The Intermountain West is characterized by stories of immigrants from across the world who embodied American grit and determination. The Charles Redd Center for Western Studies’ Intermountain Histories sponsors a website and app that tell the tales of these spirited individuals and the peculiar incidents, dangerous journeys, and curious landscapes they encountered as they settled their new homes. Chronicling the early days of exploration by French trappers to the excitement and crime of the Roaring Twenties to the aftermath of World War II, students of collaborating university professors across the Intermountain West research these stories, which are then edited and published by BYU professor Brenden W. Rensink, the project manager and general editor, and his team of BYU student researchers and editorial assistants. Tour the region and be a part of the story from any location at intermountainhistories.org or on the mobile app. 

Basque Culture in Boise, Idaho

As the draft drew thousands of young men to the front lines of World War II, small learning institutions such as the Arizona State Teachers College (ASTC), now Northern Arizona University, saw their class sizes dwindle. The navy selected ASTC as a site for the Navy College Training Program, transforming it into a college and naval base that provided new sailors and marines with an education and basic training. As the temperance movement celebrated the ratification of the 18th amendment, prohibiting the sale and consumption of alcohol, crime rates soared. The underground trade of alcohol exploded, largely in part by immigrants from across the world who embodied American grit and determination. President Kennedy Visits University of Wyoming War Memorial Fieldhouse

The first public speech made by President John F. Kennedy in the Intermountain West was at the University of Wyoming as part of his conservation tour. In his speech, President Kennedy emphasized using resources wisely in order to maintain America’s status on the world stage as well as to preserve quality of life. The speech was given on September 25, 1963, almost two months before his assassination in Dallas, Texas. The Polly Bemis House in Idaho

At a young girl born in China, Polly Bemis ended up in the hands of bandits, who some sources say purchased her from her impoverished family. These bandits shipped her to the United States, selling her to a man named Hong King, a saloon owner in the mining town of Warrens, Idaho. When the 1892 Geary Act required all Chinese immigrants to have legal residency, Polly married her lover Charlie Bemis, a neighbor of the saloon. She continued living in his home after his death, a house that is popular among visitors today. This 1894 photograph is of Polly in her wedding dress.

Relocation of Japanese American Citizens in California

In 1942, under civil and military control, Japanese families created a community at Manzanar, a Japanese internment camp in California. Despite being removed from their Oregon, California, and Washington homes and being subject to forced labor, the community sent their children to school, operated soda and ice cream shops, and more. Among the barbed wire and guard towers, residents made lifelong friends. This is a portrait of a group of female students.

Massacre in Ludlow, Colorado

Following a seven-month strike against the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, gunfire broke out between strikers and state militia on April 20, 1914. Throughout the protest, strikers and their families had been living at the Ludlow tent colony, situated below a ridge where the state militia was stationed. Militiamen trained their machine guns and cannons at the tents, and at the sound of a warning explosion, strikers began shooting. The violence lasted for 11 hours, resulting in the deaths of two women and 12 children. This photograph, taken in 1898, is of a vegetable peddler in Idaho City.

Chinese Pioneers in the Boise Basin

In the latter half of the 19th century, Chinese immigrants flooded the mining towns of Idaho’s Boise Basin, accounting for nearly 50 percent of the population. The majority of these workers were men, though there were also women and children. Public schools were integrated, and immigrants from both Europe and China grew together as a community. By the early 20th century, Chinese exclusion laws drove many immigrants back across the Pacific, but their influence remained. This photograph, taken in 1898, is of a vegetable peddler in Idaho City.

Bootlegging in Fort Collins, Colorado

As the temperance movement celebrated the ratification of the 18th amendment, prohibiting the sale and consumption of alcohol, crime rates soared. The underground trade of alcohol exploded, largely in part by immigrants from across the world who embodied American grit and determination.