COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

Archiving Our Stories Through the Art of Ranching Project

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PROJECT INTRODUCTION

The Art of Ranching (AOR) project uses an interdisciplinary approach to researching, recording, and documenting the histories of generational farmers and ranchers across the state of Colorado. The Archives and Special Collections of CSU Libraries preserve historical materials about agriculture and water, as well as university records that include the history of Colorado Extension.

Routt County 4-H Development Specialist Tami Eggers first envisioned a collaborative effort to save the stories of local Colorado farming and ranching families in 2021. Today, that vision brings together historians, CSU archivists, graduate students, and 4-H youth to preserve this vital agricultural heritage.

Through this innovative enterprise, today's youth gain knowledge about their family history and local community. The 4-H member learns basic archival research, interviewing, and presentation skills as they gather data to complete an exhibit for public display.

INTERNSHIP GOALS

- Create publishable reports on multiple Colorado counties to guide the public's interest in the historical importance of agricultural practices since the original homesteaders
- Assist 4-H youth in oral history interviews and transcript editing
- Build experience as a researcher for a public history program while working with a team to develop a public facing digital project to be archived for future use

HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO YOUR EDUCATION

- Oral history training built upon skills developed through earlier academic projects such as traditional and non-traditional archival research and digital projects
- Strengthened writing skills to communicate with various members of the community

WHAT YOU DID – PUBLIC HISTORY

The project provided the opportunity to build knowledge concerning agricultural practices and their importance to county, state, and national histories. I worked with ranching families who have a vested interest due to dedicated passion and ancestral bonds to ensure the longevity of these homesteads, preserving their existence in archives by:

- Archival research through local and digital archival sources
- Conducting oral histories
- Transcribing and preparing recordings for archives
- Field work to include visiting local libraries, meeting with community members and taking photographs
- Authoring brief narratives of Routt County and two other counties that summarized Extension Office annual reports, plan of work, and meeting minutes housed in the CSU archives.
- Authoring a publishable narrative on the history of agricultural practices of Routt County.

2026 FRYE RANCH PROJECT



Original Frye homestead cabin as of July 2026



Original cabin and cattle c. 1960s

I assisted 4-H youth in obtaining, documenting, and preserving interviews from the descendant of the original homesteader as well as the current property manager of Frye Ranch.



1908 *Map of Frye System of Ditches*

WHAT YOU LEARNED

Agricultural practices continue to be the heart and soul of Routt County. At the end of the nineteenth century, ranchers and farmers began creating a community filled with neighbors who helped neighbors during seasons of hardships. Homesteaders from the 1880s through the 1910s learned to work together and share knowledge on how best to make the land work for them. Farmers of lettuce, potatoes or strawberries as well as cattle ranchers and sheep herders built a lasting solidarity due to their love of the land and enduring family ties. Despite its modern reputation as a popular destination for outdoor recreation, Routt County still holds firm to its roots in agriculture.

These bonds showed me why it was important to build upon skills as a historian. These farmers and ranchers continue to follow wisdom handed down over generations that is integral to future successful endeavors. It is essential to document and preserve this expertise for Colorado's posterity.

Website: https://artofranching.colostate.edu

NEXT STEPS

In the next few years, the Art of Ranching project will expand into additional Colorado counties. The oral history workbook developed by AOR mentors is being promoted for 4-H projects throughout the state, building interest among 4-H youth in documenting their families' farming and ranching histories. A continued partnership among Extension youth leaders, CSU history faculty and students, university archives and local history institutions will increase access to agricultural awareness and appreciation for Colorado's agrarian past well into the future.