

T. A. (Taft Alfred) Larson (1910-2001)

T.A. Larson, popularly known as “Mr. Wyoming History” or the Dean of Wyoming History, served as the 9th President of the Western History Association from 1982 to 1983. The majority of his academic career, from 1936 to 1975, was spent at the University of Wyoming. He served as Department Chair from (1948 to 1968), director of the School of American Studies from 1959 to 1968 and held the William Robertson Coe Chair from 1968 to 1976.

Born in Wakefield, Nebraska in 1910, Larson completed a B.A. and M.A. in English History at the University of Colorado at Boulder. In 1936, he finished his Ph.D. from the University of Illinois in medieval English History. After visiting positions at the University of Wyoming and University of London, he was invited back to the University of Wyoming in a tenure-track position that required him to develop course in Wyoming History – a topic for which he had little training. With the exception of a brief service in the Navy from 1943 to 1946, this new academic trajectory would carry him through the remainder of his academic career.



Larson's seminal works include *Wyoming's War Years: 1941-1946* (1956), *The History of Wyoming* (1965), *Bill Nye's Western Humor* (1968), *Wyoming: a State History* (1977), and *Wyoming: a Bicentennial History* (1978). He also published widely on the women's suffrage movement in Wyoming and the West in journals such as *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, and *The Western Historical Quarterly*. He directed four Ph.D. dissertations and seventy-five M.A. theses and received a number of teaching and service awards, including an honorary J.D. Larson co-founded the Wyoming State Historical Society.

Retiring from the University of Wyoming in 1975, Larson was elected in 1976 to the Wyoming State Legislature, where he served four consecutive terms from 1976 to 1985. It was during this time that Larson also served as President of the Western History Association. Larson had suffered from respiratory and bronchial conditions as a child, and it was that very reason for which he had split with family tradition of attending the University of Nebraska in order to enjoy the more arid climate of Colorado. Respiratory issues followed him to Wyoming and worsened after he left the legislature in 1985. Spending increasing time in California throughout the 1990s, Larson passed away on January 26, 2001 in Santa Ana, California.

Sources:

Inventory of the T.A. Larson Papers, 1870s-1997, University of Wyoming, American Heritage Center, <http://rmoa.unm.edu/docviewer.php?docId=wyu-ah400029.xml>; William Howard Moore, Organization of American Historians Obituary, <http://www.oah.org/pubs/nl/2001aug/obituaries.html>

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