

ARCHIVING OUR STORIES

SAN MIGUEL AND LARIMER COUNTIES

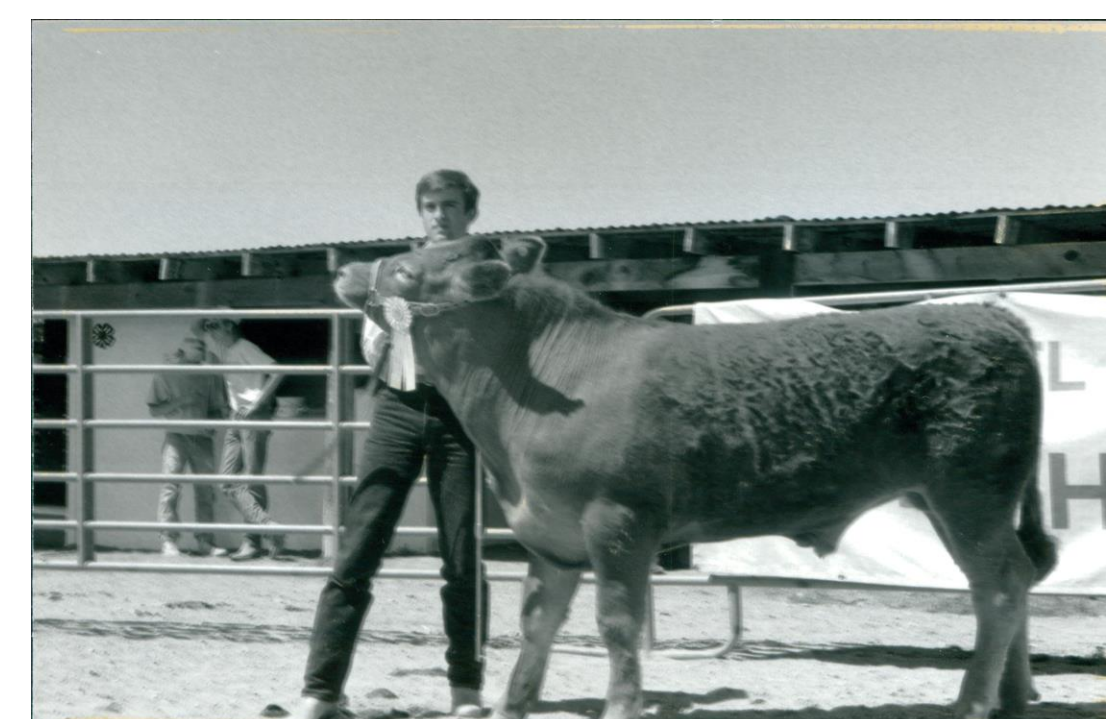
PROJECT INTRODUCTION

“Archiving Our Stories” was a 2024 CSU Extension internship that worked with CSU Libraries. San Miguel County has a long history of ranching. However, in the last 40 years, ranching has become increasingly harder as land prices increase, cost of living rises, and agriculture changes. The history of ranching in this region has been relatively undocumented. Oral histories can help preserve the firsthand accounts of these ranchers so their knowledge about the region and ranching can be taught to future generations.

This project included 4-H youth who are descendants of the interviewees. 4-H'ers asked interview questions and learned from the curriculum that I developed for this project. These kids will one day own and operate these ranches, so it was essential that this was a family-oriented project.

Additionally, I created an exhibit for this project that was displayed at the San Miguel Basin Fair. The exhibit included audio clips from the interviews, photographs of each of the interviewees, and other Extension artifacts that I discovered in my research.

Oral histories require thorough archival research. I used CSU's archive to do much of my preliminary research on the region before interviewing ranchers. I also learned how archives organize information as I collected and sorted through Extension records while in San Miguel.



Boy and his winning steer, courtesy of SMB 4-H.

INTERNSHIP GOALS

- Record the oral histories of prominent ranchers in San Miguel County.
- Prepare 4-H youth for interviews by creating an oral history curriculum.
- Mentor 4-H youth throughout interview process to build their confidence as they learn about their family's history.
- Engage in meaningful dialogue with ranchers to learn more about their livelihood and challenges ranching faces in the 21st century.
- Use historical records to build family trees and piece together stories to build a comprehensive history of San Miguel County.

APPLICATION

As an incoming senior studying natural sciences and education, I have learned to connect the scientific method to another discipline. I used inquiry-based methods to research, which I use in science education.

ORAL HISTORY PROCESS

Pre-Interview: During this stage, I did a lot of archival research into the county and the families that I would be working with. This helped me prepare appropriate questions and get a general understanding of the family's history prior to the interview.

Interview: I traveled to Norwood, CO in June to conduct my interviews. I spoke with five individuals from three of the most prominent ranches in the county. We discussed their lives, the ranch, and their thoughts about the future of agriculture

Archival and Publication: Finally, after weeks of research, interviews and editing, my work was ready to be published. The full interviews, audio clips, transcripts, and photographs will be freely available online in CSU Libraries' Mountain Scholar collections.



Several generations of the Alexander family pictured on horseback tending to their animals. Photo courtesy of the Alexander Ranch LLC.

Post-Interview: This stage consisted of creating and editing transcripts of the interviews. Additionally, I created an audio and visual exhibit for the fair. I also collected photographs and other artifacts for the archival collection.

Oral History Participants



Ray (Mex) and Phyllis Snyder

Not pictured: Sydney Schmid of Schmid Ranch



Kay and Kirk Alexander

Photos courtesy of families

EXHIBITING RANCHING IN SAN MIGUEL COUNTY

In 1882, the Schmid Ranch was homesteaded on the Wilson Mesa. Since then it has remained a family owned and operated ranch. Sydney Schmid, the great-grandson of the original homesteaders, takes pride in the work his family has done to preserve their land. Located near Telluride, the Schmid Ranch is surrounded by a sub-division which has made ranching on the Wilson Mesa more expensive.



Schmid Ranch sign near Telluride, CO

Ranches here started out raising sheep for wool and meat. The Alexanders, who originally were dairy farmers in Telluride, began sheep ranching in 1927. Their ranch once spanned nearly 45 miles. Today they are located on Wright's Mesa in Norwood. In the 1980s the value of wool declined, and ranches had to adapt. The Alexander Ranch now primarily raises cattle with some sheep.

One of the popular events in San Miguel County is the annual fair. The Snyder family have not only made a name for themselves in ranching, but also in their success in raising champions. Mex and Phyllis Snyder helped rebuild the 4-H program here and have been prominent in the community ever since.



Marcy Oliver and her horse. Photo courtesy of SMB 4-H.

NEXT STEPS

The products of my research and inquiry are available in the CSU Archives. The complete interviews, transcripts, and photographs are preserved for future generations of ranchers to learn from. Research is cyclical. While I completed my internship goals, there are many new doors this inquiry has opened that have yet to be researched and documented. I hope a future intern can take this project and expand on my initial research and uncover more Western Colorado ranching history.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the stakeholders that helped this project, Kirk, Kay, and Dilyn Alexander, Mex, Phyllis, Shay, and Hadly Snyder, Sydney Schmid, Braxton Brack, Log Cabin Museum, and Telluride History Museum.