**County Road Records**

Overview:

In general, the creation of a County Road normally began with a petition to the Board of County Commissioners, asking for a road to be established and defining where it was desired. Sometimes, the County would declare the need for a road without being petitioned. The Commissioners would then appoint Viewers to go out and look at the location and obstacles, damages that be made to other private or public property that would need addressed, or property acquired. A survey would be made to lay out the exact course for the road, the topographical features that needed to be identified and the construction costs estimated. Finally, if everything was approved, the road would be built. Later on, if it was no longer needed, it could be “abandoned”, and the property returned to private or public interests or use.

All of these steps would be documented in the Commissioners Proceedings (often referred to as the Commissioner’s Journal and referenced with a letter and page, like “J64” (for Journal “J”, page 64). The surveys were recorded in a Field Survey Book (or books) and a plat made of the road (Road Plat, see County Roads Books or County Road Record Plats). Additional records would be created to help make it easier to find information about the road’s creation and status (Index Cards, Road Log Book, Index to Field Books, etc.).

Most early records related to County Roads were produced by County Surveyors or County Engineers and were originally maintained in those offices. Later on those records were placed under the Road & Bridge Department (now Public Works Department), and still later under the Planning and Development Office. They are now kept here at the Records Center, under the County Clerk’s office. Most have been digitally scanned by the Records Center Department and are available in a folder on the network GIS drive (W:\CountyClerk\Road\_Bridge\_Images\Road Records). These include:

County Road Books 1 & 2 (surveys and drawings)

County Road Field Survey Books

County Road Index Cards

County Road Log Book

County Road Record Plats

Index to County Road Field Books

Road Petitions (Index to petitions 1922-1981 & Petitions #301-366)

Additional Field Survey Books that may contain road related surveys have been scanned and can be found on the “S:” network drive (S:\clkrec\_scan\FIELD SURVEY BOOKS). These include:

Baldwin Surveys

CSSA Surveys

E.P.Kelley Surveys

A few additional scanned records can also be found on the “S:\” drive (S:\CO\_ROAD AND SURVEYOR IMAGES), although this drive is intended primarily to store images either in progress or available only to County Clerk staff. The Commissioner’s Journals are on microfilm in the Recordings office.

The original hardcopy of these records are stored in the Records Center, please see listings under the County Clerk and Planning office. There is a separate binder that contains series descriptions and inventory sheets for the E.P. Kelley Survey records, returned to Laramie County from the Wyoming State Archives under a formal written agreement in June, 2015. This records group also contains field survey books from other private surveyors that were purchased or donated to the County Engineer/Surveyor when the businesses ceased or the surveyor retired or died. Road Petitions, Commissioner’s records and some maps/plats can also be found at the State Archives.

Most research into these road records has been to identify road and/or right or way widths and locations. Primarily, this has been for purposes of determining easements (for utilities or pipelines) or property/mineral ownership. To find this information, it helps to know a little about the public road history.

Originally roads were merely trails that connected area ranches or settlements to supply points, communities, other transportation (stages or trains) or destinations (mining areas, water resources, etc.). Except for Native American and Immigrant trails, or stage and Pony Express routes, there were very few “roads” until the Railroad came thru in 1867. Often they were named for their destination, such as Cheyenne to Laramie road or Cheyenne to Baxter’s Ranch or the like.

Laramie County once encompassed almost all of present day Wyoming, although it was then part of Dakota Territory. Beginning around 1869 and 1870, after Wyoming separated from Dakota Territory, roads started getting numbered, but could still be named as well. As the population grew, due primarily to homesteading and ranching, “branches” would be formed off the “main” road to serve new settlements and areas of interest. These branches on maps would appear in the fashion of “BCH Road 8”, or “Road 8 branch”, or simply “BRCH CR8” (or “BR Rd 8”). The branches would often not be contiguous or even near the main road, but carried the name of the closest established road to them anyway.

Over the years there have been at least three major attempts to bring some conformity to the various road names and numbers, some more successful than others. Currently, it most East-West running County Roads are numbered in the 100’s, with the lowest numbers to the south and going higher as you head north. North-South Roads appear to be numbered in the 200’s, with lower numbers to the West and higher to the East.

Research:

The Public Works Department can cross reference current road numbers to previous road numbers (and names) used in the past. There is also a spreadsheet prepared by a staff member at the Planning Office (Cambia) that also provides a cross reference to road names and numbers. It is available on S:\County Road and Surveyor Images\County Road Records\Cambia’s Copy Historical Road Index. There is no guarantee as to the completeness or accuracy of this document, but it can still be very useful. If you need to research historical information on a road based on the current road number, use one or both of these resources to identify previous road designations used during the time period in question.

The most specific information concerning a road’s path can be found in the Field Survey Book(s) for that road. The book(s) needed can be identified through the County Road Index Cards, the County Road Log Book, or the Index to County Road Field Books. The most useful of these has been the Index cards, filed numerically by number.

If the road number is unknown but you have location information, you may be able locate the desired road in the County Road Books, or on the Laramie County maps of County Surveyors L.F. Brown (1933) and T.H. Baldwin (revised 1946 thru Jan. 1973). These maps can provide additional information as well, including references to Road Petitions and Field Survey books. All have been scanned and are located on the “S:\” drive cited earlier.

The County Road Index cards will provide information that will allow you to find recorded information on almost every aspect of the road, from the original petition to abandonment, including all known branches of the road (at the time) and some cross-references to other road names or numbers. The County Road Log Book contains similar information, but perhaps not as detailed or comprehensive. Last, the individual Field Survey books will usually have an index to their contents either on the front cover, or inside the front of each book.

When using the field survey books, be aware that references to them from other sources may be incorrect. There are additional Field Survey Books available, especially from T.H.Baldwin and E.P. Kelley that may be referenced, instead of the County Road Field Survey Books. The surveyors had their own private practice, in addition to doing work for the County, so sometimes entries would be made in the “other” set of books. At the time of writing, these “private” survey books have not yet been fully scanned, but are available in hard copy.

It is also possible that you may never find the exact information you need in any of these resources, usually because it was overlooked or omitted at the time. In that case, the original documents should be checked: Road Petitions, Viewer’s Reports, Commissioner’s Minutes (all referenced on the Index Cards).

Finally, and most importantly, we absolutely cannot make inferences or interpret the information found (or missing) in these records. We cannot guarantee the accuracy of the information contained in these records. We can only certify that what we have is complete and a true copy of the original (for images or film) that we produced in the normal course of business. We can testify to the maintenance, custody, and access to the original records; to the extent we have documentation to verify it. We cannot speak with any certainty to how it was created, the methods used in production of the information contained, or the intent of the creator; as we were not there at the time.

We can and should do whatever we can to help guide the researcher, to make available the records we have available, explain what we know about them, and let them know of other resources that may be available (such as the State Archives or other departments). But we cannot do their work for them, or draw conclusions for them based upon their work.