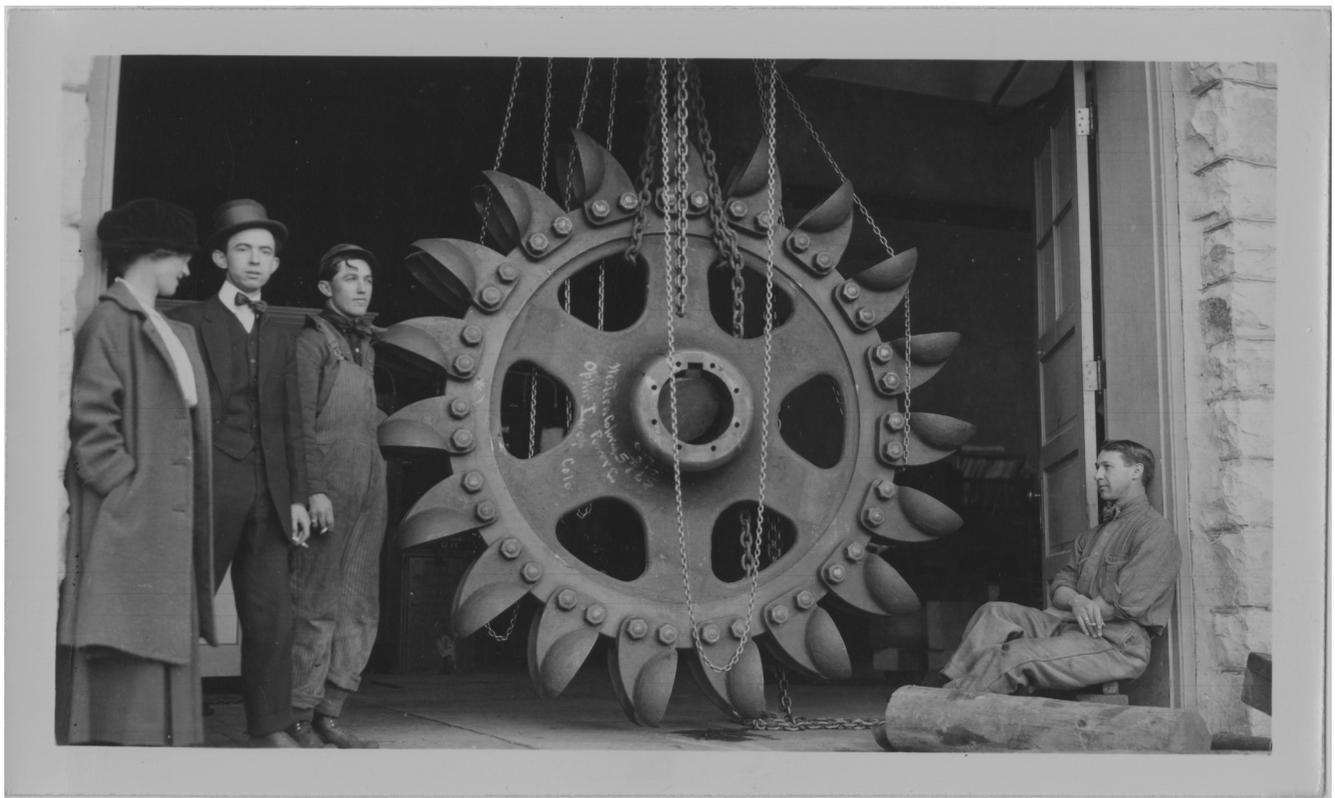


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The Rocky Mountain *Archivist*

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Repository Profile: Center of Southwest Studies

Fort Lewis College

Each issue we profile a different archives in our membership region. This issue, Nik Kendziorski tells us a little about himself and the Center of Southwest Studies at Fort Lewis College in Durango, CO.

Can you tell me a little about yourself and what got you into this field?

“It goes back to growing up. My dad was a history teacher. A lot of our family vacations were to historical sites. ... I grew up in a small town so I had my dad as my US History teacher as a senior in high school. So that was definitely the early formation of my interest. When I was going to college, at first I was trying to rebel and I thought, “maybe I’ll be an engineer – something where I can make money.” I ended up going to ... Kalamazoo College and as part of that – this was in the mid 80s – you had to do an internship. I strayed away from engineering. There were too many labs and all that math was getting in the way so history was much more on the brain. When it came time to do an internship, my history

professor said I should go to Grand Rapids to get hands-on experience at a smaller institution. I got an internship at a museum there and started working with many different collections and in all aspects of the museums. I actually worked for that museum after graduation.”

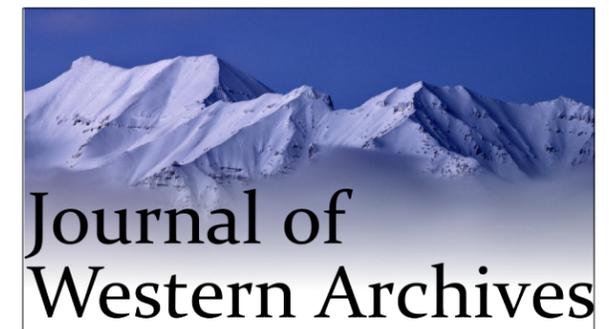
While in Grand Rapids, a friend offered Nik a place to live in Farmington, New Mexico, and he accepted. He volunteered at a museum in Farmington before moving to Hawaii to work as a teacher. He still considers it a privilege to have lived and worked on the western side of Oahu where he helped with a variety of school trips in conjunction with the Hawaiian language teacher. Eventually Nik went to the University of Wyoming to complete a master’s degree in American Studies. His journey continued to San Diego where he worked for California State Parks and the San Diego Historical Society before returning to the Durango area.

“I came to Durango and the archivist before me had gotten some grants for digitization. The person he had hired got a fellowship and left the position. I had happened to knock on his door and explained that I had done scanning at the University

of Wyoming. He said, ‘Yep! You’re hired.’ And then down in Farmington they had built a brand new museum but hadn’t filled out their exhibits yet. I still knew the director from 10 years before and she said, ‘sure, we need help!’ Between those two places I cobbled together a full-time job. Eventually in 2006 I was hired on [at Fort Lewis] as a college archivist. Then in 2008 there was a vacancy and our interim director moved me up to being the archives manager. So here I am, 15 years later.”

What kinds of things do you find yourself most occupied with?

“It can depend on the time of year. In the summer we tend to get a lot of researchers who think, “hey, there’s something at the Center of Southwest Studies I need and Durango looks like a cool place to go and have a vacation and do some research.” During the academic year we work a lot with students. Sometimes between the archive, library, and museum we can have 20 students, and we’re a staff of five. ... I work a lot with donors and doing outreach. We’re also the college archives so I and my colleague work with faculty and staff ... to let everyone know that they should send us records.



Journal of Western Archives

The *Journal of Western Archives* is a peer-reviewed, open access journal sponsored by Western regional archival organizations. The journal focuses on contemporary issues and developments in the archival and curatorial fields, particularly as they affect Western archives and manuscript repositories.

Contributing to the Journal

If you are interested in contributing to the journal or serving as a peer reviewer for journal content, please contact the managing editor at jwa.editor@gmail.com. Article submissions may also be made online at the journal website.

JWA

<http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/westernarchives/>

Student skills

“One of things I tell the students who might be interested [in working here] is the work you do, even though you might not become an archivist, the type of material you work with, entering data into the database, and working with the public can translate to a lot of different jobs. We’ve had students who aren’t history majors or anything like that come work with us because it’s interesting work to do and we’ve actually had a couple of

students who shifted their career goals because of working with us.”

What kinds of collections do you have?

“Our collecting area focuses on the Colorado Plateau. Where we’re situated there are diverse cultures: Navajo Nation, Jicarilla Apache, Ute Mountain Ute, and Hispanic History. We have broad collections: archaeology, railroading – Durango was founded by the Denver and Rio Grande railroad, mining, Native American collections, and political collections including Ben Nighthorse Campbell’s. Our collections are pretty varied.”

History of Fort Lewis college

Nik explained that many of the collections are closely tied to the history of Fort Lewis college and its namesake:

“In 1880 the US military founded Fort Lewis which was there until about 1891. When they were closing down the fort, it became a federal boarding school for Native Americans from 1892-1910. And when it closed, too, they offered the land to the state of Colorado on the condition that the land had to be used for an educational institution and that Native students could attend tuition-free. Any student from

Below: Naturalist and forester Ansel Hall



any federally recognized tribe can come to Fort Lewis tuition free. ... That has become a big focus for us in terms of working with the college and making sure the history is portrayed properly. In the past the Native American voice wasn’t a part of conversations about that part of college history.”

“The State of Colorado created legislation in 2022 to look into the issue of Native American boarding schools in Colorado and we ended up working with [History Colorado] on that to help with the research. And actually I got to go to

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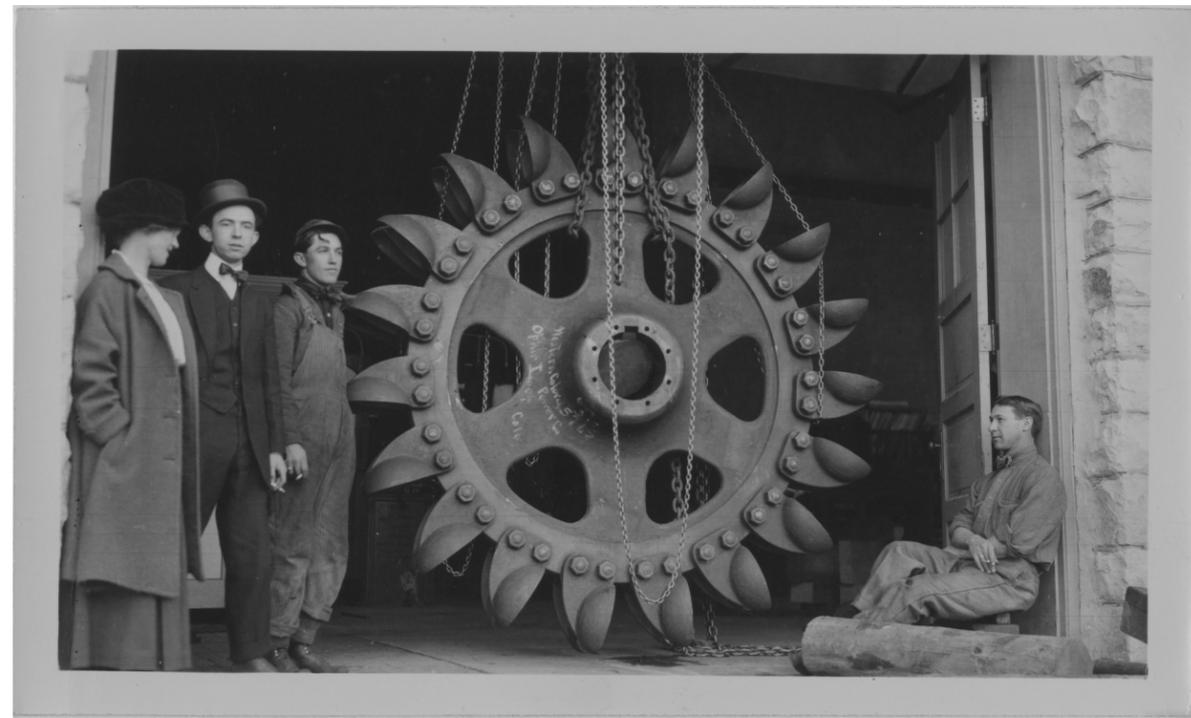
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Washington D.C. with a group to help look for records within the National Archives. We spent a week from open to close scanning as many documents as we could find that talk about this history.”

Do you have one or two collections that you like to showcase?

“The Fort Lewis history and the boarding school history has become pretty important, but there are others that are worth mentioning. We have a collection from a family whose ancestor, Ansel Hall, was an early National Park Service Ranger. He was one of the

earliest originators of things we’re used to seeing in National Parks today such as the 3D topographical maps in visitor centers. We have pictures of him using wood and possibly clay to create a model of Yosemite Valley. He also wanted to do an [informational] booklet for visitors. According to family legend, the Park Service wouldn’t pay for it and so he said, “I’ll pay for it!” But he put his name on it and that ticked off the Park Service. Some of the things he did, you don’t hear about them because of friction between him and others. ... In the collection are 1930s films. We got a National



A Pelton Wheel at the Ames Power Plant near Ophir, CO.

Film Preservation grant and CHRAP grant to get these films digitized.”

“We have what’s called the Western Colorado Power Company Collection. There are lot of old power stations out here. There was a gentleman down here, L. L. Nunn, who wanted to find a way to power his mining machinery better. He started conversing with Westinghouse and Tesla who were advocates of alternating current generators. But nothing had been proven on a large scale for industrial use such as a mine. Nunn built a power plant called the Ames Power Plant and proved that alternating current was the more viable technology. People ask, ‘why in the middle of southwest Colorado?’ Even today it’s not close to anything. One reason may have been that, if the experiment had failed, maybe not as many people would have known about it. But it worked great; once Nunn flipped the switch it generated power for 30 days without any problem. Technically I believe it’s the first

demonstration of alternating current for industrial use.”

Processing the papers of a museum curator

Will Gregg

The Anthropology section of the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History (CUMNH) is working on a grant-funded project to arrange, rehouse, and provide better access to the archival collection of former museum curator Joe Ben Wheat. Wheat served as a curator at CUMNH for 33 years between 1953 and 1986. During his tenure, he acquired over 1,300,000 individual items for the Anthropology section through his archaeological field work and collecting efforts. His archaeological work encompassed Ancestral Puebloan sites, plains PaleoIndian sites, and projects in Sudan, Egypt, and Tunisia. He developed a passion for researching the history of textile production in the Southwest,

Do you have projects or thoughts to share? Consider featuring them in the next issue of the Rocky Mountain Archivist!

Contact srmaonline@srmarchivists.org with submissions.

analyzing weaving techniques, dyes, fibers, and archival sources to learn more about patterns of cultural exchange in the region in the 18th and 19th centuries. In 1972-73, Wheat visited over 50 museums worldwide and examined over 2,000 Southwest textiles as part of his research. The resulting documentation – now part of his archive – still serves as an important resource for museums and researchers alike. Wheat deposited field books, photographs, and documents with the museum throughout his career, a body of material supplemented by his personal papers which were given to the

museum after his death. His archive totals 47 linear feet of minimally processed materials. Staff at CUMNH have long felt that this collection is underutilized because information in the archives could be vital for providing more context about museum collections, establishing institutional history, and creating research opportunities for a wide audience of researchers. Like many museum archives, though, the state of the collection – poor physical organization and lack of intellectual control – proved a barrier to access even for museum staff. In 2021, CUMNH

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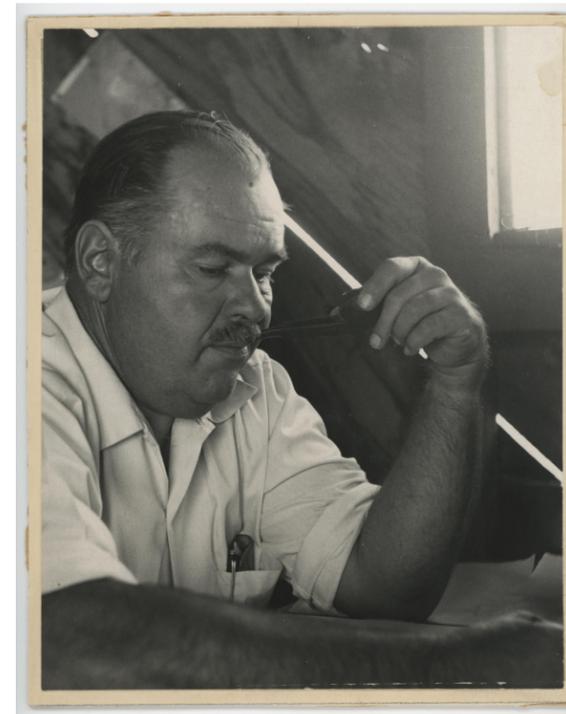
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Clockwise:

Joe Ben Wheat's office nameplate; files before and after rehousing; Wheat with his characteristic pipe.



secured a \$150,000 grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) to arrange, describe, rehouse, and digitize Wheat's archival collection. Eight months in, staff are happy to announce that portions of the collection are fully processed. Our finding aids are available online and digital images from the

collections will continue to be uploaded to our website in the coming months. These archival collections are already contributing to outreach efforts and collections management projects. We are happy to share our experience processing this archival collection with anyone who may be considering embarking on similar projects. Wheat's textile records are




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nearly processed and we encourage anyone to reach out to anthrocollections@colorado.edu who is interested in accessing Wheat's original research notes and manuscripts. Museum's with textile collections may want to view the database at joebenwheat.org or get in touch to see if records are available for your collections. We're always happy to talk!

Update on SRMA conference schedule

The SRMA board would like to inform the membership that the annual conference will be taking place Spring 2024. Stay tuned!



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