

Agnes Wright Spring (January 5, 1894 - March 20, 1988) was a journalist, writer and historian who wrote books focusing on Western history. At the time – and this may still be true – she was the only person, man or woman, to serve as the official state historian of two states, Wyoming and Colorado.



Agnes Wright  
Spring  
(1894 - 1988)

Agnes Wright was born on January 5, 1894 in Delta, Colorado, to Gordon and Myra Dorsett Wright. She was one of four sisters. In Delta her father shipped apples from the Western Slope. In 1901 the family moved to a ranch on the Little Laramie River, Wyoming. It was a home station on the stagecoach line; her father created a small post office there and sold cigars and chewing tobacco to the stage drivers.

Local historian Evadene Swanson relates this anecdote: "Agnes cut ten cent 'chews' hoping that the customer would give her the little tin star or horseshoe trademark on the cut."



What did they do for entertainment? Played cards; made taffy; sang; mom played the grand piano they had in the living room; Agnes played mandolin, and steel guitar ("but was never very good at it"); used a stereopticon; played phonograph and gramophone; shot fireworks and ate watermelon on the Fourth of July; attended the dance hall at Buckeye Ranch; and in 1906 hosted their own dance at the Home Station.

In 1913 Wright was the first woman to graduate with a civil engineering degree from the University of Wyoming. She was hoping to become a topographical draftsman, and although she earned top marks on her Civil Service exam, she was told there were no openings for women in that field. So she took a job as Assistant State Librarian in the State Supreme Court Library in Cheyenne.

In 1916 she went to the Pulitzer School of Journalism at Columbia University, and when the school closed for World War I, she returned to Wyoming in 1917.



1912  
The Wyoming Student  
Published Monthly by  
The Students of Wyoming University  
Laramie, Wyoming.

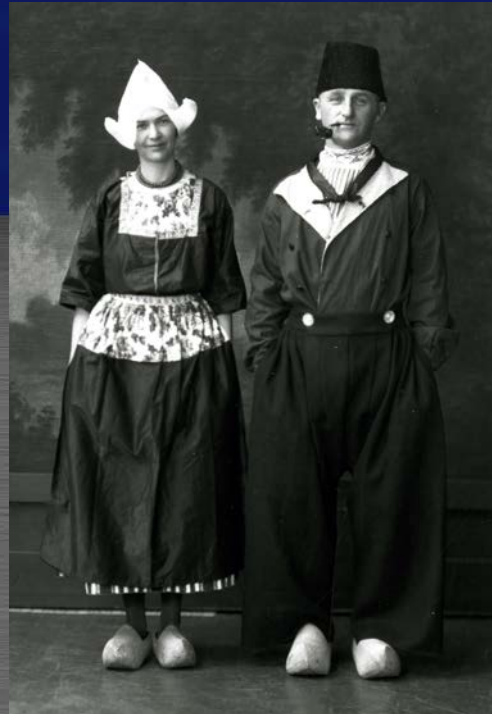
Dear Mamas Papa:-  
I am so tired to-night  
will only write a few lines but I have  
so much good news I simply have to tell  
it. Last night at the meeting of the Board  
of trustees they voted to give me a raise  
for next year making my salary \$250.  
Then I was elected Editor of the "Student"  
again for next year with a salary of \$100.  
And Bro. Meica told me, (but of course it won't  
be known until next Thursday) that I had  
won two prizes both \$5 each making \$10.  
Dr. St. Paul is going to borrow it and pay me interest  
on it to keep me from spending it so  
we'll have plenty to go to school on next year.  
Linda is going to copy her Chemistry  
notes to-night so hasn't time to write.  
Good bye Lovingly Agnes.  
Let me know if you get an Annual.



She was the State Librarian of Wyoming from 1917 to 1921, and the State Historian of Wyoming. If that wasn't enough, she was also the superintendent of weights and measures, and became quite an accomplished golfer (she won a few championships, first in Wyoming and then in Fort Collins).

She married Archer T. Spring in 1921. Archer was from Boston, and graduated from the Colorado School of Mines, and worked as an oil geologist.

Agnes began to flourish as a writer in the late 1920s. She published her first book in 1927 – *Caspar Collins: The Life and Exploits of an Indian Fighter of the Sixties* – and served as women's editor of the Wyoming Stockman-Farmer newspaper. She got money for her writing however she could – she even wrote serials for The Midnight Chimes program, which was performed at the Orpheum in Denver.



Agnes and Archer came to Fort Collins in in 1922. They first lived at 105 Garfield, then in 1930 bought Cherryhurst, a 30-acre fruit orchard located at 1100 Gregory Road. Unfortunately, the orchard failed: “Drought & the depression wiped us out, and neither of us knew a thing about raising cherries.” But they had a few good years: they shipped plums to Morey Mercantile, and sold bushels of cherries, gooseberries and apples to Nebraska truckers.

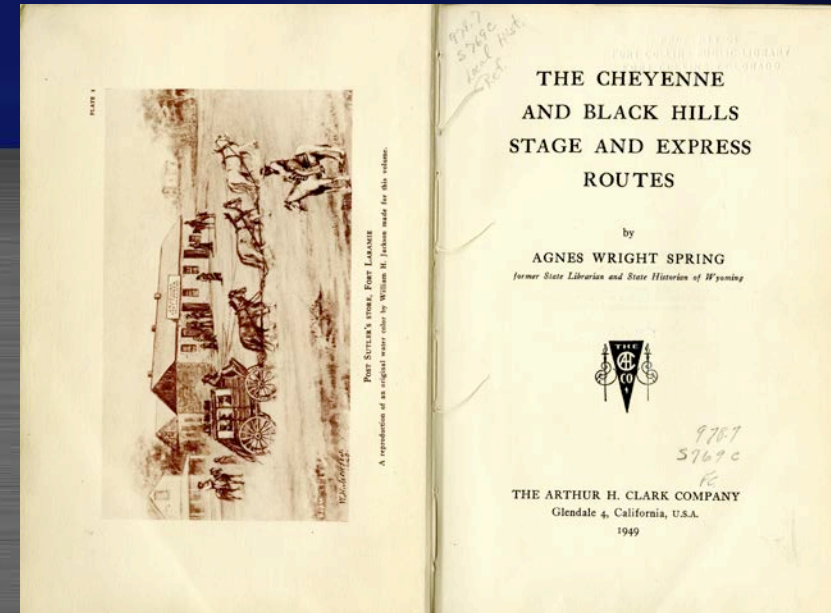
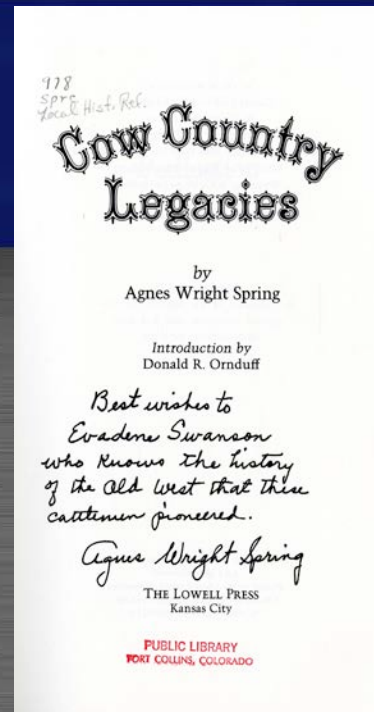
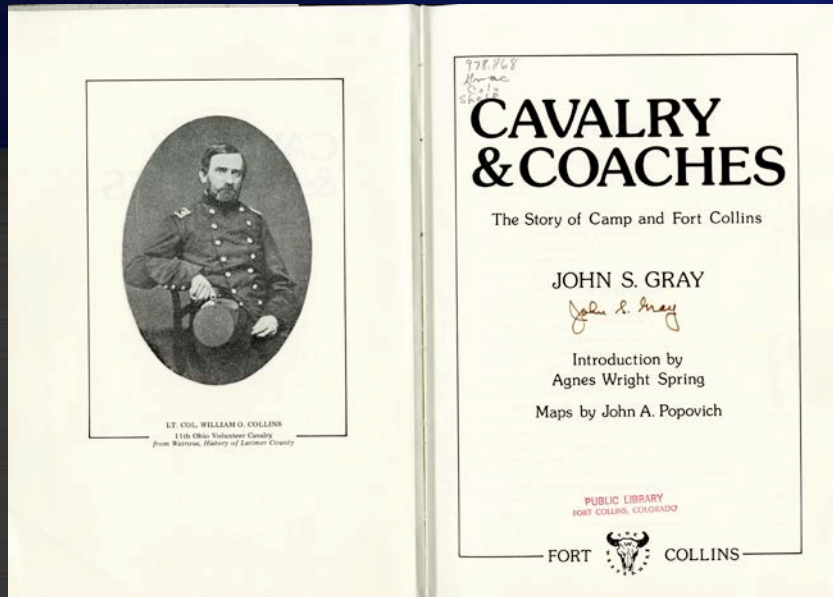


We could do a whole presentation on Cherryhurst! Here are a few more photos from around 1941, after the Springs had left. Fort Collins Country Club used the cherry orchard as part of its golf course; farm sold in 1940 to Arthur Hunt family, pictures in these photos, then to the Lyman Nichols family in 1951 (he was a scientist and inventor).



Agnes returned to Wyoming to serve as State Supervisor for the Work Projects Administration's Federal Writers' Project from 1935-1941; for the first few years she commuted from Fort Collins. The Springs moved to Denver in 1941 and Agnes worked at the Denver Public Library. In 1950 she became president of the Colorado Historical Society & served as Colorado State Historian from 1954-1963.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, Agnes continued her research and writing about the American West. Here are the three books we have in the archive; note the inscription in *Cow Country Legacies*. During her life Agnes wrote over 500 articles and 22 books on the Rocky Mountain West and contributed articles to publications including *Sunset Magazine* and *A Child's Garden*.



She received lots of publicity for her work, as seen in these clippings. Check out the one on the right (“This picture is terrible...”), probably written to her friend Charlene Tresner.



Sun, Feb. 7, 1982, Denver, Colo Rocky Mountain News "New" —35

## Great introduction to greats

By Tom Noel

NEAR THE GREATS. By Agnes Wright Spring. Platte 'N' Press. \$12.95.

This is book No. 22 for Agnes Wright Spring, who has also written more than 500 articles, primarily about the Rocky Mountain West. During her long career as librarian, public relations person, writer and official historian of both Wyoming and Colorado, she became acquainted with many of "the greats."

Born in Delta, Colo., in 1894, Spring interviewed many of the pioneers and/or old-timers who knew them. She compared oral history with the written record when possible, thus earning a reputation for accuracy as well as readability. Once you adjust to her subjective tendencies, the 132 greats vignettes here in alphabetical order provide a seductive introduction to a vanishing world of Indian and cowboys, writers and politicians, horse thieves and Hollywood celebrities.

Here you will find Larry Brown struggling to disprove the "Unimolable Molly Brown" stereotype of his mother as an illiterate, coarse social climber. He also told Spring why Molly really left J.J. Brown. "It is a story," she adds, "that will not be told by war."

This integrity as well as her fairly godmother role to many other writers has led some to call Agnes Wright Spring "the most beloved of Western historians." A perky, pretty and adventuresome woman, she attracted many suitors, including one who left her more than \$100,000.

Spring worked closely with a string of Wyoming and Colorado governors, including John Osborne of Wyoming. After slipping into Osborne's office past a skull used as a doorknob, she was told that it belonged to a train robber and murderer known as "Big Nose" George Parrot. The governor proudly showed Spring two moccasins that had been made from the same man's chest. "I told you to have the apples on," the governor grumbled, "but they didn't."

Jim Baker and Buffalo Bill, Buck Cassidy and Calamity Jane, William Henry Jackson and Herbert Hoover, Walter Beeson and Lucius Beebe, James Grafton Rogers and Lowell Thomas, Mrs. Sanford and William McLeod Raine come to life in this little book.

After graduating in history from the University of Wyoming in 1913, she studied journalism at Columbia University where she worked with suffragettes Carrie Chapman Catt and Susan B. Anthony. While ringing New York City doorbells in 1916 for "equal rights," Spring had many doors slammed in her face. One woman stomped her foot and hissed, "I hope you never get the vote."

"We have the vote," Spring smiled, explaining that Wyoming had enfranchised women in 1890.

From 1934 to 1963, Spring served as Colorado's historian and editor of the Colorado Magazine. She became a legend at the Colorado State Museum. During lunchtimes she swept dust and cobwebs out of the basement to make room for the many treasures she collected, ranging from Molly Brown's trunk to Mamie Doud Eisenhower's inaugural ball gown. She read obituaries religiously and sometimes arrived at the death house in the museum's old station wagon while the corpse was still warm.

Now retired in Fort Collins, Spring is happy as a meadowlark — with a novel about Indians and trappers simmering on the stove. At 5-foot-2, she is one of the human landmarks of the Rocky Mountain region. She has unearthed vast amounts of history, assayed it for accuracy and polished and published it as people-centered drama.

Many an Indian and cowboy, stage driver and outlaw, as well as artists, educators, politicians and writers, survive vividly in the historical record because of the lifelong work of Agnes Wright Spring.

"Platte 'N' Press, publisher of 'Near the Greats,' shares the address 541 Oak St., Frederick, Colo. 80530, with the Jende-Hagen Bookshop, which issues a most useful guide, "Colorado Books in Print."

"Denver's Larimer Street" is the latest book from Tom Noel, director of the Colorado Studies Center at the University of Colorado at Denver.

*This picture is terrible - but I thought you might like to see the publicity. JWS*

## Channel Longr

By MARLENE LEININGER  
Community Living Reporter

Mrs. Agnes Wright Spring, 221 Terry St., Apt. 4, could very well withdraw as an old woman living on memories of a full, productive life.

But Mrs. Spring is not ready to devote her thoughts to memories alone. She's still living — still holding memories for the future.

In fact, the highlight of her life as an author and historian will come tonight when she is featured on the ABC news special on Channel 9 at 7:30 p.m.

"New Old Are You?"

"One of the cameramen at the November filming asked me, 'How old are you, Mrs. Spring?' and the producer, James Benjamin, said, 'Tell him it's none of his business,'" said Mrs. Spring this week as she anticipates airing of the special.

"In this week's TV Guide it says I'm in my late 70s," she chuckled, adding, "Not too late."

Also appearing on the show about Colorado and Wyoming history will be Gaielle Blake, 90, cowboy specializing in bronc busting, and Pecos Higgins, 86, who once left Texas at one time to escape the law.

Writing 18th Book

Mrs. Spring has lived in Longmont with her sister, Mrs. Alice Wallace, since June. Here she's working on her 18th book, about the Old West.



One of the reasons Agnes is beloved is that she mentored historians of the next generation.

She formed a special friendship with Charlene Tresner; we have several affectionate cards and letters like these in our vertical files.

Fort Collins  
Nov. 11, 1978

Dear Charlene:

The pressures of preparation for the oncoming trip to Arizona are closing in on me, so that I will have regretfully to postpone the tape recording until I return.

I have become enthusiastic over recalling those early days here in Fort Collins, and have made many notes. While in Sun City I expect to arrange my notes and will type them for the interview.

In remembering back, I am surprised to find how much writing and selling I did in those early days.

Too I am remembering the delightful old-times I met in Fort Collins. I'm glad you have asked me to do this.

I am bringing my sister to my apartment next Friday, and my brother-in-law, Howard Fish and Alice and I will leave here on Nov. 21 for Arizona.

My address until January 1 will be:

King's Inn, Sun City, Arizona 10660 Grand Ave.,  
Sun City, 85351.

I hope the Fort Collins book can be sent to me there. I know it is going to be great.

Affectionately,  
Agnes



May 25, 1984

When I was married to Archer T. Spring in 1921, he was employed by a subsidiary of the Royal Dutch Shell Oil company. The company had a number of bases in the Rocky Mountains, including Wellington, but they would not permit our geologists to drill deeper than 2300 feet. When they did not get oil, they turned back the lakes. They ordered my husband to go to Lima, Peru. He said he had been chased out of Mexico by Villa, and had been in a revolution in Cuba, and wanted no more foreign service. He said, of the many places he had been, there was one above all others in which he wanted to make his home. That was Fort Collins, Colorado. And so we settled here.

Fort Collins has always been my home, no matter where I have been. The real highlight of my many years was the receipt of the most attractive plaque, which you have given me. I am deeply grateful.

Her husband Archer died in 1967.

In 1973, she received the Western Heritage Wrangler Award from the National Cowboy Hall of Fame, for outstanding contribution to the preservation of Western history. Barbara Stanwyck was there, as well as Joel McCrae and Walter Brennan, of Gunsmoke fame, and Will gear, aka “Granpa Walton.” Agnes recollected “I was so surprised to be with Walter Brennan in person that I reared back like a young wild colt being roped for the first time. Cameras snapped and caught me with my mouth open.”

In 1983 she was inducted into the Cowgirl Hall of Fame and Museum; here she is with Dean Krakel, who was Director & VP National Cowboy Hall of Fame, 1964—1985).

**“Walter Brennan handed the trophy to me, then kissed me on the cheek. ... I was so surprised to be with Walter Brennan in person that I reared back like a young wild colt being roped for the first time.”**



**“There’s a trend now to consider history a series of beautiful exhibits. But to me, history will always be people and their memories.”**

She was a lifetime member of the Denver Posse (a club of Western American historians), and a member of so many organizations: Daughters of the American Revolution, Fort Collins Woman's Club, Fort Collins Country Club, the Quill Club, and Pi Beta Phi. And lots of others! The awards she received are too numerous to name her, but suffice it to say, there were many.

In 1976 she and sister Alice Wallace (also a writer) returned to live in Fort Collins. Alice Wright Spring died on March 20, 1988 in Fort Collins, Colorado and is buried at Greenhill Cemetery in Laramie, Wyoming. The “Agnes Wright Spring, 1894-1988, Papers” are preserved at the University of Wyoming, American Heritage Center.



Finally, as a nod to the 100th anniversary of the passing of the 19th Amendment, here's a clip of Agnes talking about when she went door-to-door in NYC in 1917, canvassing about women's suffrage.

**"We would knock on the door, and we would ask. At first we couldn't get anybody to open their door, so we said we were with the Equal Rights people, and they wouldn't open their doors. So we would say we're from Columbia University, they'd open the door. And then we'd put up this spiel about how the women should have the vote, that we want to get the petition signed because we have to have a certain number in order to get on the ballot.**

**"Well, this woman stomped her foot and said, 'I hope you never get the vote.' And we both laughed and Louis and I both said, 'We have the vote, we're from Colorado and Wyoming.'"**

Learn more about local history by visiting the Archive at Fort Collins Museum of Discovery, visiting the Poudre River Public Library District, and by checking us out online at the Fort Collins History Connection.