E-Newsletter

Preserving the Source
An e-newsletter from the Water Resources Archive
at Colorado State University

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The Power of Place, There and Here

The view of San Luis, Colorado, from its adjacent northwestern mesa on a warming September morning was stunning. From this overlook, my guide, local resident Junita Martinez, explained the area's land, water, and people to me, Patty Rettig, archivist for the Water Resources Archive. She then toured me through the surrounding villages to get a look at the irrigation ditches, there termed acequias. The region's acequia culture is distinctive in Colorado and has a fascinating history all its own.

Experiencing a place firsthand can powerful, whether for an archivist doing outreach or for students with an archival assignment. I witnessed both of these very different perspectives recently, in ways uniquely afforded to archives.

While in the San Luis Valley, I visited organizations in several towns to spread the word about the Archive. In addition to meeting the people there, absorbing the local environment's present and history was the highlight. Seeing the San Luis People's Ditch--the oldest water right in the state--and the land through which it flows, impressed upon me the strength and dedication of the community keeping it operational for over 160 years. Whether in the acequia-watered lands around San Luis, on a bridge over the Rio Grande...
in Alamosa, or behind a potato truck on the rural roads, the power of place proved pervasive in this singular and special region.

This power is experienced in no less an impressive way when a student visits and uses the Water Resources Archive for the first time. During October, I worked with Dr. Jared Orsi to introduce his Colorado History class to archival research. After a visit to their classroom to get them started, I hosted more than 20 history students at the archives, teaching them how to navigate boxes of documents and dive deeply to find and understand a self-selected item of interest.

Though many students started with some sense of confusion from the wealth of documents they faced, they eventually settled in and were awed by the experience of stepping back into history, reading past newsletters of grassroots groups, transcripts of flood survivor interviews, letters concerning international engineering projects, and more. The wonder on the students' faces as they found surprising information, and the excitement in their voices as they explained connections they made with their classroom learning, expressed the power of archives and the documents we preserve.

Archives uniquely stand at this rare intersection of a place's history and the researchers who use the documentation preserved. It makes an archivist want to travel more and stay put--both at the same time!

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Archive Update: Western Water Symposium and Barbeque "Insanely Interesting"

At the July 25 Western Water Symposium and Barbeque held at Morgan Library to support the Water Resources Archive, four speakers boldly discussed the politics of water.

Lafayette College history professor DC Jackson discussed the 1928 St. Francis Dam collapse, which killed more than 400 people. The disaster's political outcomes included improvements in California dam safety laws. Simultaneously, the catastrophe was being swept under the rug to cause as little impact as possible on Hoover Dam legislation, which Californians had a great stake in promoting.

The next speaker lived his own political reality in both the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate. Hank Brown discussed his experiences in the passage of the legislation designating the Cache la Poudre River both a wild and scenic river and a national heritage area. He discussed working with opposing groups on the wild and scenic legislation, stating that either side could have killed the bill, but it took both to pass it.

After a barbecue lunch, Denver Water CEO/Manager Jim Lochhead discussed the "Zero Sum Game"--the typical water reality where gains are directly offset by losses. Negotiated solutions are likely to provide more gains and fewer losses across the board, Lochhead explained. His suggested solution to current challenges involves visionary leadership and honest discussions. He praised forums such as the symposium, but says such discussions need to move to the policy arena.

The final speaker, Pat Mulroy, now associated with both the Brookings Institution and the University of Nevada Las Vegas Boyd School of Law, discussed the politics of the California Bay Delta. While southern California diverts significant portions of the Colorado River, water issues in the north, including a pumping shutdown to protect fish, impact the river system. She argued that dialogues are needed to find solutions and that coexistence equals shared risks.

The day concluded with emcee Brad Udall from CSU's Colorado Water Institute leading a panel discussion, followed by a reception at the Water Resources Archive. Afterwards, one of the more than 130 symposium attendees commented, "I really enjoyed it and found it to be insanely interesting."
Archive in Action: New Digitization Project

The new fiscal year brought a new round of digitization funding from the Colorado Water Conservation Board. To assist on the project, the Water Resources Archive hired history graduate student Katie Oldberg, who is now busy learning the workflow—and Colorado water history!

Already in the hands of our scanning team are more than 300 negatives from the Irrigation Research Papers and nearly 1,000 pages related to river compacts from the Delph Carpenter Papers. Katie will be preparing additional selections from the Royce Tipton Papers, the Arthur Littleworth Papers, and more.

The selections will add up to more than 18,000 pages, and we hope to have all the scans online in our searchable database before next June. We thank the CWCB for helping us share unique documents important to Colorado water history with the world!

Virtual Visit: Big Thompson Flood

July 31 marked the fortieth anniversary of the Big Thompson flood, Colorado's deadliest natural disaster. The Water Resources Archive, which holds the David McComb Big Thompson Flood Collection and related materials, participated in remembering the event through exhibit, presentation, and television.

The onsite exhibit, "Reacting to Disaster: Voices of the 1976 Big Thompson Flood," showed not only what people experienced during and after the flood, but also included quotations from politicians reacting to the economic and political issues of both the emergency and recovery phases. Their voices and others preserved in McComb's oral history interview recordings serve as reminders of the multilayered impacts of natural disasters.

Forty years to the day after the flood, archivist Patty Rettig drove up the Big Thompson Canyon to the Estes Park Museum to share a history presentation, featuring a number of archival flood photographs. Rocky Mountain PBS had the same impulse as the museum to remember the flood, so worked with the Archive to use flood images in a Colorado Experience episode.

Though still fresh for those who lived through it, the flood can be experienced and understood through archival images and interviews. We invite you to take a look!

Looking Forward: Water Tables 2017

Save the date for Water Tables 2017! The annual dinner to benefit the Water Resources Archive will take place on Thursday, January 26, 2017. It will be held at the Hyatt Regency Denver Tech Center in conjunction with the Colorado Water Congress annual convention. With a theme of "Refilling the Leadership Reservoir," the evening will feature tables hosted by Aspinall Award recipients, Water Leaders Program alumni, and other luminaries. Stay tuned for the list of table hosts. We hope to see you in January!
would prefer not to receive further updates, or if you know someone else who would like to receive this, just email us.

This e-newsletter is created by Patty Rettig, archivist for the Water Resources Archive.