

Natrona County Profile



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Natrona County Public Library System

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Preface

In 2009, the Natrona County Public Library updated its profile of the County in order to tailor the collections and services to the needs and interests of our community. In preparing this profile, library employees researched the community and library history, interviewed key community members regarding current issues, and gathered demographic data as well as other objective information about transportation, business, education, and social services. On the basis of this information, the staff developed a series of recommendations to help direct the Natrona County Public Library in providing the best possible library services to our patrons.

The first Natrona County Profile was created by the Natrona County Public Library in 1999. Updated versions were published in 2003 and 2005.

History of Natrona County

Wyoming's plains are the historical home to many nomadic tribes including the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Shoshone and Sioux. Today, about 6,000 Shoshone and Arapaho continue to reside on the 2.3 million acre Wind River Reservation, northwest of Natrona County.

In 1812, John Jacob Astor established Astoria at the mouth of the Columbia and sent Robert Stuart east to start what was hoped to become a network of trading posts. Stuart found South Pass by following a Crow Indian trail and entered our region. Near Bessemer Bend, Stuart and his small band erected the first white man's hut in 1812. Although Astor's plans failed when the British captured Astoria in 1812, trappers and scouts continued to explore our high plains and develop transit routes. On July 4, 1824, some of these trappers named Independence Rock.

In 1840, Father Jean Pierre DeSmet began spreading the gospel among area Indians. Father DeSmet was the first to carve his name on Independence Rock and give it the name, "The Register of the Desert." In 1843, John C. Fremont (known as "The Pathfinder") chiseled his name on Independence Rock and later with Kit Carson as his guide, went on to explore the country along the Platte and Sweetwater Rivers.

Trails & Emigrants

Economic depressions in 1837 and 1841 frustrated farmers and businessmen east of the Mississippi. The collapse of the international fur trade in 1839 intensified the hard times. These economic concerns and fear of British domination of the Oregon territory became catalysts for people to relocate to the Oregon Territory. Consequently, the primitive trails that early trappers, explorers and missionaries forged came to serve over 200,000 pioneers bound for California, 50,000 bound for Oregon, and 70,000 Mormons headed for Utah. Casper was the northernmost point on their respective treks and was the point at which they abandoned the North Platte River that had guided them through Nebraska and much of Wyoming. West of here, pioneers picked up and followed the Sweetwater River west.

Between 1847 and 1855, the Mormons, on their way from Nauvoo, Illinois to the Great Salt Lake passed through the area. Brigham Young established "Mormon's Ferry" that served a number of emigrants until 1852, including many "49ers" bound for California's gold fields.

Hostilities between Indians and settlers were few along the trail until 1855. In 1858-59, U.S. soldiers had to be dispatched to the region during what was called the "Mormon War." Shortly thereafter, the first permanent settlement along the river was established, when Louis Guinard built a bridge and trading post in 1859. Guinard's post later became an overnight stage stop, a Pony Express mail stop, and a Pacific Telegraph Office known as Platte Bridge Station.

In 1861, a volunteer cavalry company was ordered to Guinard's Bridge to guard against Indian raids, which were becoming more frequent. Between 1862 and 1865, Platte Bridge Station was outfitted as a one-company military post. In July 1865, the Sioux and Cheyenne, under Red Cloud, outraged by the Chivington Massacre at Sand Creek in Colorado, resolved to eliminate Platte Bridge Station. In the ensuing Battle of Platte Bridge Station, Lieutenant Caspar Collins, (son of Col. William Collins for whom Ft. Collins, CO is named) lost his life. Later that year, the Army changed the outpost's name from Platte Bridge Station to Fort Caspar, to honor the fallen lieutenant. Fort Caspar became the headquarters for soldiers escorting wagon trains on the Oregon Trail until it was abandoned in 1867. (When the town name of Casper was recorded, a frontier Army clerk is said to have incorrectly spelled our city's namesake.)

