

THE LITTLE THOMPSON FARM: LEARNING ABOUT LARIMER'S HISTORY THROUGH PUBLIC, AGRICULTURAL SITES

PROJECT INTRODUCTION

The sugar beet is one of Northern Colorado's most important crops. Northern Colorado's beet sugar industry created jobs and opportunities that attracted greater populations. The growth invited by the beet sugar industry led to the economic and social flourishing of Larimer County cities including Fort Collins, Loveland, and Longmont. It is no exaggeration to say that the sugar industries shaped our cities into the communities that we know today.

An understanding of the sugar industry helps us to learn more about Larimer County's past and present. Thus, this internship will aim to use archival research and fieldwork to identify new, relevant facets of the history of Larimer's sugar beet industry. In turn, this internship sets the groundwork for future projects that utilize the Little Thompson Farm's scenic, historical, cultural, and environmental attributes to engage the public with Larimer County's past.

INTERNSHIP GOALS

Goals for the internship include:

- Examining, cataloging, and interpreting existing sources about Northern Colorado's sugar beet industry
- Contributing to existing literature about Larimer County's sugar beet industry
- Conducting interviews of people familiar with historic, agricultural sites
- Connecting relevant sources to the history of existing agricultural sites in Larimer
- Preparing for future projects to educate the public about the history of Larimer County

PICTURES



INTERNSHIP TASKS

Archival Research + Background Reading: Using physical and digitized resources from the CSU library, the summer project began with extensive archival research. I catalogued over 125 archival resources and compiled an annotated bibliography of useful sources to expedite further projects. Archival sources were primarily from the Great Western Sugar Collection, the Germans from Russia Collection, the Sidney Heitman Project, and the papers of Kenneth Rock. Archival sources included photographs, newspaper clippings, interviews, articles, and books. Beyond archival research, background research also included works by Hope Williams Sykes, April Merleaux, Bernadette Perez, and Timothy Kloberdanz.

Little Thompson Farm Oral History: As part of the project, I visited the Little Thompson Farm in Berthoud, CO. While touring the farm I learned about the farm's background and history. The Little Thompson farm has operated as a farm since 1904, and its legacy includes clear associations with Great Western Sugar and Germans from Russia. Knowing this, I conducted an oral history of Peggy Malchow-Sass, a former owner of the farm. My interview with Mrs. Malchow-Sass lasted over three hours and spanned a wide array of subjects including the property's facilities, forms of labor, agricultural practices, and Great Western sugar. After conducting the interview, I manually composed a transcript of the oral history. The oral history and its transcript were provided to the CSU archives to contribute to existing sources and help future researchers. Likewise, this oral history can connect to future public history projects about the Little Thompson Farm. In 2016, the farm was purchased by Larimer County in a historic water-sharing agreement that enabled the county to lease the water, land, and mineral rights while retaining a site of historical and cultural importance. Thus, the project fulfilled by this internship can be used to meet the aims of Larimer County by educating the public about the farm's history. In line, I am currently preparing materials about the Little Thompson farm to be posted on the extension website.

Writing: Research was employed in the creation of various writing projects. One such writing project was an article about the relationship between Northern Colorado's sugar industry and the Cold War tensions of the late 20th century. Another writing project was a concise, comprehensive history of Northern Colorado's sugar industry using the Little Thompson Farm as a focal point. This history aims to provide the public with a concise, and engaging understanding of the Little Thompson Farm's history and importance. My proposal to write an article about the Little Thompson Farm for the Colorado Encyclopedia was recently accepted, so this history will potentially be published soon.

Future: Future projects could include public history projects in Larimer County. A public history project about the Little Thompson Farm could educate the public about the farm while promoting the preservation of the farm for its environmental, historical, and economic values. Additionally, writing projects can address existing gaps in the current literature, such as the connection between the Cold War and Colorado's sugar industry.

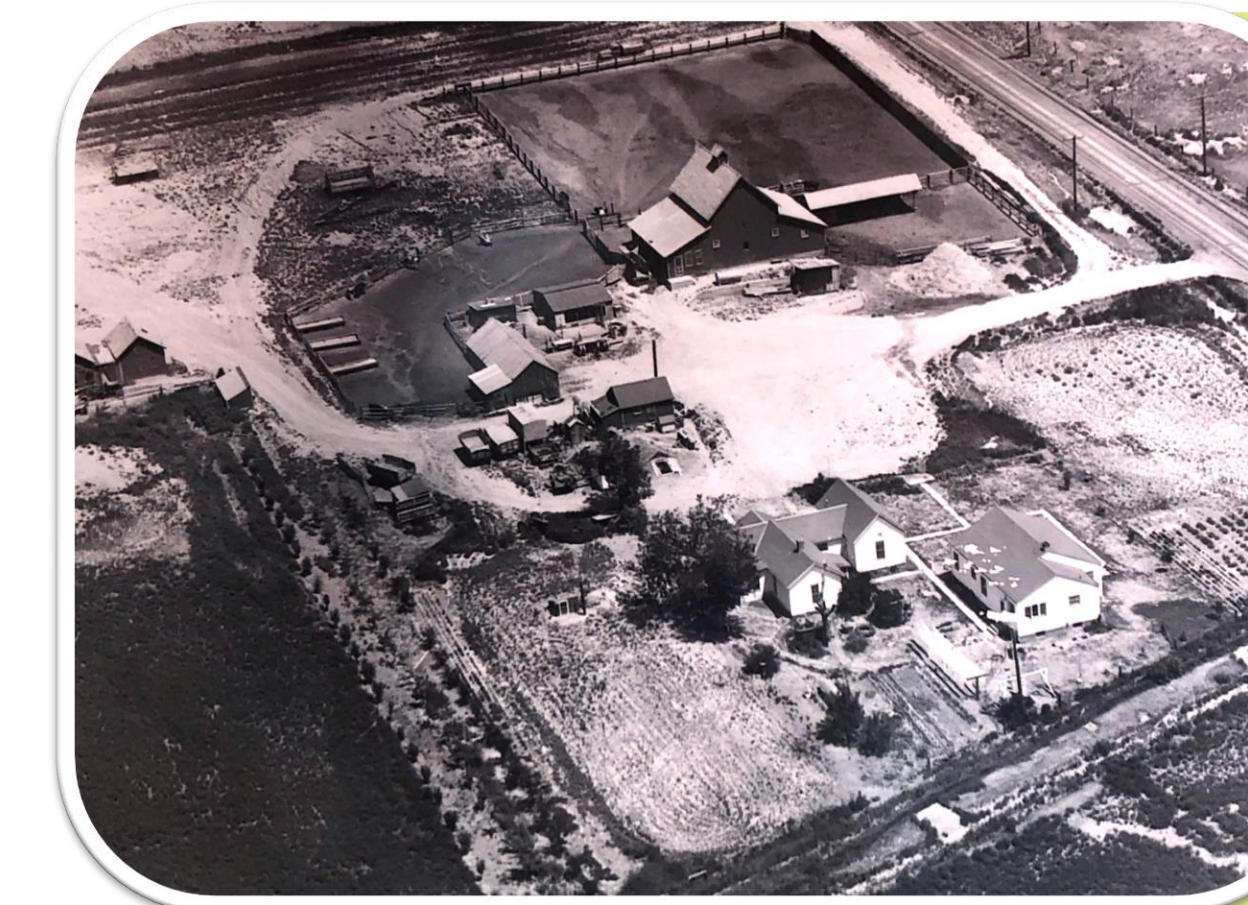
LITTLE THOMPSON FARM



The Little Thompson Farm was purchased by Frederick Mundt in 1904. Soon after, Fred Mundt built the farm's iconic gable-roofed barn. Mundt likely employed Russian German labor during the nearly thirty years that operated farm. Germans from Russia immigrated to Colorado, as they fled religious persecution and military conscription in Russia; they were the principal source of labor in American sugar beet fields during the early 20th century. These workers built the farm's 'beet shack'—a two-room building that provided housing for workers throughout the farm's history.



The Mundts sold the farm shortly after Fred's death in 1931. The farm transferred ownership several times until it was purchased by the Malchow family in 1952. As Russian-Germans experienced great social mobility during the 1920s and 1930s, Mexican Americans became the dominant source of labor in Northern Colorado's beet fields. Along with sugar beets, the Malchows grew corn, alfalfa, tomatoes, and many other crops. The Malchow family engaged in crucial irrigation and construction projects during their time on the farm. Three separate generations of the Malchow family lived on the Little Thompson Farm while they operated it.



The Malchows owned the Little Thompson Farm for three generations and over 60 years – longer than any other owner. Larimer County purchased the property and its water rights in 2016, so that it could lease the farm's land, water, and mineral rights while preserving the farm as a site of cultural importance. Many of the buildings from throughout the farm's history remain on the property including the house, barn, beet shack, and chicken coops. Today, these buildings are testaments to the impressive agricultural history of the Little Thompson Farm and Larimer County.

TIMELINE OF COLORADO'S SUGAR INDUSTRY

1901

Thousands of Germans from Russia begin to immigrate to the United States from Russia due to a lack of religious freedom and mandatory military conscription in Russia. These immigrants were the primary laborers in Colorado's sugar beet fields at the beginning of the 20th century.

1905

Six sugar factories merge into the Great Western Sugar Company. Throughout the 20th century, GW was the major sugar company in Colorado. GW's presence in Colorado was one reason that Colorado produced the most beet sugar of any state.

1914

World War 1 begins. Increased demand for sugar during the war enabled sugar factories and farms to expand. Sugar-industry executives successfully lobby for sugar tariffs to protect American beet and cane sugar against cheaper, imported sugar. Russian-Germans faced great discrimination during the war due to the activities of the KKK and the prevalence of anti-German sentiment during the war.

1929

Many Russian-Germans were able to purchase property and achieve greater social mobility during the Great Depression due to their thriftiness and distrust of banks. As many Russian Germans rose from tenant farmers to growers, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans became the primary laborers in Colorado's sugar beet fields. While Mexican and Mexican-American workers were essential to Colorado's economies, they often faced brutal treatment in the fields and factories of Colorado's sugar beet industries.

1950s-1990s

Cold War heightens intensifies the rivalry between domestic sugar and foreign sugar. As important sugar tariffs under The Sugar Act were set to expire in the 1970s, sugar executives utilized nationalism and propaganda to promote "capitalist" American sugar over "socialized" foreign sugar. Likewise, sugar executives used Cold War ideologize to defend against robust sugar industries in Russia and Cuba.

2002

Western Sugar cooperative purchases the Great Western Sugar company after the company lost the profitability that it enjoyed in early-mid 20th century. Today, many of Northern Colorado's beet growers are members of the Western Sugar Cooperative.