

Loose Hay Empire

*Five generations in, Danny and Lucy Meyring are ranching
the old-fashioned way in North Park, Colorado.*

By Marjorie Haun



One of the best-kept secrets in Colorado, North Park Basin—40 miles wide, 70 long, cupped above 8,000 feet between the Park Range, Never Summer Mountains, Medicine Bows, and Rabbit Ears—looks from the air like a giant green bowl tipped toward Wyoming. Snowpack from peaks on the encircling ranges feeds the Michigan, Illinois and Canadian rivers, which braid across irrigated meadows before spilling north into the headwaters of the North Platte.

In sparsely populated Jackson County the calendar still turns on hay cutting, branding, and six-month winters. And here, on the old Henry Seymour, Allard, and Coyte ranches, Danny and Lucy Meyring run one of the last large-scale loose-hay, horse-powered cattle operations west of the Continental Divide.

A Study in Resilience

The Meyring Livestock Company's story begins in the early 1870s, when David Dulaney, a Virginia aristocrat turned St. Louis real estate baron, and inventor of war dirigibles, crossed the Continental Divide with his Swedish wife Sophia. They built a roadhouse on the Canadian River, kept the third post office in a hamlet called Canadian, and held patents on Clear Creek's highest grade silver mines.

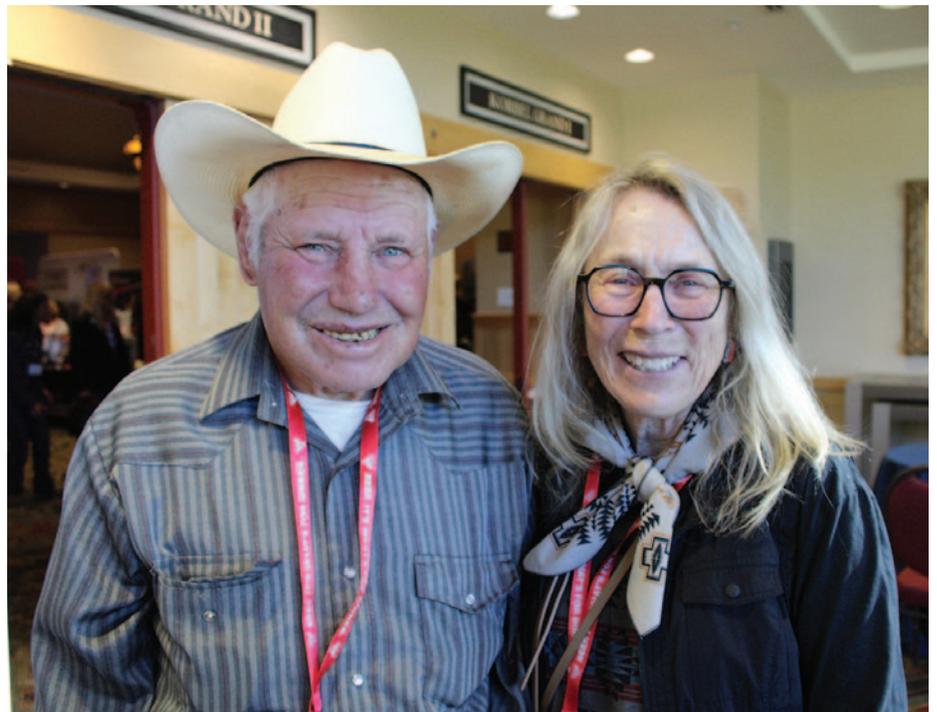
Their daughter Jennie married a young man from New Jersey, Ralph Moore Coyte, who rode for the Swift Cattle Company and the North Park Stockgrowers' Association. Ralph bought the Spicer-area ranch in the 1890s and their son Joe took the reins in 1910. Joe married schoolteacher Katherine "Kitten" Myers in 1911. She died of cancer at 29, leaving three children under nine. Joe married twice more. Frances Heath died in childbirth, but Ruby Jordan outlived Joe, ranching at his side until cancer took him in 1955 at age 67. Joe and all three wives lie side by side at the old cemetery in Walden, the seat of Jackson County.

In 1912, Joe's daughter Ruth was born in the original Spicer ranch house and grew up to teach school in North Park for over 34 years. In 1937 she married Oliver "Twist" Meyring, an 18-year-old from the San Luis Valley who had arrived with a stripped-down Model T and nothing more. Landing a haying contract for Henry Seymour, they irrigated, cut, stacked, and fed 700 tons at \$3 per ton. Their first year's pay of \$2,100 bought five heifer calves at \$47 each. By 1945 they traded 27 cows and calves as down payment on Seymour's ranch at \$11 an acre. After eight lean years, the note was paid off.



PHOTOS COURTESY MEYRING FAMILY

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TOP: Danny and his crew take a break on their Forest Service permit in spring 2025. Left to right: Danny Meyring, Abel Lozardi, Aushi James, Elin James and Buck Owen. ABOVE: Danny and Lucy Meyring attend the 2025 Colorado Cattlemen's Convention in Steamboat Springs. OPPOSITE: Meyring family friends, Mark Lloyd (tractor) and Todd Petry stack hay using a beaverslide in summer 2024.

Twist bought the Allard place and Seymour's remaining interest in 1960. Later he and sons Jerry, David and Danny added the original Coyte ranch and the adjoining Ara-

paho Ranch. In 1986 the holdings split. Jerry eventually moved to Nebraska; David ran the Spicer Ranches until 2009 when he was killed in a horse accident. Now his son Coy carries



Meyring's cattle drink from the Slack-Weisse Reservoir in 2025. RIGHT: With Arapaho Peak looming in the background, Danny and his Percherons head out for morning feeding in 2025.

on. Danny and Lucy kept the home place under Meyring Livestock Company. Twist died Jan. 4, 1994; Ruth followed 10 years later, almost to the day. Danny, now 82, is the fifth generation to raise cattle in the spread's emerald-green meadows.

Keeping It Old School

Danny and Lucy met in 1983 when Lucy hired on with the Meyrings to break and train horses and work cattle. Lucy says: "I became so involved with this family and this ranch. His parents became my second family, and they loved me, and I loved them, and I loved this ranch. I came to respect and admire Danny more than anyone other than my own father, and I realized that I needed to either commit or get out of here because I was too emotionally involved with everything." Three years after her arrival in North Park, Lucy and Danny were married.

Theirs is the very definition of a family working ranch. Generations have pitched in for calving, branding, haying and winter feeding. "We have a beautiful ranch here. It's not a fancy showplace but it's well maintained. It's well cared-for and loved."

The heart of the ranch today is roughly 10,000 deeded acres—hay meadows in the valley, sagebrush parks on the benches, aspen and spruce climbing to timberline. Sole-use U.S. Forest Service permits, along with a patchwork of Bureau of Land Management, and state school sections comprise more acreage. The ranch headquarters sits on the old Seymour home place south of Walden;



the bunkhouse, corrals, and beaverslide stacker face Spicer Peak, which is Arapahoe Peak on the map and Maggie's Tit to old-timers.

"Draft horses and the unbroke saddle horses would run up there on that peak and graze," Lucy says. "That's home to the horses

here on the ranch and also the summer range for every saddle horse and draft foal born here in the last 90 years." But there's a caveat. "The peak is the most worthless piece of land we own as far as running cattle, but it's probably the most valuable piece we own as far as if we wanted to sell the outfit. Who wouldn't want to own a mountain?"

Lucy and Danny run over 660 Angus and Angus-cross pairs. Half their hay crop, some 800 tons, goes into loose stacks built with a 20-foot beaverslide derrick powered by a hydro-fork and a crew that once numbered 15. Today, four hired men, a Peruvian hand who returns every spring, and a rotating cast of loyal friends keep the tradition alive. "We have one guy from Minnesota who has been

here every year for 32 years now," Lucy says. "He uses it as his vacation. He's always had an office job, high-tech, tied down. To him, coming out here and helping us hay is his vacation."

Winter feeding is the essence of commit-

ment. Two teams of four-up Percheron horses, grays, blacks and whites, are mostly descended from Twist's first registered stud, Barney. The teams pull wagons across stubble fields until snow buries the axles, then the wagons give way to sleds. "Danny remembers a time when there wasn't a tractor on the place," Lucy says. "Everything was done with horses. The ditches, the reservoirs, the first haystack. Just horses and men. Our lives revolve around the hay crop. We're either irrigating it, putting it up, or feeding it."

Land Prices, Gypsy Ranchers, and Wolves

With six-month winters, rugged landscapes and long-distance transportation, making ends meet has always been a knife-edge proposition in North Park. The cost of land and a lack of willing hands makes it even more dicey.

When Twist paid \$11 an acre in 1945, a working cowboy could still buy in. Today the same ground appraises at \$2,500 to \$4,000 per deeded acre. "When I came here 43 years ago, there were numerous family ranches in North Park," Lucy says. "Today I could count the family ranches on my two hands." Unfortunately, the ranches have fallen prey to uber-wealthy folks who have made their money elsewhere. "Many historic ranches are now held by absentee owners whose employees get the same paycheck regardless of how many calves they lose during calving or whether or not the hay crop is put up in a timely fashion. Family-owned operations don't have that luxury."

And then, there are the "gypsy ranchers." Lucy explains: "The family ranches are almost gone, but we have a lot of young people here who ranch but don't own an acre of land. They don't even own the house they live in. They might own 400 to 500 cows, but they lease everything else." The gypsy model of ranching is as transient as its name. "They send cattle to Nebraska to feed on corn stalks in the winter, so they essentially get the winters off. It doesn't take the commitment and sacrifice of daily feeding in North Park's sub-zero winter temperatures."

Months prior to the release of "experimental wolf populations," the Meyrings' neighbor Don Gittleston, whose ranch is north of Walden, was losing cows and calves to wolves that crossed the border from Wyoming. With deadly stealth, wolves have been encroaching into North Park through natural migrations and state-engineered introduction schemes.

"We have a wolf pack established here

on the south end of the Park, and there was a litter of pups born here this spring," Lucy says. "Several neighbors have lost cattle and there have been five ranch dogs killed by wolves right in their own yards." Wolves are highly adaptable and reproduce quickly. Their presence is a dark cloud over the future of ranches like the Meyrings. "The wolves they've brought in have already formed three packs that have all had pups. It

and driving the Percheron teams that define the ranch. Lucy wishes to have iron-clad requirements in the forthcoming Trust to enforce the character of their operation. "Even in generations to come, I want people to consider the Meyring and Coyte names as synonymous with good stewardship and quality cattle. The sacrifice of previous generations needs to be honored—that's why I feel so strongly about this name continuing."



Danny, his sister-in-law Nancy Meyring, older brother Jerry Meyring, and parents Oliver "Twist" and Ruth (Coyte) Meyring on the ranch in 1992.

won't take any time at all for this whole state to be overridden with wolves."

Taking the Reins

Though energetic and strong for their years, Lucy at 75 and Danny at 82 are looking to the future with sober eyes. With no biological heirs to take up the Meyring Livestock Company, they're considering their options—none of them easy—and they are on the hunt for successors who will honor their heritage and keep the old methods alive. Lucy says: "We're setting up a Living Trust, and here's the deal. If a trust owns it, then the IRS and the government look at it differently than if it is owned by individuals and that's how we avoid going through Probate. The terms of the Trust will dictate the future operation of the ranch."

Several young prospects have worked the ranch with the Meyrings and are learning the old-school methods, including haying with outdated equipment and harnessing

Danny and Lucy plan to continue living and working on the ranch, which is both their life's work and love. To view the Meyring ranch through a financial lens, though the place's value is in the tens of millions of dollars, misses the mark. This little slice of heaven in North Park transports one to a time and place where the value of the land is not in dollar signs, but in the beauty, the richness of the lifestyle, and the sweat, tears and sacrifices paid by those who came before.

"Until you sacrifice for something, you do not value it," Lucy says. "That's why many absentee owners are failing. They're not putting in what is required to create a lasting legacy for their brand." ■

Marjorie Haun is a freelance journalist who specializes in ranching, farming and natural resources policy. She lives with her husband, chickens, cat, pet tarantula and herd of horses in the borderlands of eastern Utah and western Colorado.