

University of Wyoming: Emmett D. Chisum Special Collections and American Heritage Center



The American Heritage Center in Laramie, Wyoming. Wikimedia Commons

By **Tamsen Emerson Hert**

Wyoming and the American West owe much to Grace Raymond Hebard. Suffragist, cartographer, librarian and historian, it is thanks to Hebard that researchers have access to significant Western Americana collections at the University of Wyoming.

Both the Emmett D. Chisum Special Collections and the American Heritage Center (AHC) were founded on the published and unpublished materials she gathered while documenting the history and culture of Wyoming. Upon her death in 1936, her collections were donated to the University of Wyoming Library, which, at the time, also housed the archives. Her vast personal library is the foundation of the Grace Raymond Collection.

Emmett D. Chisum Special Collections

Among the collections housed here is the Grace Raymond Hebard Collection. Considered to be the most comprehensive collection of published materials about Wyoming, it provides a superb starting point for research on any aspect of Wyoming's history and culture. While the focus is on Wyoming, there are works with a broader Western focus as well, such as the Oregon-Mormon-California Trails, narratives of exploration and expansion, national parks and monuments, transcontinental railroads

and highways, dude ranching and tourism, Western fiction and water. Subjects with a specific Wyoming focus include the Johnson County War, the Heart Mountain Relocation Center, Bozeman Trail, the University of Wyoming and Owen Wister and *The Virginian*. In fact, one can find a variety of editions of this Western classic along with translations in Arabic, Danish and Polish, among others.

Additional collections in the department include the Cheramy Native American book collection; the Historic Clothing collection, which contains textile samples as well as publications; the University of Wyoming Wool Library; and the Michael D. Canoso miniature book collection.

This is a closed-stack area and staff retrieves items upon request. George Miles, Western Americana curator at the Beinecke Library at Yale University, said: "The Hebard Collection is a major research collection of national importance that provides essential service for scholars working the history and culture of Wyoming and the Mountain Plains West."

American Heritage Center

The Journal of the West devoted the Fall 2013 issue to "Academic Centers Studying the West," saying "the AHC has one of the nation's foremost collections documenting the Rocky Mountain West." The vastness of the resources available here are surprising. When I arrived at the University of Wyoming Libraries in 1986, I was amazed to find 18 volumes of finding aids for collections on Western history! Finding aids are available through the AHC website as well as the University of Wyoming Online Library Catalog.

In addition to serving as the archives for the University of Wyoming, collections here encompass a broad array of topics and include manuscript and photograph collections, as well the Toppan

Library which holds the rare book collection. Some Western art is displayed on the walls surrounding the loggia and include works by Bierstadt and Farny.

My own research on the University of Wyoming, Grace Hebard and Wyoming's national parks has benefitted from the archival materials held here. An aggressive collecting policy under the direction of Gene Gressley resulted in a world-renown archive containing Western history manuscripts and archives but also diplomatic materials, as well as the Anaconda Mining Collection. The Western Americana collections contain archival material from leading authors including Owen Wister, Jack Schaefer, Mary O'Hara and C.J. Box. Owen Wister's desk graces the reading room. The WWA records (1956-2004) are also available.

From first-hand trail accounts to Charles Belden's photographs and so much more, the American Heritage Center is a resource one should not overlook in researching the American West.

Information

Emmett D. Chisum Special Collections

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W.R. Coe Library
Laramie, Wyoming

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