

SPREADING CHRISTMAS JOY



CHRISTMAS FELLOW

The Walt Webbers have been contributing and resourceful members of this community for over 50 years. Many oldsters and youngsters have had their eyes filled with visions of sugar plums as the Webbers helped children's Christmas memories be brighter. Their work in electronics and their contributions to television coming to Steamboat have won a special place for them in many hometowners' hearts.

As I talked with the Webbers I learned about their lives and about their positive outlook on life, and how they have actively participated in community affairs.

Here's their story: Mrs. Webber told me, "Walt was born in Fruita, Colorado in 1892. He was a Methodist minister's son, and being a minister's son meant they moved around a lot from one town to another. So they lived in Wyoming and Colorado. He stayed with his father a lot of the time, but he worked in the

By Dale Cooper

afternoon as an electrician in Gunnison. Then he started as a firehouse worker in Leadville, and later moved to Lamar, Colorado where he later became chief engineer at the plant. Then the war broke out and he and his brother enlisted in the Cavalry. Walt did not go overseas, but his brother did."

Mrs. Webber then began to tell of her childhood, leading up to how she met Walt. "I was born 40 miles south of Lamar on a homestead in a little town called Carrizo, 90 miles from Springfield. I lived there until I was big enough to go to school. Later I worked in the bakery, and at the that time Walt lived there, too."

"Then one morning one of my friends asked me if I'd like to work for the light company. She said she was going to resign her position, and she had recommended me. So I went over to the office and applied for the job. I talked to the superintendent, and he said I could have the job. I was really thrilled. In the meantime, he asked Walt, who was chief engineer, and he said, 'Yes, Gertrude Davis.' There were two Gertrudes. She and I would get our meals messed up when we were kids at school."

"Then the first of the month rolled around and I started to work. Mr. Moore, who hired me, said to Walt, 'I guess I don't need to introduce you to Gertrude Davis,' and he looked at me so funny. He said 'But, she isn't the one I was meaning. I was talking about the other Gertrude Davis.' I had waited on him a few times at the bakery, when he used to come in on his way to work. Walt said, 'You said your name was Gertrude Davis? Well, you're not the Gertrude Davis I was thinking of when I talked with Mr. Moore.' I told him I didn't think he would recommend me for the job, because he didn't even know me."

Mrs. Webber met her husband without even knowing it, and she then continued to tell about Walt courting her. "We worked together for about a year until he left and went to Rawlins. And when he came back we had a few dates. Then at Thanksgiving he gave me a diamond ring, and we were married the next year. At the time my mother thought it was all right for us to marry because he was at the light plant and I was at the office."

Mrs. Webber then told about their first years of marriage. "We moved to Rawlins, Wyoming, where Walt had been working. We were there for

quite a while, then we moved back to Denver and a couple of other places. Walt wanted to get back into engineering work, so he went to Denver and got a job. Then he saw a job in the paper for \$190 a month, a house to live in and fuel. It sounded like a good deal, so we borrowed money from his Dad and moved to Coalview. We got there over Berthoud Pass, on the train and stopped in Steamboat. When we were here the springs smelled so bad that I told Walt I was glad that we weren't going to live here. He said he was, too. We lived in Coalview for five years and then moved up to Steamboat. The plant was beginning to close down so Mr. Anderson asked if we would like to move to Steamboat. There was an opening up there for a good electrical shop. He said that the light company would help us move up to Steamboat and give us the supplies that we needed to get started. I helped my husband by keeping the books for him. Mr. Anderson knew us from Lamar when we both worked there. Mr. Anderson told Walt when he came up here that if he wouldn't charge more than \$1.00 an hour for the first year, he could have the job."

Things began to go well for the Webbers, but then quickly took a turn for the worse." We got along fine until a fire broke out where we were staying at Christmas. We had just bought a new car, so losing everything hurt us pretty bad. After this Walt went to Denver to get his tools and supplies. The company helped us get started again. We paid for the tools and supplies as we used them. Then we moved to behind the bank, where we stayed for the rest of the winter."

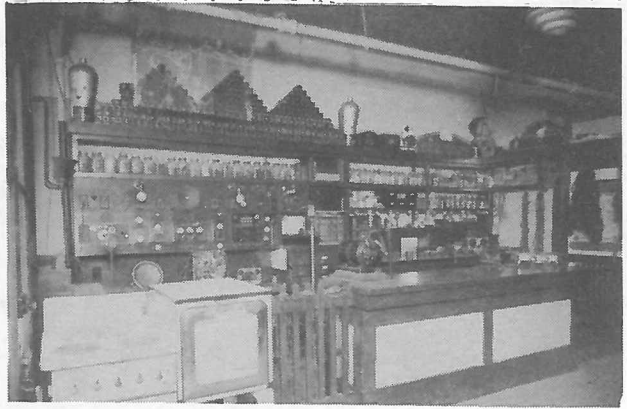
"Then the Odd Fellows needed someone to do the janitor work up the Cameo building. They had law offices upstairs, and the Christian Science people had their church there. So they told Walt if he'd move up there and be janitor they'd fix up an apartment in back of the store. We could have our rent and fuel free if he'd take care of the building. So we moved down there and we lived there for nine years."

"During the Depression, we got by; things were pretty tough, and we lost some money in the Central Savings Bank in Denver when it went broke. Also the bank at Hayden went broke. We were just getting started in the Odd Fellow building when the banks here closed, and we had some money in there, but we just got a percentage of that back. And it seemed like it was one disadvantage after another. But we didn't get hurt too bad, and we got by."

"The children were getting big enough to go to school, so we decided to move to Spruce street, next door to where the Bradleys live now. We were there for sixteen years."

"Mr. Burett came along about that time and he became a partner with Walt, and he was a good

partner. Together they built the Emerson Building, and advanced to where they had propane gas. In their shop they did installations, which were much different than natural heat. We were partners with him for about twelve years in W.B. Gas and Electric Company. Then he decided he wanted to get out so we sold the Gas Company."



Walt's electrical wizardry

"Walt and I just ran the electric part of the business, and we sold electric supplies, did sales, and services for twelve years. January 1962, we sold out to the electric company. In the meantime Walt brought in T.V. which we had contracted out all over the valley."

Mrs. Webber then began to tell me of the history of bringing T.V. to Steamboat. "It was several years before we got the T.V. reception here, and it was quite expensive. We spent a small fortune bringing it in here. Walt is one of those types, that whenever he starts anything, he sees it through. He won't give up, he just keeps working. Everyone was trying to get T.V. in, but Walt was one of the chairmen of the committee who helped the other little towns."

"The first booster we had was up the Law Hill, on top of the Boulevard street. Then Mr. Carry, and his wife, Walt and I, and some of the boys that worked for us, Dale Bostock and Chuck Nelson went up on the hill one night, because we knew there was going to be a fight broadcast. Walt took a little radio set he had to see if he could bring in something. We sat down by the side of the cars and watched the fight in the middle of a snow storm. There was as much snow in the picture as there was coming down out of the sky. But it was fun. That was the first television in the valley of Routt County."

"Television was just like we have now, only not color, of course, but black and white. Walt put up antennas all over town, charged batteries, and repaired radios. We also sold radio and electrical supplies, did electrical work in the daytime, and radio work in the evening. It was fun! We would

work long hours, but we didn't mind it. Our home was right there where the business was, and I could watch the store and take phone calls, while he as out working. I could also take care of my baby and clean the home."



"Walt and I had little two way radios to talk back and forth with. He would go to work, and I would sit and do my book work. He would say, 'Now, honey, is this better?' or 'Is the signal any better, is it louder, how much better is it?' He would go from place to place trying all types of different receptions. Then he'd ask how the signals were coming in, and that's how I spent most of my evenings. I would be at home and he would be up on the hill. Sometimes he'd pick up some of the boys or electricians to help him. They would all cooperate, and between them they would come up with a half way decent picture. Also two or three television men would come in and work with Walt, but Walt did an awful lot of it on his own. Every weekend or when he had a few minutes he was up there working on the television."

"It was quite a shock to Walt"

"The long, hard hours in which Walt spent on television came to an abrupt halt one day. That equipment costs a lot of money. He got Honeywell equipment, and then the town bought Norm's T.V. from Walt. It was quite a shock to

him because he had worked so hard to bring in television. He had worked so hard to bring in a good picture, and at the time we were selling quite a few sets."

In this period of time the Webbers were also involved in the community, bringing about a tradition of Christmas celebration. "Walt had a sound system on his car. He decided to put Christmas carols on his sound system one year. Thus he decorated the truck by putting four Christmas trees on it, one on each corner. That is how we first started out. Then he just went

"SANTA'S BEGINNING HIS ROUNDS"

around town playing Christmas carols on the sound system. Our children stayed home and one time when Walt got home one of the girls said, 'Daddy, why don't you let Mommy make some popcorn balls and then pass them out?' So we decided we would do that next time. I made popcorn balls that year and the next year. I had a bushel basket full ready for Christmas. So Walt took those out and went around town handing them out. He ran out very quickly. The next year one of the kids said they knew where they could get a Santa Claus suit. So Walt dressed up as Santa Claus and took a bunch of popcorn balls, and gave them to whoever came out. Afterwards many people said to Walt, 'Well, why didn't you come to our house with those popcorn balls? So the next Christmas Mrs. Page and some women that belonged to the lodge came to the house. We made popcorn balls and they helped stuff the sacks. We also decided to get some candy. Bob Heid found out that we were doing this, and he said that he'd give it to us at cost. He helped me pick out the different kinds of candy, and also gave us the ingredients for popcorn balls. We went home and started working. The most popcorn balls I ever made was 895. So when Christmas Eve came we put everything in plastic bags and had a family party. The kids and all the family came over and Walt gave the kids a bag of candy. He told them, 'Well, you put two of these in one of those...'. The kids would pass the bags to the next person, and they would put in whatever they were supposed to. The last thing to go in was the popcorn balls. The bags were tied and put into a bag. It quickly became a family affair, as we had a covered dish dinner. We really did enjoy all being together.

"Walt would start at five o'clock in the evening and walk the whole town of Steamboat Springs, delivering those popcorn balls. Mr. Carry used to drive the truck for Walt. I'd stay home and bake. Then they all came home a little after midnight and we'd have sandwiches. We had many memorable Christmases that everyone en-



ON THE SPOT RADIO ANNOUNCERS AT THERE BEST

joyed." The Webbers hold their family memories very close to their heart.

After talking to the Webbers about their community effort, we then talked about the present and the future. "I think Steamboat is entirely different. When we came up here, it was a little town, and everybody knew everybody. It's a lot like the city now. I can go around town and so my shopping and maybe not see half a dozen people that I know. Most are all strangers, but I guess that's what takes place when a town grows."

"I think we have a different generation at this time that's doing things differently. A lot of people may think that the old people are trying to run the town and take it over, but we're not. I guess we were the same way, because of the way that we reacted to some of the older people that we thought were old fogies when we were young. We did things the way that we thought they ought to be done. But I think every generation goes through their stage. In the old days Steamboat would have the Aspencade every fall. People used to come in here on trains for the Ski Carnival. They would have a special train come in. I don't think that Walt missed a Fourth of July once since 1928 until he got out of it in 1962. He used his sound system to broadcast the carnivals and other events."

The Webbers now leave Steamboat with a part of themselves, giving to the community time and

effort. On the whole the Webbers are a marvelous family who have contributed to Steamboat Springs in many ways. By using their own money to bring television to Steamboat, by starting the tradition of the roving Christmas tree, and helping the community to enjoy the Christmas spirit, thus they turned their accomplishments over to the community and take only their memories with them.

In memory of a wonderful lady who passed away before this story could be totally done. Mrs. Webber was very kind in telling us a few things relating to Walter and her life. I feel very honored and privileged to be able to write about two wonderful people's lives.

