



Mark Esper/Silverton Standard & the Miner
Betsy and Richard Armstrong stand among the dozens of boxes containing papers from the late Ed LaChapelle.

Snow files: Ed LaChapelle's library gets put into order

By Mark Esper

Sorting through dozens of boxes representing much of the work of the late Ed LaChapelle, former Silverton resident and a professor of Atmospheric Science at the University of Washington, was a labor of love for Betsy and Richard Armstrong.

"He was quite a character," Betsy said. LaChapelle died on Feb. 1, 2007.

Aside from his duties as a professor, LaChapelle worked as a snow ranger for the U.S. Forest Service at the Alta (Utah) Avalanche Research Center.

"He also organized glacier research on Mount Olympus (Washington) which is where we met him," Betsy said.

Betsy and Richard lived in Silverton from 1971 to 1978 doing avalanche research.

"The project continued for another 10 years, collecting data and observations," Betsy said. "Ed was a consultant on that project" and he moved to Silverton as well.

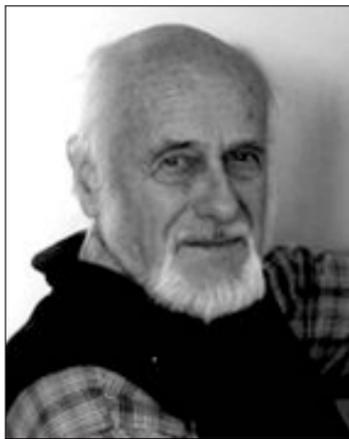
"Ed was a very well-known glaciologist," Richard said. "He was one of the few in the field in the 1950s. He probably didn't have an equal in terms of avalanche and snow and glacier studies."

From 1985-present, Richard Armstrong has served as the Senior Research Scientist with the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences (CIRES) through the University of Colorado at Boulder.

Betsy Armstrong is now a publishing consultant with a specialty in glaciological topics.

Richard said that LaChapelle was the first to develop a methodology for studying avalanche behavior and applying science to avalanche control.

How LaChapelle's library ended up at the San Juan County Historical Society



Ed LaChapelle in 2006.

"The collection spans the history of avalanche work in the United States. It represents a real history of the field of study."

Richard Armstrong

Archives is a story in itself.

According to Chris Landry, director of the Center for Snow and Avalanche Studies in Silverton, it went something like this:

Following the nearly coincident deaths of both his mother and father in late 2007 (Dolores and Ed LaChappelle), their son David gave his permission to move his father's extensive snow and ice research library to Silverton.

Ed's companion Meg Hunt took the first vital step of cataloging and boxing 65 cartons of materials.

Don Bachman then undertook to coordinate that complex move, from McCarthy, Alaska to Silverton, funded by a \$5,000 grant from the American Avalanche Association.

As it happened, Ron Matous, of Jackson Hole was willing to drive the materials from Alaska to Bozeman in a U-Haul, thus

avoiding the exposure of the materials to over-sea transport conditions.

Don then mailed the majority of the boxes on to Silverton and drove down the most delicate boxes himself.

As of Oct. 12, 2008 all of Ed's library had arrived and was successfully stored, with no damage whatsoever, in the archive facility in Silverton.

Another \$6,950.62 grant from the ISSW 2004 organizing committee has been received to cover the costs of proper archival storage and curating of the materials, to be performed by Betsy and Richard Armstrong.

The CSAS is facilitating this project, without compensation. Researchers and others will have open access to Ed's library under carefully monitored circumstances, and the materials will be housed in a climate controlled and secure room at the archive.

Betsy and Richard say they went through 72 boxes of material at the archive building.

"What we found was a very long record of historical publications, notes on books, and correspondences with colleges in Chile and other places," Betsy said.

"It's a really broad collection that shows his whole career in the snow and ice world."

Richard said it is fitting in a lot of ways for LaChappelle's library to end up in Silverton.

"It's a combination of a lot of things. People wanted it here. It's a good place for it to be. We were lucky there was a proper place," Richard said.

"The Center for Snow and Avalanche Studies and the historical society made it a welcoming place for this collection.

"The collection spans the history of avalanche work in the United States," Richard said. "It represents a real history of the field of study."

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