

Title: A Mutual Irrigation Company at 150: Developing A History of the Sterling Irrigation Company

Faculty Mentor: Adam Thomas (Public Lands History Center, Department of History, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO; Adam.Thomas@colostate.edu)

Other Mentors: R. Brent Young (Regional Extension Specialist, Agriculture and Business Management, Northeast Region, Sterling, CO; Brent.Young@colostate.edu)

Location: Fort Collins, with limited travel to Logan County

Goals, Scope, and Objectives: The overall goal of this internship is to provide the student with opportunities to develop skills in cultural resource management, historical research and interpretation, public history methods, and public communication by developing a series of products related to the 150th anniversary of the Sterling Irrigation Company. To meet this goal, the scope of work includes (1) researching the history of the mutual irrigation company, including conducting oral histories; (2) writing a brief pamphlet or booklet about the history of the company for shareholders and the public; (3) drafting a National Register nomination for the ditch, including documenting linear features and arguing for the local, state, and national significance of the company's water storage and delivery systems; (4) developing a small exhibit, most likely in concert with the Overland Trail Museum, in Sterling; and (5) presenting research to company directors and shareholders at a celebratory gathering this summer. This internship fulfills an important objective of fostering relationships among CSU Extension, CSU Public Lands History Center, CSU History Department, farmers, and water resource stewards in the state. The intern will be working primarily with the irrigation company management, directors, and shareholders.

Background: Established by the farmers of Logan County in 1873—three years before Colorado even became a state—the Sterling Irrigation Company waters approximately 6,500 acres. SIC is a very early example of a mutual ditch in which farmers acquire shares of the company related to the proportion of water provided to the shareholder. These kinds of ditch companies became increasingly common in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries so that by 1920 they were the most common form of cooperative irrigation.

Outcomes: By the end of the internship, the intern will develop important skills necessary to: (1) research and interpret agricultural and water resources, particularly mutual irrigation companies; (2) document linear resources; (3) argue for the significance of cooperative water distribution systems and the agency of farmers when it comes to limited water resources; and (4) interpret the history of irrigation, farming, and cooperation via multiple media and to multiple publics.

Mentor Backgrounds: Dr. Adam Thomas is a practicing public historian who serves as the undergraduate internship coordinator for the CSU History Department and maintains research interests in Colorado's agricultural history. Dr. Brent Young is an agricultural economist for CSU Extension in Sterling and is himself a Logan County farmer whose family owns shares of the Sterling Irrigation Company.

Travel Funds: While much of this internship can be accomplished remotely from Fort Collins, especially since the water archives are housed at CSU, the Sterling Irrigation Company has allocated up to \$1,000 for travel expenses for research and programming trips to Logan County.