

Doc Utterback

"I came to Steamboat, a babe in arms, on a four-horse stage."

By Mari Jo Hoaglund

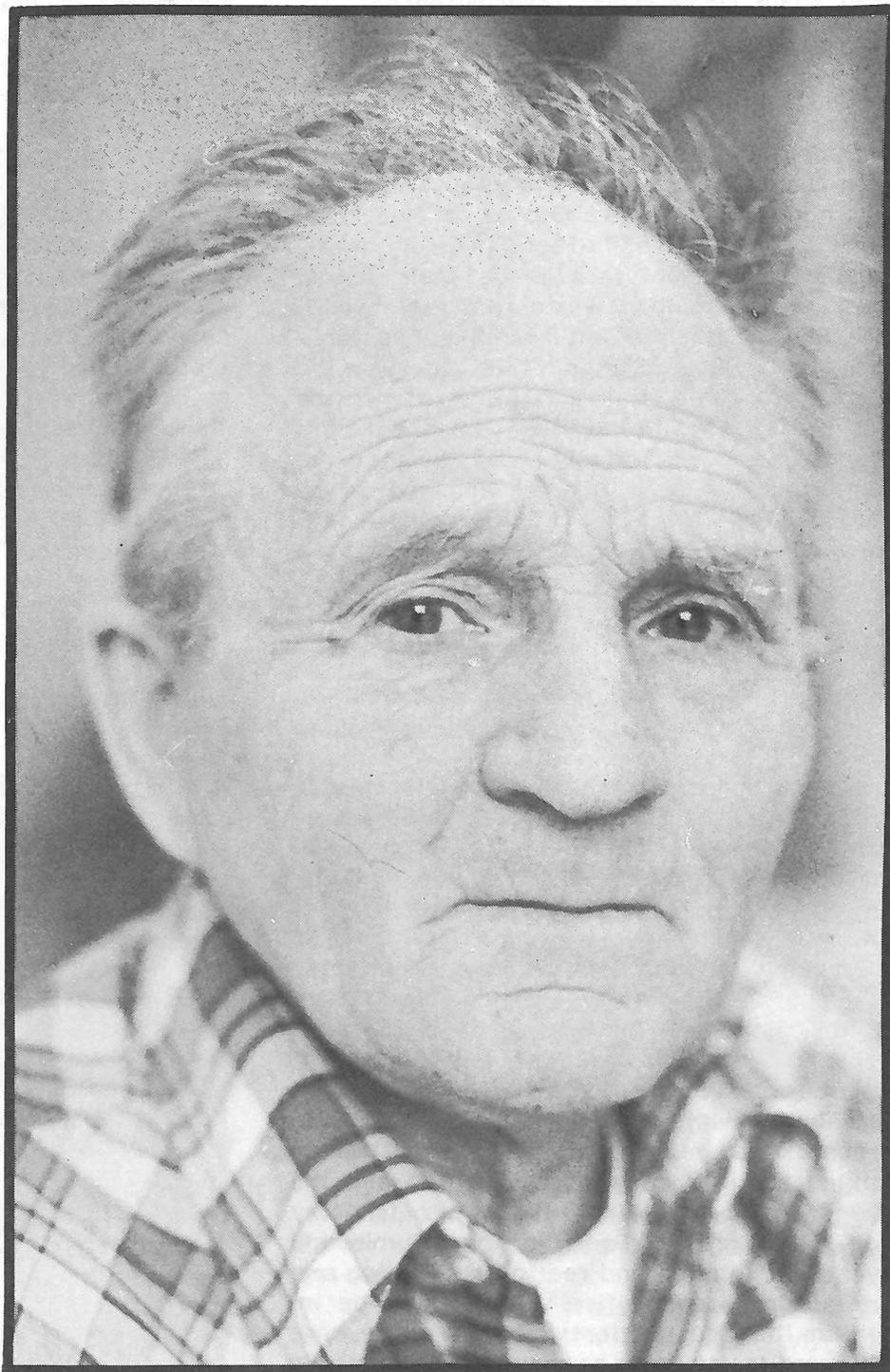


Photo by Ross Dolan

The West symbolized adventure to Americans. It seemed centuries would be needed to explore and settle this vast area. So restless were the Americans, so powerful the Westward surge, that in less than a century the land was settled, and the frontier officially declared closed. Through this rush, a hidden crevice, the Yampa Valley, in the Rocky Mountains was overlooked until 1876. This secluded area waited to be settled

by daring men and women, ones looking for opportunity and a new start. They followed the sun westward through blazing heat and frigid cold with parched lips and frozen cheeks to open a new continent and tame a wild frontier which was rich in natural resources such as timber, land and minerals.

The story of Doc Utterback's life is rooted here. His mother and father were among the first

settlers who came to Routt County. Their story, related to me (Mari Jo Hoaglund) by Doc, is like a western novel. This is part one of a two part story about Doc's father (now deceased), his mother, the oldest woman in Routt County, and Doc's life up until 1940.

Doc started by telling me some history about his parents. "My mother's parents were John and Gertrude Hazel. They were English pioneers from Oxenhill, Maryland. That's just down the Potomac River from the Capitol. In fact, back then, you could see the building from there. Farming was how they made their living. Gertrude, my mother, was born September 18, 1880. She was one in a family of five kids, three girls and two boys. She didn't like the rural life and always wanted to live in the city. When she was ready to go out on her own she hadn't changed her mind. The city always held a great deal of fascination for her. So when she was 22 she moved to Washington D.C., and worked as a telephone operator at Anacosta Heights, a government hospital."

Doc continued by telling me about his father. "My dad, John A. Utterback, was all German. He was born in 1875, and was raised in the Shenandoah Valley at Leesburg, Virginia. He went to the city because the young ones in those days thought the city was the life. He came to find out he hated it. My father worked for the fire department in Washington D.C., and one day he just happened to meet Gertrude. They got married in 1905. They lived in Herndon, Virginia, for about a year and a half. I was born at Anacosta Heights Hospital, June 22, 1908.

"While working in the city my dad contacted tuberculosis. The doctor diagnosed either to stay in the city, get continually worse and end up dying, or go out West. He said the high, dry, altitude would cure him. So the family stayed in Washington while my dad went out West to look around. Dad got to Denver and heard people talking about Northwestern Colorado and the town, Steamboat Springs. It was new territory and full of growth. See, there was lumbering over here, mining, and real good ranching and agriculture opportunities. It was just the incentive that people interested in rural life were attracted to. He came here and bought a couple of lots in Fairview. He built a nice little cabin over there and wrote and told us to come on out.

"I was ten months old when we started out from Washington, D.C. We came by train until we got to Wolcott, Colorado. From then on the only way to get to Steamboat was by stage. So we boarded a four-horse stage and started the last leg of our cross-the-country trip.

"The long, narrow, winding road was a memorable trip for Mom and me. My mom told me that she was the only woman on the stage. She was scared to death. She had never seen

such things. Guys had guns on, long mustaches, and big cowboy hats. The horses running in front made a big racket, and the stage was swaying side to side. All the trunks and crates piled on top were banging around. She thought the whole contraption was going to fall over!

"It was a two-day trip to Steamboat. We stayed overnight at Yarmony (now known as McCoy), so she tells me. I was just a snoot wrapped up in swaddling clothes. We got to Steamboat around the middle of May, I believe. Like I always say, I came to Steamboat a babe in arms on a four-horse stage."

Doc told me about early Steamboat. "This town had a couple of livery stables, blacksmith shops, a grocery store, a stage stop and a post office. That first year Dad worked around town. You know, he wasn't too well when we first got here. It took him about two years to get his strength back. He was 5 feet, 11 inches and weighed about 190 pounds. The high, dry altitude cured him. He was absolutely well in eight years.

"Fairview has many mineral springs. We all drank the mineral water ever there. I still go down there and take a drink of it once in a while. I like to get a jug of sulphur water. Some say it smells like rotten eggs, but I've never seen anything so bad about it. The only thing is, people go down there and fiddle around with the spring and I don't know what they do to them, but I still take a chance on drinking it."

One can imagine what hardships people were up against living in early Steamboat. "That first year my mother thought the world had come to an end because on the 22nd of October it snowed 24 inches, and it kept snowing until May. She was a true city gal from the East. I guess she did a lot

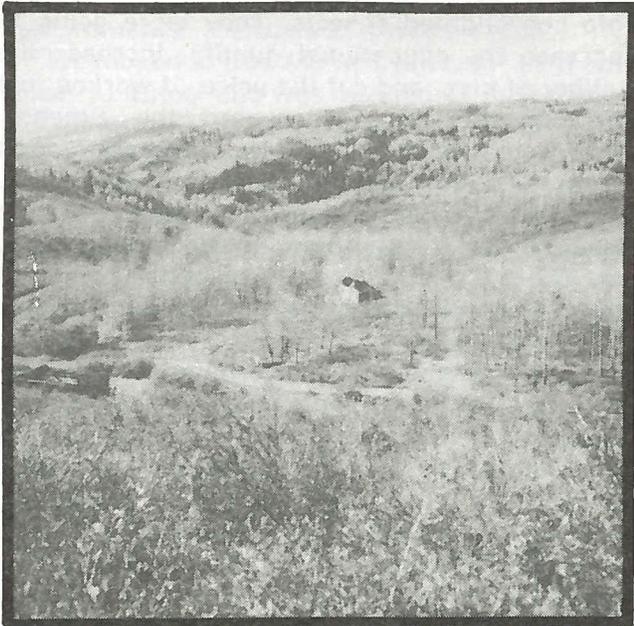


**Mrs. Gertrude Utterback
showing off her flowers**

of crying because she was out here in the wilderness all alone and snowed in. My dad was real happy here, but Mom never was. She always wanted to go back. With all due respect to her, she should have stayed in Washington, D.C., she never was a country gal. She should have married some ding-a-ling that had a city job, got a three-room apartment and put \$25.00 away in a savings account each month.

"But instead, she came out here, got settled, and made the best of it. My dad didn't give a damn about the city; he was like me. All the city is (and always has been, and is getting worse) is a concentration of people and power."

Doc's information on his parents show then to be rugged, strong people. "Mom never got to go back to Oxenhill. She wanted to, but she never did. She always regretted it, and so have I. Finance, opportunity, time and transportation didn't permit traveling back then. That is, unless you were a banker's family or had some extraordinary circumstances that the average family didn't have in the early days up here. But they started out and didn't have any money with them. Besides that it was hard times, and they just kept eeking out a living. These people here now, they don't even know what the hell work is. Today people complain about working long hours. If they had to do some of the things we did (the people who built this country), why they'd faint."



The Utterbacks' original homestead

As Doc told about his family getting started ranching, an era of western life came alive. "The following spring my dad bought a homestead relinquishment. That's squatters' rights. In other words we went out and homesteaded, bought the rights, and proved up on the

homestead. That was up on the head of Tow Creek and Wolf Creek, 20 miles northwest of here straight as a crow flies. We stayed there until Dad got well, and then we all went to work. There were three kids in our family, two boys and one girl. I was 2 years old when we left town and went to the homestead. We moved up there in our buckboard. Our driving team was a good one. We had a sorrel horse and a mule, and by God, they could travel, well-built, with lots of action. That team could put some miles behind them. Everybody had a buggy of some sort. They were light and all oiled and painted up a little."

The early homesteaders came from all over. "Most of the homesteaders were from the East: Illinois, Missouri, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Virginia. There were some from the Midwest and Southeast. 'Course, a lot of them gave up and went back because of the weather and the land. We always worked hard and bought out their homesteads. That's how we got our land built up. Clearing the land was back-breaking. In the wintertime we would go out and take a sharp axe and cut the trees and brush off at the top of the snow. They'd die in a couple years then. In the spring we'd go in with three or four horses on a walking plow. Most people have never seen a walking plow. It was a lot of work to use one, but that's how this country was cleared. All these clear patches in the woods were made by them. Later on, they invented the riding plow. We didn't have the big machinery or tractors, though. 'Everybody worked darned hard. The men weren't the only ones that worked hard. My mother used to work like the dickens. She used to milk cows, raise chickens, why, she'd even go out and help in the fields stacking grain and hay. And garden, my God, her garden was at least a 1/2 acre. 'Taters, cabbage, rutabagas, beets, peas, etc., whatever we wanted to eat during the year we had to raise or do without. There was no running down to the store and buying it out of a tin can or a wax carton."

Doc's unique personality is reflected in his attitude. "Women today have the choice of staying at home or getting a job. Back then they didn't. They had to work their skin off, trying to raise a bunch of kids, putting enough food away, and keepin' everyone happy. The women nowadays don't know what work's about. Why, all some of them can do is go to the coffee shop. They swallow a couple of cups of coffee and wonder why they're nervous and can't do anything. You never had that problem with the women in those days. They had work to do. Their energy was used up in trying to make a living and making ends meet."

As Doc told about his younger days a grin came on his face and pride shone through. "I had a good childhood and got a good education. My parents set a good example for me to follow.

They taught me right from wrong. They taught me the necessity of character, honesty and integrity. We got up at five every morning. After I was ten I had done everything from getting the horses and cows out to pasture, milking cows, to harnessing and feeding the horses and slopping pigs. We used to take milk down to the mining camps like Mt. Harris and McGregor and sell it to the company stores there. In the summertime we came down in the buckboard and in the wintertime in a sled. There for a number of years up on the Tow Creek homestead we were snowbound from the first of November 'til the latter part of April, or until the snow went down, and we could get out. I've seen six or seven feet of snow on the level up in that country, and that wasn't counting the drifts! There were 20 to 30 foot drifts where the wind blew hard and long. It used to snow in those days! It was cold during the winter, 40° or 50° below sometimes. We dressed for it, put on heavy clothes and got used to it. We were out in it all the time, see. We weren't mollycoddled and pampered. Our skin went through the wind, the cold, and sun. It got hard, tough and had a ruddy color.

"When we lived on Chimney Creek we used to go to school in the summer. We had four months of school. That was as long as we could get the teacher to stay. We used to ride a little Indian pony to school, my brother and I. We had a big shepherd dog that would go along with us, too. The teacher taught first to eighth grade. In primary school they taught us how to spell, write, read and do arithmetic, not like nowadays, when some come out of college and still can't read. We learned basic math that was to serve as a basis for the more complicated math in high school and college. We didn't do it by looking at a bunch of pictures on a wall screen. We learned it, not memorized it to forget the next year.

"At Christmas time we would put on plays, and activities that everyone liked to do. Some would recite poems. It was fun, and all the parents came and visited and had a good time. The years that we did go to school in the winters were fun, too. At recess we would go out behind Camillettis' and toboggan. We really got going fast. One time two girls and I and the school teacher's sister who was visiting, rode down together on my toboggan. We ran head on into a snow drift in a gully. It crumpled up the toboggan and broke the teacher's sister's leg."

Discipline was a different story when Doc attended school. "By God, the kids toed the line. The teacher was boss. If she whaled one of them they usually got a whaling when they got home. During my schooling I got out of line three or four times and got a whaling from the teacher and one when I got home, too. The parent wasn't down there raising hell with the teacher 'cause

they spanked the kid because the kid probably needed it. They knew the kid got out of line once in a while. So they invited the teacher over for Sunday dinner and found out what the trouble was. We didn't throw spitballs or stick our tongues out or write things on walls. The teachers had the support of the parents and most of the students.

"I graduated from eighth grade at Milner. Then I went to high school in the present-day junior high in Steamboat. The classes were a lot harder. Latin was necessary. I remember a lot of it even today. I took algebra, geometry, and trigonometry. We were graded individually, and we got the grade we deserved. If we told a lie that was it! Now if we did something wrong, accidentally or unintentionally, and we told about it, that was a different story. They said 'Okay, don't do it again.' If we had tried to pull some of the stuff now back then we would have paid for it. Sports were few but fun in early Steamboat. I played football in high school. We had a pretty good football team in those days, considering the time. We won the Northwestern Colorado championship three years in a row."

Education has changed, and Doc has decided views on it. "Today they decide to move the kids into one concentrated school. You know, they said we didn't learn anything in those little country schools where the teacher was boss and got along beautifully. They had to move the kids into consolidated schools. They were going to increase the educational quality, increase the caliber of kids, and cut the price. It worked just the opposite. They increased the expense, they're teaching the kids less, and they don't know how to manage discipline nowadays. Consequently, we're headed for chaos. I went to school to learn something, not because I had to go. There's a difference! The better brains of yesterday and today came out of those little one-room schoolhouses."

Steamboat's winter sports have always been exciting. "In the winter we played outside, used to sleigh ride and cross-country ski a lot. Every farm had a little ski hill out in back. We would go out and ski, jump, fall over, and raise hell. We took a pine 1 x 4 and soaked it in water for a few days and whittled it down to make our skis. We used to ski all over this country. I got to be pretty good. I didn't run any downhill or slalom races, but I had just as much fun. A lot of us old skiers can do better than people give us credit for. We sledged quite a bit too. If we got up on a steep hill we could sled for a mile or two. In the evenings after the chores were done, we'd go back out and sled again for a couple hours.

"The neighbors were friendlier then. Everybody knew everybody and got along real well. If a man was sick someone would break the snow, feed the stock, and take care of all the

other chores. Why, we would help each other build barns. We used to build barns in the winter because that was the only free time. A couple of neighboring farmers would come over and lend a hand. It was hard work. The snow was up to our waists sometimes."

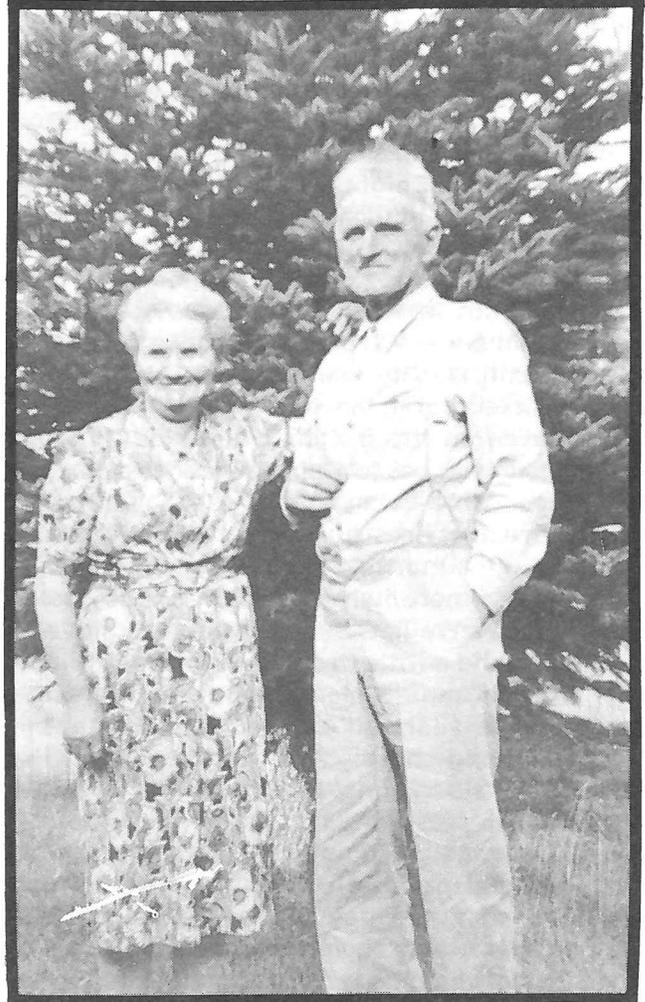
Summer work was hard and long. "We were real busy during the summer. We didn't have time to go to every fandangle around. There used to be a carnival that would come through town every summer. I used to box in the carnival and was really pretty good at it. I had a lot of fun doing it too.

"In those days we used to have good old country dances. Mom liked to dance. My dad didn't, but he would always go with her and have a fun time anyways. There were always a few fellas around that liked to dance. They'd dance until daylight. The old dances were fun. While everyone was jiggin' around, the old boys would bring out their jugs of white mule. Once in a while there would be a fight, but that went along with the game.

"You know, this was good old music. It wasn't this rock 'n roll squall and bawl you got nowadays with a lot of noise and nothing else. No rhythm, melody, tune, nothing to it. This was old time music, see. They had a piano, guitar, violin, and a mouth harp. Old-time music told a story. You kids nowadays don't know a thing about the old-time music. You never heard any of it to speak of. You don't know what the 'Isle of Capri' is or 'Home on the Range', or 'Strawberry Roan', 'Wabash Cannonball', 'South of the Border', or 'Yellow Rose of Texas'. You never heard of that. They told a story of the times. The music was a story about the western people. This type of music supported an ethnic group of people who brought this country out of the wilderness where esteem, dignity, valor and honesty was the byword. Today with this rock 'n roll racket we are creating a wasteland of bewilderment. The pioneers up here were a part of that music. This damn stuff they put out now gets a bunch of dope and potheads on the rise. Loud noises and screaming—they call that music!

"Harvest was a busy time. Threshing time was a big event. We used to put up lots of hay and grain in this country. For a number of years we had Dick Jackson come around with his threshing machine. He was a gambler and quite a boy. He used to thresh all that country. All the homesteaders would all go together and go to one guy's place at a time. In later years we had a threshing machine and ran the same route that Dick Jackson had before he quit. We'd bring our teams, bundle racks and grain wagon, and everybody would help thresh the grain and put it in the grainery. When we were done we'd go to the next guy's place, and so on, until everyone was finished. It was just a trade. Wasn't any

eight or ten dollars an hour stuff. We worked from daylight to dark. We didn't quit at four in the afternoon like some do now, and have a beer. At the end of the day the housewives served the best meal ever. We were usually the last ones to get threshed because we were on the side of Tow Creek. We'd always get the grain in before the first snow fell. When it started snowing everybody would go home for the winter. All the neighbors would get together once in a while by showshoeing back and forth. Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years were the big get-togethers.



Mr. and Mrs. Utterback's 50th anniversary

"At home Christmas was the main event. We got both handmade and store bought presents. But when we got a stocking with an apple, nuts, a skull cap, and a pair of gloves we considered ourselves lucky. We didn't have a big wagonload of junk that we spent half the night opening and the next day breaking. The kids nowadays have so much clutter they don't know what to do with it. We got practical things then. It was practical that two or three neighbors would get together and have dinner at one's house. We would feed the cows and put on an extra load. We used to have about 275-300 head of cows that needed feeding no matter what day it was. It took about 4

big loads of hay. The women would fix up real good meals: homegrown beef, pork, chicken, turkey, potatoes, and different kinds of cakes. It was the same as when we would harvest the crops. Everybody pitched in and everybody shared the results."

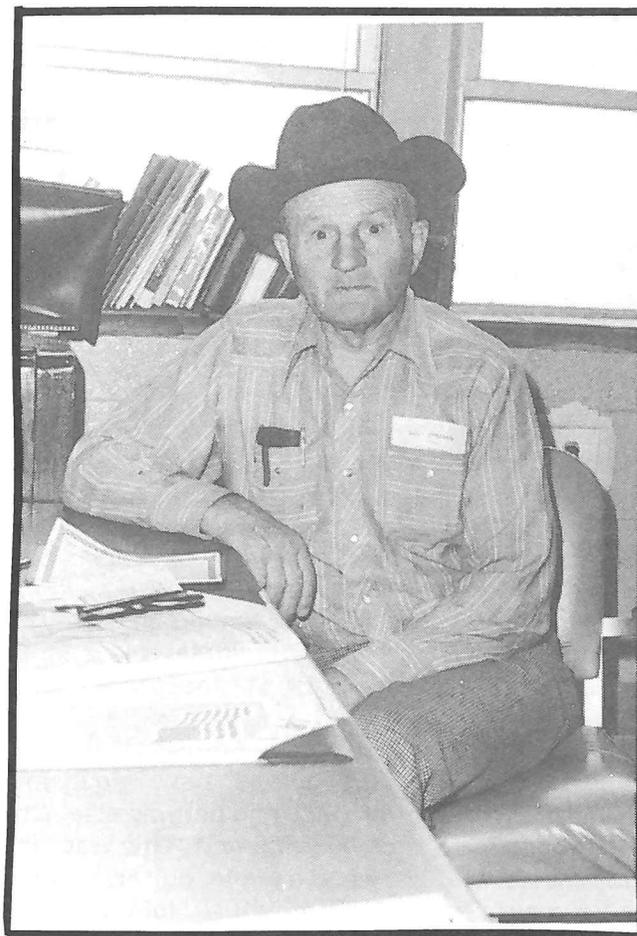
Doc continued by telling me about his family getting another ranch established. "In 1921 we bought a place down by the Yampa River, below Milner. I still have it. We used to live down there in the wintertime and up on the Tow Creek homestead in the summer. In 1924 I stayed up there alone on the Tow Creek homestead during the winter. I was 16 years old, and I came down once or twice to see the family. There were a couple of neighbors, two or so miles over the hill. I would ski over to see them once in a while. One of their boys would ski back over with me, then spend a couple of nights. There were a bunch of coyotes up there in those days, and a wolf or two also. I lived on showshoe rabbits.

"My brother and I bached together in the original cabin in Fairview too. Boy, we were really up in style. We'd go home once in a while to Mom and Dad to visit and eat. Mom would always bake a lot for us to take back. We would hitch a ride on the freight train, ride up from McGreggor and get to Fairview about dark. We had a good time living in that cabin. We had to make sure the fires burned all night, or we'd wake up in the morning stiff as logs. I've seen it 54 below zero here twice. We didn't have gas or electric heat. We had a little potbellied stove in the corner and a little fireplace. I grew up with a coal oil light and a Coleman lantern with white gasoline. For years all we used was coal, out in the barn doing chores, and even at 5:00 in the morning for sledding.

"In the late '20s while I was still in high school, a lot of new things came to the valley here. For one, the sheep. That's when the bears and coyotes had a hey-day 'cause they liked the lambs. There were thousands of head of sheep. The sides of the hills would be masses of white. They shipped out a lot in the fall and took the breeding flock to the winter range.

"The first car in the valley caused as much commotion as the sheep. The majority of people here had never seen cars. We got an old Buick years later. When I got to college I kind of wanted a car to go around in, but in high school in this area no one cared about having one."

The change of times unfortunately shows an increase in crime. "There wasn't much crime here in the early days. We didn't think about locking up our houses. There was seldom a time that we came home and found something missing. If there was anything missing the bird was found and paid for the crime. We didn't go to court to find out if they were guilty or not. We just took them out and tore up the dirt with them.



"I'm a son of the earth."

Then we told them to leave the county and never come back. I even know of a couple of incidents when the criminal was followed down the river and shot. The codger would be put in the ground and a few words said and everyone went about their business. The word got out that those kind of people weren't wanted in this area, so they wouldn't come drifting around. We never had to lock up. If anyone came by they thanked us for the accommodations.

"Back in those days Oak Creek and Mt. Harris was where the fast cards and fast money changed hands often. They were the gambling casinos of this country. Some of the big time gamblers from around the country would come there, and some real big games were played. There were stabbings and killings every year over the gambling tables. Some of the gamblers didn't even work. They made their money off the hard working miners. When the miners got their wages they would usually go down there and gamble it away. A couple of the old places are still standing, like the Colorado Bar. The bad part of Oak Creek was Hickory Flats. There were a couple of sporting houses around that part of town. Craig was a rip roaring cow town

and their fast money was in plenty. Now Brooklyn (just left of the rodeo grounds) was the bad part of Steamboat. There was three saloons, a hotel, and a sporting house. I don't think they ever caused much trouble though."

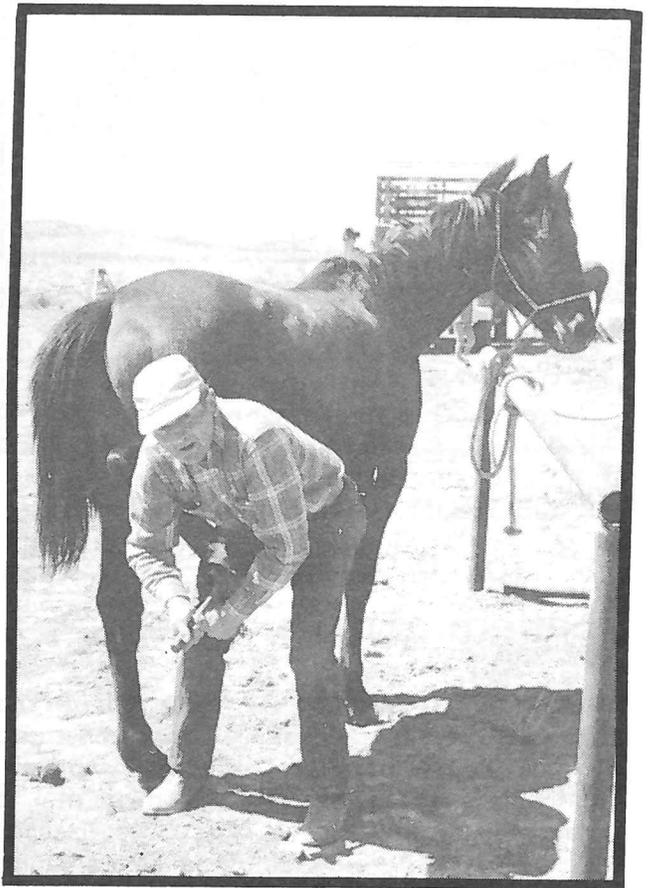
From talking with Doc I found he was a one-of-a-kind western man. "I've always been inclined to be towards the rancher. I'm a son of the earth. I've always liked to ranch, punch cows, ride a few bucking horses, and brand calves."

Doc told me about how he found what he wanted to do in life. "After I got to be 18 there was a veterinarian that came into this country and established a practice in town. I used to go around with him. I knew I wanted to be a veterinarian, but I didn't know if I could handle all the big terms he used. My parents also didn't have enough money to send me to college. I raised fifty pigs that summer of 1929, to get enough money to go to college. One of our neighbor friends took a truck over to Fort Collins, hauling me and my pigs. He dropped me off at the college, and took my pigs on to Denver to sell. I was one of the greenest country kids that ever walked onto a college campus. Dad didn't send me a check every month. I had to find a job in order to get money for food and any other extras. So I hunted around and found a place to live that didn't cost much. On weekends I would work at the sugar factory or wash dishes some place. There weren't very many people able to go to college in those days. It was the early depression years. There were only about 1200 students at C.S.U. It was, and still is, a top school for people interested in animal medicine.

"I majored in agriculture. The second semester I wanted to take bacteriology, but there was a conflict, but veterinary bacteriology was open. I took that, and it changed me. As soon as I got in there I got acquainted with medical terminology and the field it covered. I said to the dickens with agriculture; I'm going to be a veterinarian! It took two years of pharmacy along with my veterinary courses. That's where I learned to compound. I make a lot of my own medicines.

"I had a real good teacher at C.S.U., an old boy named George Glaves. He has a building over there in his name. He taught me medicine. He was one of the first veterinarians to graduate in the United States. He ran the Texas cattle trails, taking care of them. He knew Charles Goodnight and Joe Chishom. He was knocking near 80, teaching at C.S.U. He used to lecture us with his eyes closed. What I remember him for is that he referred to man as featherless bypeds. He said they're so damned important in their own ignorance and arrogance that they don't know how dumb they are. I pull it out every now and then and, by God, I get people's attention!"

Doc graduated in 1935. He told me what being a



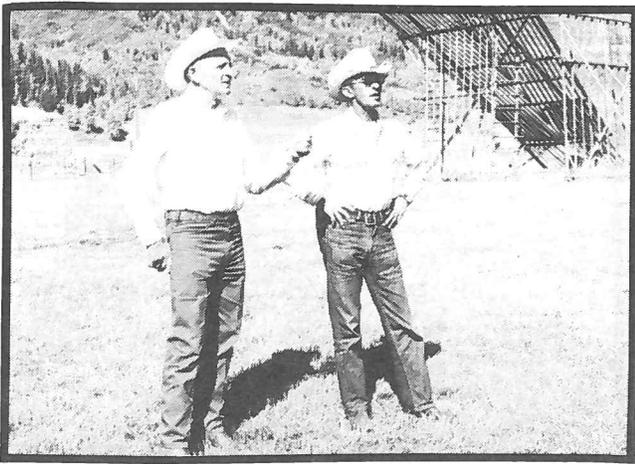
Doc shoeing chariot racing horse

veterinarian was like then. "Business was slow when I got out of college because it dealt primarily with agricultural animals and a few small animals. All those years were the ones that were right after the depression, and times were hard. So we didn't make a lot, but we didn't need a lot of money.

"I came back to Steamboat and practiced for about three months. Then a government position opened up. That was about the time they wanted to clean up the United States of tuberculosis and bangs. I thought I'd do it for a year or two to get a little money ahead. It turned out I followed it for six years. I was what they called the regulatory government worker in the field of veterinary animal medicine. The work was in Colorado, Texas and Idaho.

"I got through with the field government work in 1938. The government then sent me to the meat inspection bureau division in St. Paul, Minnesota. I stayed there a year and worked. In the meantime I had got a scholarship to Iowa State. I went there and got my masters degree in veterinary medicine. I came back to Steamboat then. I didn't have much competition. There was a few old horse doctors before I came back. They were good with horses and had a lot of knowledge. They taught me their tricks."

Doc told me about the animal diseases in this area. "The livestock problems have stayed



**"Creation made this country
for a certain
pattern of development."**

about the same as when I started. I see respiratory pneumonic diseases, nutritional and interric disease, digestive system problems, infectious diseases transmitted from animal to animal, then animal to man. Parasitic diseases are caused by different types of parasites, fungi, and different bacteria. Animal veterinary medicine covers the whole scope of health from the standpoint of nutrition and contagious disease. The worst problem I've ever had to treat was swamp fever in horses. Hayden and Elk River used to be a haven for it. In recent years we've had these viral diseases in calves. They've been vicious and very futile. We had a lot of trouble with it for a number of years before we diagnosed the disease and got a vaccine."

As Doc has lived here all his life, I asked him what he thought of the changes and how they came about. "The ski hill has brought change. When this new generation of people came in here, primarily for recreation and fun, they saw the advantages of resources that was here to be exploited. That started when Mt. Werner was in its infancy, when it was still called Storm Mountain. People figured it was going to be big recreation, so that's what started the escalation of prices, income and expenses. Up to this day the expenses have always exceeded and preceded the income. Prior to today, back in the 20s and 30s, when the mines began to close down, the country became almost all agricultural. It went on being primarily agricultural until the ski hill was developed.

"Creation made this country for a certain pattern of development. It was to be the rural frontier type, with the utilization of resources that we have: timber, agriculture, and minerals. Small mountain towns would be developed with a limited amount of urbanization. Now there's

nothing wrong with skiing—skiing's fun, but skiing should not have number one priority.

"Conservative and well planned development of the community over an extended period of time eventually falls back to the basics. That's what creation put here. The snow creates a certain type of social/economic influence which becomes exaggerated in its values. As long as the values stay in that area where the snow activities are concentrated, that's fine with me. The exaggerated values it creates should not be allowed to expand, consume and devour the whole county which then puts its basic economics in competition with speculative fast-buck dollars. That's what the trouble is. I shouldn't have to be burdened with the exaggerated expense because I didn't help create it, and I should not be devoured and consumed by it. That's what is happening. Like I say, the American public only has one priority, the 30-cent dollar dill, and that's getting cheaper every day and every year."



**Doc, his mother, and daughter
Mrs. Utterback's 100th birthday
Photo by Ross Dolan**

*Home,
home on the range*