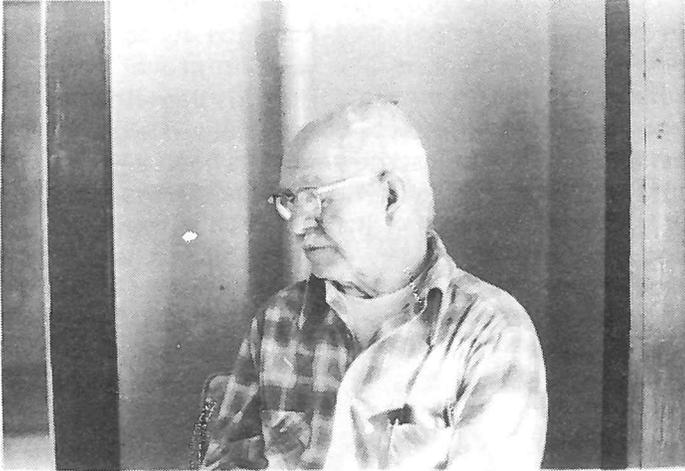


# "BUCKLE UP YOUR BELT AND MAKE THE BEST OF IT!"

BY ROGER MUHME, KEN BANGS, ROGER BEDELL



## EARL THINKING OF THE PAST

Earl Bedell, a resident of Craig and Hahn's Peak proper, has been living in this area for 61 years. After coming to Colorado in 1919, he has seen many changes from the growth of Hahn's Peak to the demise of the old mining area. He has observed changes and styles in hunting and trapping from the Rocky Mountains to the plains of Nebraska.

We, Roger Bedell, Ken Bangs, and Roger Muhme, spent two afternoons talking with Earl and listened fascinatingly as he told his story.

"Both my mother and father were from Iowa.

My Grandmother on my dad's side was in bad shape, so they hired a girl to come in and help.

That girl turned out to be my mother. She worked for Dad for a summer or two and, of course, she and Dad got started on their courtship. They were married in 1903, July 8th or 9th, in North Platte, Nebraska.

"Mother's health was bad in Nebraska, so the doctor advised her to move to a different and higher climate because of a spot on one of her lungs. They made the trip in the fall of 1918, to Hahn's Peak and bought this property. Dad found out about this property in an ad in the Kansas City Star. The ad told of property on Deep Creek, so he came to look at it. Then they met a man in Steamboat who told them he could take them to Hahn's Peak and show them a better place to buy than Deep Creek. So they went up there and made a deal to buy the ranch and cattle. Then the next spring they moved out from Nebraska.

"We took a train that stopped at Steamboat Springs, and we came over Corona Pass, over the Continental Divide. That was long before the Moffat tunnel came to be. We sat on top of Corona. They had a big rotary plow plowing the track 'cause the wind would blow it shut overnight. They held the train there for six hours till they could get it plowed open. Then we came on to Steamboat and took a wagon to Clark. We got just above Clark two or three miles and transferred to a sled that went on to Hahn's Peak. It took two days to get to Hahn's Peak, just from Steamboat.

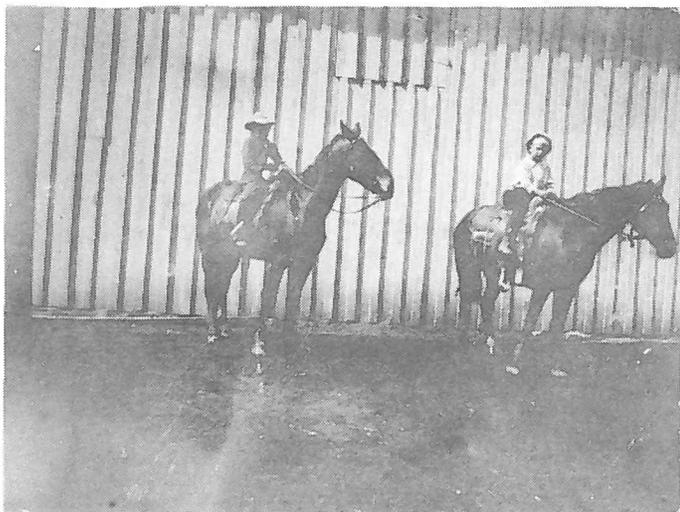
"I was born in Tryon, Nebraska, on August 19, 1907. I spent my childhood there, till I was 12, then we came to Hahn's Peak in April, 1919. Actually we just moved the ranch here instead of Nebraska. We came up on the train with a load of household goods and a load of young work horses.

"My childhood was pretty rough, but we got used to bad weather. For three winters, when I was in the 8th, 9th and 10th grades, we took school up at the country school at Hahn's Peak. I skied three miles to school and three miles back, so I could get home in time to help my father with the chores, both morning and night. School was the same old three R's, readin', 'ritin', and 'rithmetic. That was what school consisted of then, and there was very little fighting. The children of that day and time had more respect for their parents and everybody else than children do today. As near as I can remember there were 15 that went to school there at Hahn's Peak."

Earl told us about the ski equipment he used to ski back and forth to school. "Well, it wasn't bad, but what we had in those days wouldn't compare with the skis we have today. Everybody that was grown used at least eight foot skis, a lot were homemade. I had a pair of eight foot hickories, and I used them until they were completely worn out. Then I made a new pair. They cost about \$15, and that was a lot of money back then."

Earl had many jobs as a young man. "I was never in town. I was on the ranch. From the time I was eight years old I practically took a man's place on the ranch. I ran a mowing machine when I was ten years old. When I was eleven I racked hay in haying time. This was before we left Nebraska. I helped my dad. He had quite a

herd of cattle, and by the time I was six years old I was on a horse and rode with him to take cattle. We had two ranches about four miles apart, and we rode over and cut a bunch of cattle out of the herd of one ranch and brought them over to the home ranch, and visa versa. Since I was 12 years old my dad bought cattle that Nick DeBrau had. When he bought the ranch he bought all the cattle, and they were large red Durham. Dad bred these with Herefords, and when he retired from the ranch he had the largest Herefords in the county to cross breed with.



**EARL AND ORVAL IN 1920**

When I was younger times were hard on everyone. I remember one man who went up to Clark to meet the doctor. The roads were bad, and mother went over to the neighbors to be with the lady till the doctor cam. As soon as Mom got there the baby was starting to come. Mother didn't have time to set up restraints, so she called me, and I helped deliver that baby. We had just delivered the baby when the doctor came. That woman was Mrs. Rose Wheeler. She wrote the book GOD'S MOUNTAIN. Another time mother rode to Columbine to help a dying woman. She and another woman rode five miles on horseback to help.

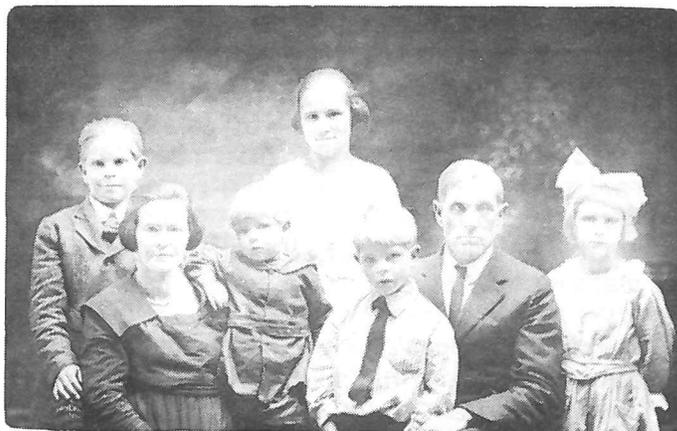
"As a youngster I trapped beaver, muskrat and coyotes. I also caught a brush wolf that was as big as any police dog I ever saw. After the depression prices went up for furs and hides. A good beaver hide was worth eight to ten dollars. During the depression a hide would only bring about five dollars. There were a lot of beavers around where we lived, even though the government controlled them at that time. If you had a ranch you could get a permit for ten beavers, then you had to give half to the State Fish and Game Department. We sold them

illegally to a man in Wyoming. He contacted us, and we took the furs up to the Colorado Wyoming line and met him. We wouldn't have done it being illegal, but during the Depression we would have had to live on part-time welfare if we hadn't. We never lived on welfare because in the summer we worked at anything that we could find, and in the fall we traded hay when we could for money. That way when spring came we could get groceries. We had to get money from somewhere.

"There were more muskrat and beaver than anything. The coyotes were hard to catch and still are. We did a lot of hunting and fishing for food during the depression. That's how we got most of our meat. There were lots of grouse, rabbit and fish. The deer weren't that plentiful, but we managed to get some. We had our own garden too.

"We had two ranches in Nebraska, and one in Hahn's Peak, three miles south and west of the town of Hahn's Peak. I worked on the ranch during the summer and skied and went to dances during the winter. That was our entertainment, skiing and dancing. At the dances they usually had three instruments: a fiddle, a little piano and sometimes a guitar. The dance steps we did then were the waltz, the one step and the two step, and a lot of circles. We also had square dancing, but it was just coming back in at that time.

"I met my wife at a ranch on the Elk River, known as the Old Investment Company. I went down there to work and ended up meeting her. I was 20, and she was 15 when we met. Courting was something back then. We'd go to the picture show in Steamboat in a Model T, and as soon as we got there we had to drain the water out of the car. Anti-freeze just wasn't known then. We would also have to cover the car with a tarp, because maybe it would be 35-40 below zero when we would get ready to start home. Before we left for home we'd start the Model T up and pour the water in. The radiator had to be drained or covered, so it wouldn't freeze. So we really had to stick together in those days.



**EARL, ORA, CHARLES, PEARL, ORVAL, BILL, LELIA**

"The times were rough, but people didn't think about it. They were used to it. I don't know what people would do if they had to go through what we had to. They would probably buckle under. Many wouldn't be about to cope with the hard times.

"My wife and I were married in 1928, April 1st in Steamboat. After we were married I worked on all kinds of jobs, anything I could get. Now we have two kids. Denton will be 50 this June, and Evelyn will be 49 this July.

"In the wintertime we were lucky if we went into town even once, and in the summer we went every two weeks to get groceries and things we needed for the winter. Like we might get half a ton of potatoes and 500 pounds of flour, so we would be really stocked for the winter. During the summer we went to town in the car, but during the winter we went by horse-drawn sled. We had to pack all the groceries in the car since there weren't pickups in that day and time.

"I owned two Model T's, then I owned two Model A's. We bought the Model A's new in the spring of '30 and '28. The first one didn't work so we traded it in for another. That was really a good Model A.

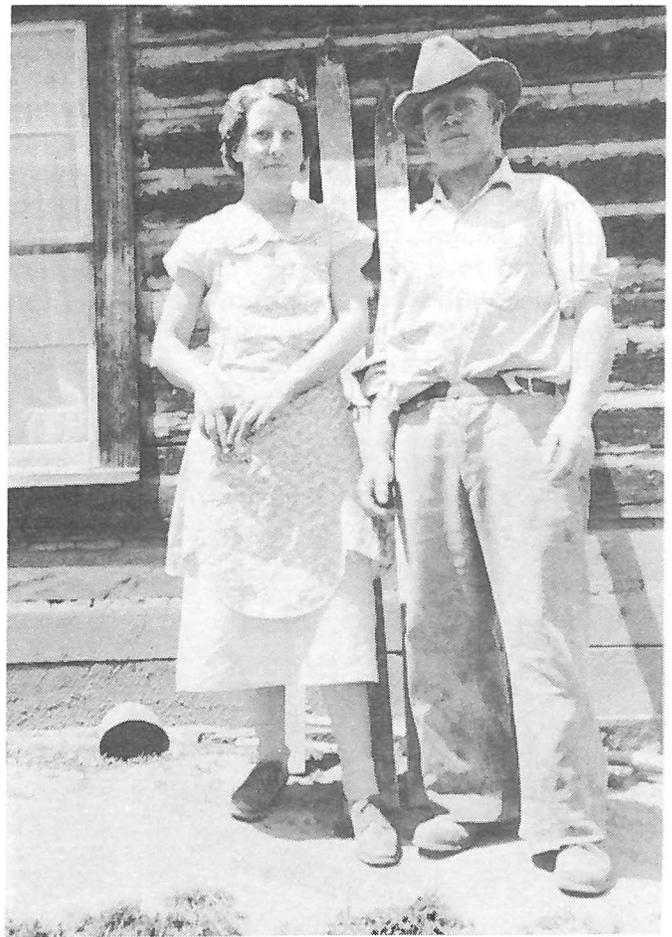
"In the summer we always went to town for the celebration of the 4th of July. That was one big thing in us kids' lives at that time. After I got older I still looked forward to the celebration. If our parents had the money to go, then they took us. But I also want you to understand that in later years when the big depression came in '29, why, people didn't go anywhere hardly.

"During the depression it was awful rough, and people would do anything to survive. I remember it very distinctly because we were married at that time, and for months at a time in the winter we didn't have a dollar in the house. We did have our winter supplies though.

"During Christmas things were about the same, rough. Everybody made the best of it, and there were a lot of hand me downs, like toys for the children. The older people only thought of giving rather than receiving. I made our little kids toys out of wood and also sleds. When they got bigger, why, we bought them skis for only a dollar a pair.

"During the depression I worked at anything I could do, mostly on a ranch. Then I leased a ranch over on Red Creek, the Fry place. I had that place for three years, then we moved on to what we called Dad Morse's place. Part of that place is under Steamboat Lake now."

We were enjoying hearing about the olden days, so we asked Earl about winter travel, both on the stage and the school bus, if there were any. "Charlie Trulinger drove the stage for about the first five years, and Fred Foster drove the stage from Steamboat to Clark. Trulinger



**EARL AND GURDY**

then drove it on to Columbine. A few years later Frank Vessly drove from Clark to Columbine. After that I don't remember who all the drivers were. Burky Byars drove it for two or three years also. They used just one team and a small sled. That way they could haul a couple of passengers.

"Sometime around '36 or '37 the roads got so bad people couldn't get through. I had what was considered the best snow team in the country. My two greys were driving the school bus from our place to Hahn's Peak. I took my team loose without a sled and opened the road to Clark during the time the children were in school. Then the next day I opened the road to Columbine. That team was considered to be the best snow team in the country, by the old timers.

"I still remember those two horses, Steel and Starch. I bought Steel in 1932, and got the chance in 1934, to buy his half brother, Starch. We were living on Larson Creek. I had to go to the Snake River to get this horse. I found him on Columbus Mountain running with a bunch of range horses. I bought him from Ray Buckster and drove that bunch of horses about 35 miles in to Slater the next morning. I was there just after the sun came up. I roped this horse, and he had never been branded. He was still a stallion, about four



## **EARL'S FATHER'S LIVESTOCK ON NATIONAL FOREST GROUND**

years. So I roped him, snubbed him up and got a halter on him. After about two hours I had him broke to lead good enough. Then I got on my horse, and a fellow opened the gate and let me out. I rode the rest of the afternoon, and the next day I got as far as the Hanald place. Then I left there before daylight and was home by two in the afternoon. I had worn out three saddle horses and myself. I had traveled close to 160 miles.

"During the war it was a little rough too, but I managed to have a job all the time. I drove buses during WWII from Craig to Grand Junction. There wasn't much gas because it was rationed. Sometimes people needed to get to doctor's appointments. The bus was always loaded.

"We moved to Dad Morse's place in '37. It was closer to school and was also closer to the road. Our children were both in school at that time. We had a school bus that ran from my own place which was five miles from Hahn's Peak. I drove the car in the fall and hauled the children, about ten of them. Then when the snow came I drove a team and sled. The sled was covered for the school bus. If the roads were bad, which they usually were, then I had four horses that could make that trail in an hour's time. It was ten miles a day, and that was good exercise for them.



## **MOVING CATTLE AT HAHN'S PEAK**

"When we left that place we had nine milk cows and they were all milked by hand. During the fall when haying season started we exchanged work with other ranches. That way we had a hay crew. All the hay was stacked loose, not baled.

"When we first came from Nebraska this old fellow my dad bought this ranch from had an old horse hay baler that was run by one horse. It went around in a circle, so we used that for three or four years. We did this for some of the stage lines, but we could only do 15 or 20 tons, 'cause it took a long time to bale hay with that system. We put all the hay up with horses. We'd stack it close and feed it through the winter. Years later when I went out on my own Dad expanded and bought extra hayland for more cattle. That place put up as much as 280 tons of hay.

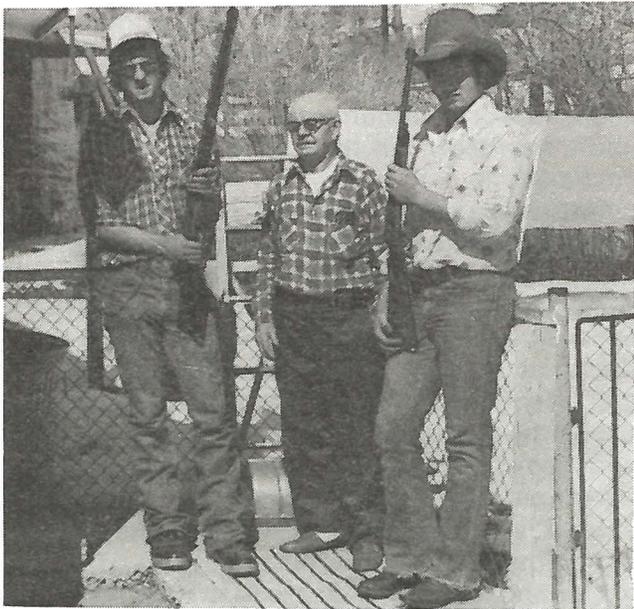
"In and after the depression the price for stacked hay was about three dollars. I don't believe in the twenty years at Hahn's Peak I ever saw hay over 20 dollars a ton. And in those years we had real short crops."

We wondered about the people who traveled through this area during the pioneer days. "Quite a few times someone would come through asking directions over the Sand Mountain trail to Slater Creek. We never let them leave the place without having a meal. Then when the ranchers around the Snake River started to ship their cattle in the fall they made our ranch their headquarters. They would call ahead and make sure it was all right. If there was snow on the ground we put out the hay they required for their cattle and put the men up at the ranch.

"I remember one time the St. Louis bunch called and said they had a big herd coming through and wanted hay put out. Well, Dad was in Nebraska visiting his brothers and Mother and the children were in California, so I was there alone. It was snowing, and I put the hay out. There were five of them, and they told me they would do the chores if I would cook supper for them. They were a hungry bunch who hadn't eaten since breakfast. I could hardly cook enough to satisfy those fellows, and, me, I wasn't a cook either."

Earl told us about several of his jobs. "I was never idle. After I quit the bus job they turned me into the draft board. I was sent to Denver for a physical which I couldn't pass because of my crooked arms. I broke both joints in my elbow when I was a youngster.

"I hauled coal for different outfits, and I was a night man in the garage too. This garage had a coal business with trucks to haul the coal. I took care of the gargage at night, gassed the trucks. I worked there for nearly a year. I also hauled coal from Colorado to Wyoming. I worked nights, and the boys would tease me about having so much



## EARL SHOWS SOME OF HIS GUNS.

coal in my pickup. They asked if I would take a bar and bounce it out. I would keep some of it in my pickup. Morning after morning I would come home with a ton of coal left in my truck. I didn't have to buy any coal that winter.

"In 1948 and '49 I trucked for myself. The government leased trucks to everyone including the farmers. I saw what the outcome of that was going to be because I was making my money off the farmers, hauling their wheat because there was no way for them to transport it. I hauled it at a fair price and was busy all winter. Then in the summer I would go out on the road for a truck job.

"Then I went to work for Union Carbide, where I worked for eight and one-half years as a heavy equipment operator. I maintained roads, mostly north of Maybell. We moved to Craig because the doctor told me the lower climate would be better for my rheumatic condition. I moved to California once before for my health, but couldn't find work. I would take any odd job just to keep off welfare.

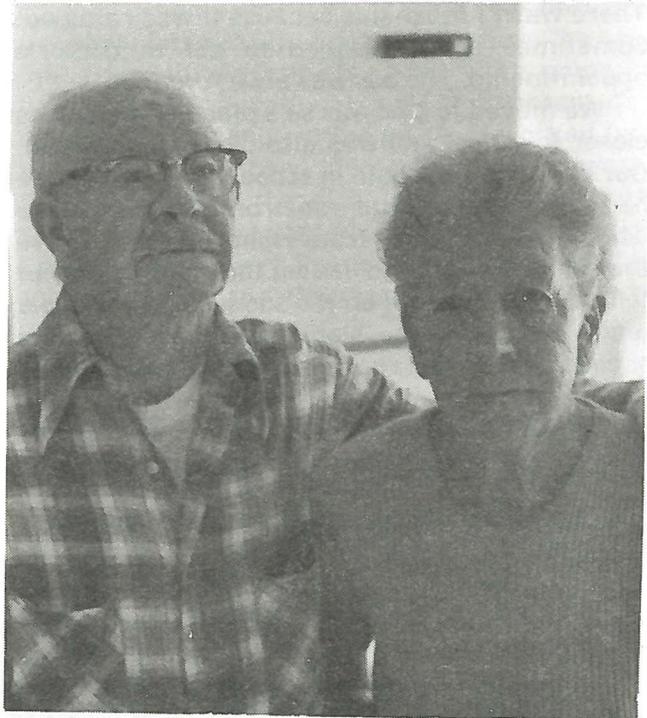
"The sixties were good years because the wages increased to be compatible to the cost of living. We could live good and save a little money if we were so inclined, and I was. Then when we got to the seventies they were a nightmare for the general public. The Watergate mess and the soaring cost of living really drove the older people nuts.

"Times have really changed in town. When we first landed in Craig, everybody was so friendly. They had time to stop and talk on the streets. Now it is rush, rush, rush. Everybody is in a hurry, and they don't know where or why they are going, yet they are in a hurry. I thought I was a decent fellow and got along with everybody.

That's the way people treat me. I have learned to treat my fellowman the way I want to be treated. I have respect for people of all ages."

Since we interviewed Earl he has had open heart surgery and is recuperating nicely. In this story we learned of a man who could cope with hard times and still treat his fellow man the way he wanted to be treated. If everyone were as thoughtful as that this certainly would be a better place to live. That is advice we intend to use.

We then chatted with Earl about the times today. "It's hard to say just what I do think about the high prices today. The people who have the most hardships are retired people. All these high prices aren't helping our country either. As history repeats itself, there is a rise and a fall, and the fall is bound to come one of these days. I believe we are headed for another depression, only this time it's going to be more terrible. The last depression in the 30's people tightened up their belts and turned around and started over again. If we have another depression our government is so deep in everything that the government has got to be the first one that goes broke. I have talked to a number of people who sustain this. I hate to say it, but you boys will probably see it. Then you'll just have to buckle up your belt and make the best of it."



EARL AND GURDY

