The story of Jim Yust's pioneer roots can be traced to Little Saxony, Prussia and includes a pioneer home in Canton, Missouri, mining camps in South Park and Breckenridge, and early preemption filings on homesteads in the lower Blue River Valley.

Selected as a 2021 Pioneer of the Year by the Board of Directors for the Middle Park Fair and Rodeo, Jim owned and operated MY Ranch (named after his grandmother Mary Yust) since the early 1970s, a ranch on which the Yust family continues to run cattle.

The pioneer story starts with Jim's great-grandfather Captain Charles Yust, who migrated to America and established a home in Missouri.

Edward Charles Yust, Jim's grandfather, was born in Prussia in 1852, he immigrated with his mother to Canton when he was less than a year old.

As a nine-year boy he carried ammunition in the Battle of Shiloh for his father. After the war, he learned the blacksmith trade and moved to Denver. Following the search for gold and silver, he prospected in South Park, helped build the Dudley Smelting Works near Alma and engaged in the saloon business in Breckenridge.

He and his wife Mary had two of their 10 children while living in Breckenridge, and they realized that the mining town of Breckenridge was not conducive to raising a family. In November 1884, Jim's grandfather put money down on a homestead preemption near Kremmling, and he eventually became owner of the final patent.

Their youngest child, Frank Edward Yust, was born September 4, 1902 at the Yust Homestead near Kremmling. That homestead has been protected by the Yust Family and is listed with the National Register of Historic Places.

Under Ed's management, the ranch grew to over 4,000 acres in size by combining the original E.C. Yust homestead with numerous family homesteads and parcels the family had accumulated over the years. The ranch features 600 acres of irrigated pasture and the grazing rights to 2,000 acres of public domain.

Ed and his first wife, Madelon Pike (Yust), who died in 1940, had one daughter, Jeanne Yust (Off). Ed married Beulah Lohr, and Jim was their only child.

Jim went through grade school and two years of high school in Kremmling and then followed in his father's footsteps by attending the New Mexico Military Institute in Roswell, New Mexico for two years of high school and two years of junior college.

He received a bachelor's degree in English literature from the University of Colorado in Boulder in 1965 and was doing graduate work in Boulder until he entered the U.S. Army as a Lieutenant, in the Ordnance Corps. He served one year in the Army in Vietnam before returning to the solitude of ranch life and working for his father on MY Ranch. Jim purchased the ranch from his father in 1970.

Jim Started playing piano before entering grade school. He had done a great deal of singing in and accompanying choirs, playing in bands, and playing the organ and piano for numerous churches and community events.

A history buff, particularly of railroads, Jim was a member of the Pioneer Society Board of Directors. He would become very active, and remains active, with the Grand County Historical Association (GCHA), most recently serving with Larry Gross as the Vice President of Museums.

A charter member of the Rollins Pass Restoration Association, he continues to work on opening up Rollins Pass to automobile traffic. When it was still open to the public, Jim drove through Needle's Eye Tunnel and over Rollins Pass numerous times.

Jim was married to Nancy (Black) Yust and they had two children, Amanda and Jay. Amanda and her husband Davy live with their son Wyatt in Wyoming, while Jay and his wife Tia live and work on the MY Ranch and are expecting a child this summer.

Photography is a passion of Jim's as is kayaking. He frequently paddles the Grand River (he prefers the original name of what current maps denote as the Colorado River) from the Grand's confluence with the Blue River to the mouth of Gore Canyon and then back.

Many of the photographs featured in the Grand Gazette over the past several years are from that trek.

Jim has a close connection to a pioneering past that fades further and further into distant history. Fortunately, many of the memories from that history are preserved in GCHA publications like "Blue River Valley" and "Where the Rivers Meet" and the pictorial publications of John Fielder.

Jim has also authored a book entitled, "Gore Canyon, the Colorado River, and the Moffat Railroad, Then and Now" (2013).

A man of various interests and talents, Jim's life story and path has always brought him back to the family homestead. One aspect of the story remains timeless. The Yust family was looking for a good place to raise a family.

Congratulations Jim Yust on your selection as 2021 Pioneer of the Year for the Middle Park Fair and Rodeo.

- written by Larry Banman