

Tamsen Hert is Head of the Emmett D. Chisum Special Collections at the University of Wyoming Libraries, a position she has held since 2009. She has served as the liaison between the UW Libraries and the UW History Department since 1988. Tamsen received her BA in American History from Colorado State University and her Master of Library Science and Master of Arts in History from Emporia State University in Kansas. She has had articles published in *Annals of Wyoming*, *Yellowstone Science*, *The Yellowstone Postcard Exchange*, and *Great Plains Studies*. Her article on Yellowstone's Canyon Hotel received the 2006 Wyoming State Historical Society Award for best article. She received a 2010 Fellowship Award in Western American History from the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies at Brigham Young University. In 2012 she was the recipient of the Agnes Milstead Distinguished Librarian award from the University of Wyoming Libraries.

Prior to beginning her academic career, Ms. Hert worked as a researcher for Colorado State Parks and as a tour guide at Fort Robinson State Park in Nebraska. She is currently working on a history of all Yellowstone Park Hotels, Camps, and Lodges with Lee Whittlesey, Yellowstone National Park historian. She has presented on various Yellowstone topics at the Western History Association, the Yellowstone Gateway Museum in Livingston, Montana, and at the Yellowstone Historic Center in West Yellowstone, Montana.

Librarian as Public Historian

By Tamsen Hert

In 1985 Lawrence McCrank's article, "Historians in the Information Professions: Problems in Education and Credentials" was published in *The Public Historian*. While this work is dated, it continues to address current issues. McCrank points out three areas that public historians should consider: "1) government service, planning, and public administration; 2) historic preservation, museum work, and local and regional studies; and 3) information services such as librarianship, records management, information science, and information systems management." The essay by James Bailey addresses his experience in the government sector and I will touch on the 3d.

Graduating from Colorado State University in 1979 with a BA in history, my career has paralleled the rise of public history. At the time I entered the history department, I opted for a program then known as the "park historian" concentration. Following graduation I worked in a variety of public history positions from researcher for a nomination to the National Register, to tour guide, to librarian. I was fortunate to find a graduate program that provided me the opportunity to pursue both an MA in history and a Masters in Library Science. This dual degree program, offered at Emporia State University in Kansas is still available with a focus on public history.

While I have worked in a variety of positions within academic libraries, my grounding in the historical method and professional interest in the discipline fed my involvement in many areas which complement my work as a librarian. My history education included many aspects of historical research methods now common in public history programs. Through the

research required in the coursework, I learned how to research in county clerk's records, public library local history collections, and public and private archival collections which established a firm understanding of how to identify resources pertinent to any topic.

As head of special collections in the University of Wyoming Libraries, my education and training in both fields provides a solid background in assisting researchers identify the resources they need and the knowledge of the repositories that contain useful material for their research. In addition to administration, the basic responsibility of my position includes support of the educational process. For the majority of my tenure at the University of Wyoming I have served as the library liaison to the history department. This includes working with the faculty to identify resources that support their courses as well as research and providing bibliographic instruction to a variety of classes. On the academic side, I meet with potential faculty candidates to discuss the process of ordering materials and give them an overview of the collection in their area of specialty. Recently I have been invited to meet with the new graduate students at a general orientation and then provide more specialized assistance in their research methods class.

The UW history department offers a public history concentration and shares responsibility for a museum studies minor. I share the resources in the Grace Raymond Hebard Collection, a comprehensive collection of published material on Wyoming and the Rocky Mountain West, with public history, archives, historic preservation and geography classes. There is also the opportunity for a student

to earn credit through an internship in the department. Some of the requirements for this include learning how to develop collections; design small exhibits for the reading room, and write an article for the library newsletter highlighting materials in any of the collections.

Scholarship is also a small percentage of my position and this is where the two degrees serve me best. My collection development work—identifying new and old resources that are pertinent to the collections—informs my scholarship and vice versa. As I pursue research on the cultural history of Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks, as well as other Wyoming subjects, I identify titles that do not exist, yet, in special collections. Conversely, looking through catalogs or browsing exhibits at WHA informs me about new materials and sometimes, I see titles that fit the collections but which I would not have identified without actually seeing the material.

Sharing one's research with the public is one aspect of public history. I provide this through the exhibits and articles produced in the department but also through public presentations of my own research. Presentations in public settings across the Greater Yellowstone region as well as articles in *Annals of Wyoming* and other local publications serve the public historian role.

In Wyoming it is necessary to wear many hats. In the nearly 30 years in Laramie I have served as board member and president of the Albany County Historical Society and am currently the 2d vice president of the Wyoming State Historical Society. In these positions I have identified speakers for the monthly

meetings, hosted the “annual trek” for the entire society, and served on committees responsible for collections and web design. I currently serve on the advisory board and contribute to the same as an historian for WyoHistory.org, an online encyclopedia for Wyoming’s history. Other library colleagues around the state are responsible for the Wyoming Newspaper Project and Wyoming Places—an online place names project I have also contributed to. Additionally, we all work to provide access to our resources through a variety of digitization projects.

Within the Western History Asso-

ciation are a number of librarians, archivists and curators with responsibilities for Western Americana collections in institutions across the country and who consider themselves public historians. Meeting at the WHA each year, this group addresses issues, shares research and offers programs to unique to Western history. At the Denver meeting, several of the sessions identified as public history included information specialists commenting on or presenting on a variety of topics. Gathering as public historians or information specialists, that is one of the benefits of membership in WHA.

In an earlier time, many librarians and special collections administrators were trained as historians and then served the profession in the archives and special collections community. In recent years, with certification in archives programs and increasing coursework in information management, training as a historian has taken a back seat to the requirements of those programs. This is a concern that Lawrence McCrank addressed in his original

essay and which is still a concern as voiced in his book,

Historical Information Science, An Emerging Unidiscipline (Medford, NJ: Information Today, Inc., 2001). In discussing this with colleagues in Denver, one told me, that we [historians] can’t do anything

without librarians and archivists and she noted that having a master’s degree in library science would have helped her as she pursued her Ph.D.

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