the past.
Interviewed by David Kruger
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An oil painting of William Robertson Coe Library by Wyoming artist Robert Seabeck is on display in Coe Library’s Alma Doke McMurry Reading Room. Commissioned and donated by Carol McMurry, the painting documents the original Coe Library from the late 1950s. “When Carol McMurry asked me to paint my interpretation of Coe Library I considered it a privilege,” said Seabeck.

To create the painting, Seabeck studied photographs taken of William Robertson Coe Library during the late 1950s, shortly after the building was completed. Seabeck noted that his painting “documents the Coe Library that so many of us know, particularly the front porch leading into the entrance.” When he examined earlier photographs of Coe Library, Seabeck was struck by the “orange color” that emanated from the building. “The trim originally was quite a contrast, yet the sandstone finish also projected the color in a unique but subtle way,” commented Seabeck. Seabeck also paid particular attention to the cars he placed out front, which were a status for that time. “It was particularly meaningful for me to put a pickup in this painting,” said Seabeck. “After all, it is Wyoming, and Coe Library served students from all walks of life, many of whom drove pickups just like [the one in the painting] while attending the University of Wyoming.”

Robert Seabeck works within a tradition of realism that has been a strong direction historically in American art. His subjects include landscapes, wildlife, flowers and vehicles. A native of Casper, Wyoming, Seabeck resides in Laramie, Wyoming. Samples of his work can be viewed online at www.robertseabeck.com.

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Emmett D. Chisum Special Collections

The Emmett D. Chisum Special Collections include the Canoso Miniature Book Collection, Cheramy Native American Collection, Grace Raymond Hebard Collection, Hebard Historic Map Collection, and much more.

Located in the reading room on level three of William Robertson Coe Library, the collections are open to the public Monday through Friday. Although materials may not be checked out, materials may be used in the reading room.

Emmett D. Chisum Special Collections

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William Robertson Coe Library
Level Three
Laramie, Wyoming

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