

You Had to be Tough

From Texas to New Mexico, the Shroyers and the Devers made a claim, then built and worked what became their world.

By Julie Carter

When you pull on the taproot of the Devers' family tree, ground starts moving in several states, but all roots lead back to two New Mexico locations—Rutheron in the northwest quadrant of the state, and Folsom in the northeast. Both hold the history of a hundred years of family ranching.

Lampasas County, Texas. "He and my grandmother arrived here in an old Model A truck," Sharon says. "My grandmother was very prim and proper and there was an old house that was on that property. She got down and looked at it and told my grandfather, 'Nope, you're going to have to clean that up before I even get out.' So she stayed a few days in the

enough food and crops to survive. My dad, Rex Shroyer, was the third of four children. They all have lived here in Rutheron at one time or another, but my dad was the only one to come and stay most of his life."

Rex, a teenager at the time they arrived in Rutheron, rode his horse to school a few miles away in Tierra Amarilla, which was often dif-

PHOTOS COURTESY/DEVERS FAMILY



FROM LEFT: Lewis A. Shroyer in Texas, circa late 1800s. ▶ The "prim and proper" Esther with baby Rex, the third of their four children. ▶ Rex and Edna's children, Rexa, Gary and Sharon.

Jerry and Sharon Devers have been ranching together in the Rutheron area for decades; however, for Sharon it's been her home her entire life. Their story is embedded in her century-old family history and in generations tied to a heritage of caring for the land.

"My granddad, Lewis Shroyer, came here in 1931 from Tahoka, Texas," Sharon recalls. "He had bought 20 acres sight unseen, making a 20-percent down payment. He had always been a cowman and cowboy and even owned his own rodeo company in the 1920s in Texas. Born in 1876, he left home when he was 14 or 15 to trail cattle when they were still making cattle drives out of Texas."

Lewis married Esther Harrod in 1906 in

"You watch those Texas boys—they work their women."

truck until they got that cleaned out."

Lewis worked for a big outfit that ran a lot of sheep and Esther cooked for several of the big area ranches. "Those were hard times all over the country," Sharon says. "There were no jobs to be had so people would come to Rutheron, clear some land and try to raise

difficult as he had to cross the Chama River with high water in the spring and ice in winter. He had always been around horses and cattle working with his dad and grew a deep love and respect for the livestock and the land. For income, he and his dad would chase and catch wild horses around Rutheron and then he'd break and sell them.

After school, and as the Depression worsened, Rex left for Hobbs, N.M., to find work. He spent a few years there and even worked as a soda jerk, but the lure of cowboy life soon drew him home. When he was 21, he met and married a young girl who had moved with her family from Albuquerque. Edna Wilson was only 15 when she became

Mrs. Rex Shroyer. Needing to support his family, Rex moved them to Las Vegas, Nev., where Rex worked in CCC camps. They lived in a small trailer and their family grew with the addition of two children, Gary and Rexa. When the work ran out they moved to Washington state where Rex worked at Hanford Site, which was established as part of the Manhattan Project. Sharon was born in 1943 and a year later they were back in Rutheron where Rex started buying and selling cattle to make a living.

Lewis and Rex both continued to acquire more land and grow the property boundaries one piece at a time and raise more cattle. Lewis passed away in 1940 and then Esther returned to Texas. Edna tended the children and livestock while Rex was frequently away trading cattle. Without a car, she would take the kids and walk to Rutheron to get supplies and walk the two miles home with all they could carry.

They later moved to the old postal building to be closer to town and lived there until Rex had made enough money to build a home on their own land. There Edna had explored her gift for art and began painting. Over the years she developed a large following and went to many art shows, even showing and selling her work in France.

In 1947 tragedy struck when their oldest child, nine-year-old Gary, left home to walk five miles to his grandparents' house. He failed to arrive. Extensive searches found nothing. He seemingly had vanished without a trace. Two years later, tragedy struck again when Rexa was electrocuted by a downed high-line wire across an irrigation ditch where the girls often waded and played. Two months later, Edna's father took his life, blaming himself for not telling them he'd seen the downed line. While the grief was overwhelming, Rex and Edna continued to take life one day at a time. Sharon was their everything: Mom's budding artist and Dad's cowboy.

Rex continued to expand, acquiring two ranches near Folsom, N.M., where he and Edna ranched for many years. Edna lived to be 90 and Rex made it to 101. He maintained his powerful love for ranching and land to the very end.

Jerry Devers is an Oklahoma/Texas cowboy who got to New Mexico by working his



PHOTO © JULIE CARTER

Jerry and Sharon Devers, with son Jay in 2024. The art was hand carved by Sharon for her dad, Rex. BELOW: The Devers with 100-year-old Rex. BOTTOM: Moving cattle on the Thies Ranch, Rio Arriba County, N.M.

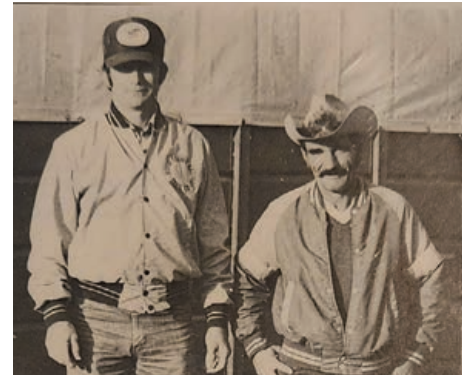


trade along the way. He ended up in the Chama Valley working for Rex Shroyer where he ultimately met Sharon. “The boss’s daughter,” he laughs. “And she was a good cowboy too. I’d usually spend summers here and then I’d go back to Texas and break horses through the winter. When I came back in ’65, I met Sharon. We were married in 1967.”

Sharon’s mother had one piece of advice for her before she married Jerry. “You want to watch those Texas boys,” she said. “They



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Oklahoma/Texas cowboy Jerry Devers got to New Mexico by working his cowboy trade. This is Jerry driving his chuckwagon used to feed the crews on the Rutherford ranch. ▶ Jerry Devers, left, and Jack Brown were the winningest trainers in 1983 on the Colorado horserace tracks with each claiming over 100 wins for the year. ▶ One of Jerry’s crafted bits. ▶ Sharon and Firefly clear a barrel at the 1964 New Mexico State Fair in Albuquerque.



work their women.” Jerry and Sharon still laugh over this today. “After we got married, we moved back to Texas for two or three years,” Jerry recalls. “Then I inherited a ranch in southeastern Colorado—Granada—and we moved there. That’s where we raised our kids, Pam and Jay.”



While in Granada, Jerry starting running racehorses and did so for the last 10 years there (1978-88). Very successful at it, he started with a few and ended up with a steady 50-horse barn every year. With many titles and awards, Jerry attributes his success to always making sure his horses were completely broke before he ever put them on the track. “I believe that was the main difference,” he says. He and Sharon also rodeoed for a few years. Jerry mostly rode bulls and Sharon barrel raced. He proudly displays the championship bull-riding buckle he won at Chama Days and says, “Hometown rodeo is always the best.”

He finally sold the place and then bought more land in New Mexico. “And then I wound up selling this and I bought a big ranch west of Roswell. I had 32,000 acres down there. After we sold that, we moved back here to Rutherford and have been here ever since.”

Their son Jay went to school to be an



aeronautical technician and worked for United Airlines in California until the “too many people” problem sent him packing to the ranch. He currently lives on and cares for the Devers’ cattle herds on their three ranches near Folsom. Collectively, the Devers know the future of the next generation of Devers Ranches is in Jay’s hands.

Jerry, 85, and Sharon, 81, have worked side by side in all their endeavors for 56 years of marriage, even down to chuckwagon duties when out with cattle. As a young woman, Sharon hired out to local ranches and worked on cowboy crews in an era when that was not the norm. It was an easy transition for her to spend the rest of her life cowboying with Jerry.

Her marketable artistic skills took her work far beyond “hobby” level. Mostly working with large slabs of wood cut from trees on their Folsom ranch, she carved the western life she lived and knew intimately into the

wood, creating scenes of cattle, horses and wildlife. These were made into various pieces including tables and wall hangings. Sharon also compiled a book of photographs and stories, “Rutherford, New Mexico,” that documents families from the 1920s to the 1940s in the community before she was born. She used her family’s oral history to find others and creatively painted a picture of Rutherford life when people were scratching out a living trying to survive.

Jerry’s craft skills include but are not limited to using available materials to create bits and spurs and other cowboy gear. He has a unique take on each piece: stirrups made from hoof rasps, spurs from the same with his signature Buffalo nickel spur strap button, and bits made from horseshoes or maybe even pieces of an old pitchfork.

From the big herds of several thousand yearlings to the cow/calf operation at the Folsom ranches, they have kept doing what they have always loved best. Jerry says that in his many decades of ranching his biggest challenge has always been the same. “Drought, no two ways about it. Ranching is always a wreck looking for a place to happen, but you just have to come through it and keep on walking.”

Sharon quietly offers this: “I guess the biggest challenge for me has been to just keep going and think positive through the different things that happened and just thank God and have faith. You do have to be tough.” ■

Julie Carter is a New Mexico writer and photographer who documents the West in all its authenticity.