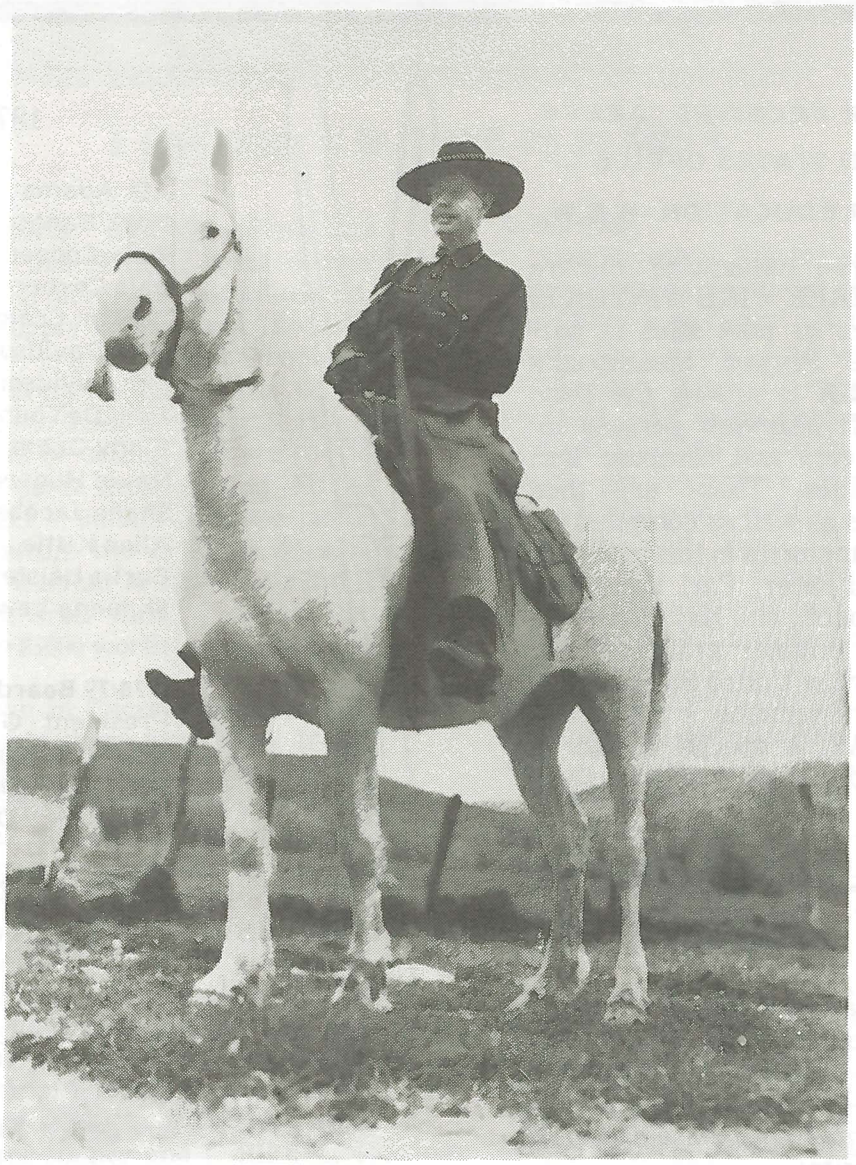
BOB SWINEHART "FROM HORSE AND BUGGY TO MEN ON THE MOON"



BY CURTIS LAISLE AND JOLENE STETSON

"We arrived in Steamboat in September, 1900 by covered wagon, three covered wagons. One was pulled by four horses, one by a span of mules and the other by one pair of horses. My father drove the four horses, my brother Jay, the mules and my mother drove the single team. We also had several head of loose horses and my job was to herd them behind the wagon."

Bob Swinehart has been in Steamboat for 78 years. His family originated in Pennsylvania, then moved to Wisconsin. He was born on April 5th 1886 in Clay Center, Kansas, one of nine children.

"I think I was probably about two years old when we moved from Kansas to Denver. We were there a little while then moved to Ouray,

which is about 160 miles from Denver as the crow flies. My dad took up a homestead there, I can start to remember from then on. That was when I was six or seven years old. My dad built a nice house on his homestead in Ouray. I can remember there was a fireplace four feet wide. We'd roll logs into the house and then into the fireplace. They had a little country school house in Ouray and we used to go on horseback. I used to ride horseback there when I was six years old. I don't know how far it was from the house but that was my first schooling. But my dad got tired of homesteading and went away and left it, and it went back to the government.

"We moved to a little mining town called Vulcan and we were there two or three years. (Vulcan was a mining town that got started in the 1890's and was located in the Gunnison Gold Belt.) My dad ran a store in Vulcan and he had the Post Office too I believe. I know we were there during the Spanish American War, which was 1898-99, as I remember. Then we moved to Gunnison and I went to school there for a couple of years. We moved up to Crested Butte for one summer and worked at the sawmill there skidding logs. We came from Gunnison by way of Crested Butte and Gothic, which was just a ghost mining town at the time, over the pass to Marble, Carbondale, Eagle, Wolcott and Steamboat Springs."

Colonel James H. Crawford located and established the town of Steamboat Springs. He first came in 1874 and settled here with his family. His son Logan Crawford was a government trapper and shared early stories of Steamboat with Mr. Swinehart. "I wish that Logan Crawford was here right now to tell you some of the things he told me. Logan Crawford, son of James Crawford, was a government trapper at the time, and was going to trap some coyotes and wolves that were killing some of the farmers' livestock on the Great Divide. One of the stories he told me was about an old Indian trail from the north fork of Soda Creek to the region around Lake Luna. Most everyone knows the Indians marked their trails by breaking off and bending the tops of evergreen saplings, pointing them in the direction that the trail was supposed to go. This trail was marked perhaps before any white man's time in this country. Logan told me in 1917 that he was sure he could still follow that trail by the markings on those trees. I wonder if anyone could still follow it?

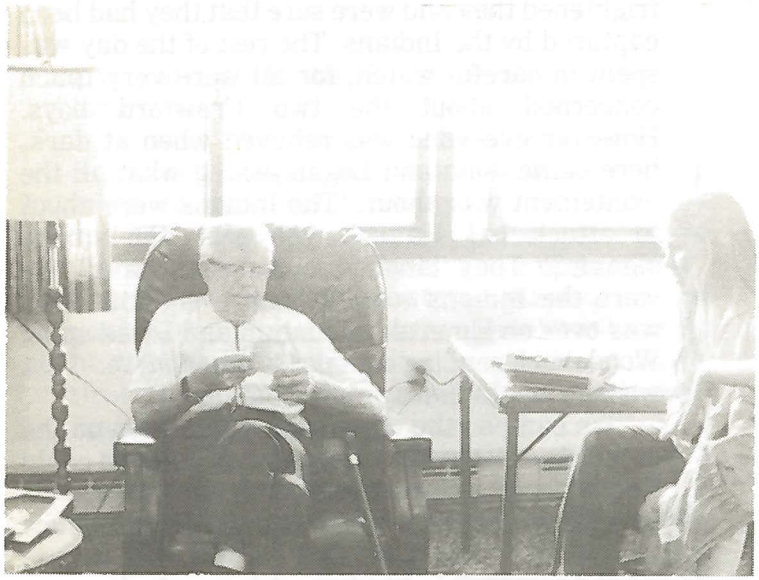
"Then he told me of an Indian scare they had here in Steamboat, probably about the time of the Meeker Massacre in 1879. Someone saw smoke signals over what we now call Emerald Mountain. Soon an answering signal was seen on Woodchuck Hill. The alarm was all over the town that the Indians were about to attack. Everyone gathered up their guns and ammunition and congregated at the Gambini house on the corner of 7th and Oak. When all had calmed down a bit, someone noticed that Logan and John Crawford were not among them. The people became really frightened then and were sure that they had been captured by the Indians. The rest of the day was spent in careful watch, for all were very much concerned about the two Crawford boys. However everyone was relieved when at dark, here came John and Logan asking what all the excitement was about. 'The Indians were about to attack us! Haven't you seen the smoke signals?' They laughed and Logan said, 'We were the Indians sending smoke signals. John was over on Emerald Mountain and I was up on Woodchuck sending signals back and forth.' That was the last Indian scare in Steamboat!

"We camped the other side of Brooklyn on the outskirts of town for a week or two until we could find a house in Steamboat. The first winter we lived here, we lived where the Towlers live now

BOB'S FATHER AND MOTHER IN FRONT OF THEIR HOUSE IN WISCONSIN.

at 528 Laurel. Five of us kids and my mother in that little house, it only had two rooms. One upstairs and one down. That winter all of us; me, Helen, Molly, Eva, brother Dudley and my mother had scarlet fever in that little house. In those days you was just supposed to die and forget about it. We had a doctor here by the name of Kernahan, Dr. Kernahan, oh, a wonderful man. He pulled us all through. They had us quarantined for about six or eight weeks. My father, brother Jay and I, while the rest of the family was quarantined, cleaned out a grove of trees on what is now the Charlie Auter tract in Strawberry Park. One can still see the stumps of the trees where they once grew."

"The earliest logging and sawmill operation I know about was the mill located between Ninth and Tenth streets. We cut logs up in Strawberry Park and hauled them down there to that mill. We made our living that way in the winter of



MR. SWINEHART ANSWERING ONE OF JOLENE'S QUESTIONS.

1900. Anyone with a team of horses and sled could make a living by going into the woods, since there were no government restrictions then, and cutting down trees, sawing them in the proper lengths and hauling them down to the mill where they were scaled and paid for. There are lots of places in the woods where one can see to this day trees that were cut down, sawed to length and for some reason never hauled out."

"Later we had a farm in Strawberry Park, where we raised cattle and hay. The hard winters were the worst things and we had to use a sled and team to get out. When we got a car, we'd just have to park it in the winter and leave it there. When Claude Lucans was elected commissioner in 1932 he started having the snow plowed for us. When we were kids we walked from where we lived near the Bear Pole Ranch to town for school. It seemed a long way in those days but it don't sound so far now."

"I had an eighth-grade education, that's as far as I went, right here where the Junior High School is now. One time when we had left for school, I had two younger sisters at the time and the littlest one started to cry before we got out to the road because she was so cold. So, I made her go back but the rest of us walked on to town. We went to that school house that burned down in 1910. About ten o'clock that morning I was upstairs, my sister was downstairs and they sent for me to come down there. My sister sat there studyin' and her ears were as big as my hand and as red as anything you ever saw. Froze them both that morning. Fifty-four degrees below zero and we walked to school. This Dr. Kernahan that I talked about before, we took her to his house and he kept her there to doctor her ears. There were no ill effects at all. Sometimes they come off when they're frozen that way. Yeah, you just lose your ears. They were just as red as anything you ever saw."

During Mr. Swinehart's school days he had several adventures with his Steamboat friends. "A boy worth mentioning was one whose name was Bean. That is all I remember of his name, just Bean. His father was pastor of one of the Steamboat Springs churches. Bean used to come off the jump at Howelsen Hill on a toboggan. When he left the jump he didn't seem to be on the toboggan, but trailing along behind it holding on with both hands. When he landed he would somehow land on top and go sailing on to the bottom. Bean was known to drive a car down Lincoln Ave. using his feet to steer instead of his hands. I ran into Bean at Kelly Field, Texas, during World War II. He was then a fine airplane flying instructor. In the spring we used to play a lot of marbles and Teddy Wren used to win all my marbles. We played for keeps, you know, but he'd give them back. We were best friends all the way through school. He'd even steal my girl. I'd get a girl and he'd steal her; that didn't keep us from being friends.

"We had a gang here they called the 'Dirty Dozen'. I think I was the second lieutenant in that gang. They had one in Oak Creek they called the

BOB IN 1920 FISHING IN DIAMOND PARK.

'Stinking Six'. Steamboat had two newspapers then. One was called the Routt County Sentinel and the other was the Pilot. In politics they were just the oposite of each other. They had quite a time writing up our gang fights. I think the editor of the Sentinel named our gang. I guess you know of Fred Foster, he used to be the sheriff here. He and I are the only ones that are still alive that I know of from our gang. Some of the members were Clay Monson, Teddy Wren and Ralph Barch. Barches ran a hotel right where the Pioneer Bar is now. Some of the other members were my brother, who was two years older than I, and a fellow by the name of Charlie Webb. They were all gone years ago. They think the kids now are awful bad, but we were just as bad, maybe worse. They didn't have no moving pictures here then, nothing but dances. We had to make our own entertainment. We'd put a hayrack on a wagon and go up what they called Capitol Hill. That's where all the 'big bugs' live now. See, if we got a lot of kids together we could push that wagon. We loaded six outhouses on this hayrack and we brought them down and put them on Main St., lining them up nicely on both sides right in front of the Hugus Store. That was across from where Harwig's is now. We named our outhouse town 'Tonopah'. That was about the time that Tonopah, Nevada had struck gold. We got a pig up on the hill and how he did squeal. We got him anyway, brought him down and put him in one of those outhouses that we called the 'Jail'. Another outhouse said 'Fred Metcalf' the local banker. They was gonna raise the dickens with us about that. They were going to make us move them back so my dad told me, 'You better get out of town 'til this blows over.' I went over to Creede and stayed with my brother for a while. They came and got their outhouses and moved them back. I remember that real well. Kids don't do those things nowadays, you know. Then it was a trick; now it's trick or treat.

Below the present location of the Rabbit Ears Motel there was an old landmark bridge that carried traffic in and out of Steamboat. "The Brooklyn Bridge was used by all traffic coming into Steamboat Springs from the East. Very few people believe there ever was a bridge there. They say there is no sign of a bridge ever having been there. It spanned Bear River just east of the mouth of Spring Creek. Sam May had a ranch south of Steamboat Springs. One day Sam came to town on horseback across the Brooklyn Bridge. Several of us boys were loitering on the street and seeing Sam coming, we got out of sight and figured what we could do to Sam to have a little fun. Sam pulled up and stopped in front of the Franz store, dismounted and tied his horse to the tie rack used by store customers and went into the store. As soon as Sam was out of sight, Streeter Reinhardt got the right idea and unhitched Sam's saddle, turned it around so it was backwards on the horse and cinched it up again. Then we got out of sight and waited to see what Sam would do. Soon he came out of the store with a gunnysack filled with groceries and without looking right or left, as though he did not notice that anything was wrong, he tied his sack of groceries behind (or in this case, in front) of his saddle. He put his foot in the stirrup, swung into the saddle just as though he always rode his saddle in that position and turned his horse up the street across Brooklyn Bridge. Still without looking back he rode out of sight. We were never able to figure out who the joke was on, Sam or us. I think it was on us."

Sports played a big role in the leisure time of Steamboat residents. Mr. Swinehart was an enthusiastic participant in sports all year round. "In those days there were no paper boxes, all were made of wood. Mr. Franz used to pile all his boxes, and he had a lot of them, on the left field of the baseball diamond. Sometimes there would be a pile as high as a house. Our left fielder was a boy named Charlie Baird. Many times I saw Charlie climb on top of the boxes to pull down a hard hit fly. To me that was much more thrilling than to see Mickey Mantle or Willie Mays take one out in center field. When we competed with Craig it took us three days to play a baseball game. We'd go down there in a wagon and a four horse team. It'd take us all day to go the 42 miles. We'd play two games the next day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, then the day after we'd come home. Even then Craig and Steamboat had a very close rivalry. We'd beat them one game and they'd beat us the next.

"They had a time that they called Game and Fish Days that was celebrated in September. They called it that because that's about all we had to eat. Also there was always the grayling run. About the 10th of October the fish run up the streams to spawn. We would get in there with a pitch fork and throw them out like that. We used to salt them and put them in barrels and kegs and that's what we had to eat during the winter.

"Nobody knew how to ski until Carl Howelsen came here. I'd go up and have a lot of fun but I never learned how to ski very well. Howelsen came in here and taught us everything we know. All we did was go down the hill and we'd lose one ski and it would go for a mile and we'd have to ride the other ski down to pick it up. All we had was a little strap right across the front of our foot. Now they tie them on. Those days if you tied the ski on they thought you were crazy. Maybe you would have been. I never tried ski jumping. No, it was too much for me. I was twenty-nine when I came back from Panama so it was getting pretty late to learn to ski jump. We used to have lots of fun back in those hills, my brother and I. Our skis were about eight or nine feet long back in those days, and we'd make them ourselves. We'd get a good piece of lumber free of

knots and shave them down and then they'd boil them. Boil the ends in water and then take them out and tie them there two or three nights and they'd be O.K. My brother and I went everywhere on skis, we'd go down the hill and through the trees and thought we were real good. One time we went up on Buffalo Pass, my brother and I, and I went down a hill and fell. I just kept falling and falling and one of my skis came off and hit me in the eye. When we got going too fast we'd just fall down. We only had one pole and if we were going too fast we'd put it between our legs and ride it. Before we had a tow I packed my skis up to the top on my shoulder, took a look at that jump, put my skis back on my shoulder and walked back down, it was all ice.

"We had a man in Steamboat Springs named Carl Combs and speaking of ski champions I think he was one. Carl used to jump over on Howelsen Hill using a pair of barrel staves for skis. He would compete with those fellows who had the best of equipment, imported skis and all. One time Combs won using a pair of barrel staves. A pair of skis was the first prize. Those were Carl's first skis and he was one proud boy. We were all proud of him.

"The fourth of July Rodeo was a lot better then, than it is now, even though they have a lot better ropers now because they practice more. The professionals nowadays never miss. We used to miss and maybe try another loop and miss that one too. I never really rode broncos in competition but this Wren boy, Tuffy, he was the best rider that ever was. I used to ride relay races and rope, things like that in those days. The main thing about Rodeo then was relay races. You would ride five horses each a quarter of a mile down and back, and then change saddles and ride the other one. I won that for three years in a row. I don't know what we got when we won. I don't ever remember getting money but it was a prize of some kind. We went out for the fun then, not for the money. There has been a lot of stuff added to the rodeo. I never saw any of that bulldogging. We never done it in those days. We used to rope big steers and now they rope little calves."

When Mr. Swinehart was twenty-two he left Steamboat Springs to join the other 43,000 workers on the construction of the Panama Canal. Through treaties and an initial payment of $10,000,000 the U.S. had use and control of the canal. It was being built across a ten mile stretch of Panama in one of the most disease ridden sections on earth.

"When I left here in 1908 the railroad was at Toponas, that was the end of the tracks. There was a fellow by the name of Dodge. I believe he had two automobiles, the first ones we'd ever seen and he'd run from here to Toponas. So when I left here I got one of those automobiles and I got

BOB, HIS BROTHER AND SISTER DOWN IN PANAMA.

up there about eighteen miles and got a flat tire or something so we had to go to a ranch and get a team and buggy to take me to Toponas.

"I think those seven years I spent in Panama were the best part of my life. I had a good time, they talk about the heat and everything but I didn't notice it. I had a gang of about thirty-five Panamanians and they'd do anything I told them to. If they wanted a ditch dug here or a mountain moved, I'd take my gang up there and we'd do it. I had that same job about five years. Around those Panamanians I learned to talk pretty good, too. I had a water boy, he'd carry ice water to the gang and I think he taught me more than anyone. He'd correct me if I'd say something wrong, an adult wouldn't do that, they'd just let it pass. I learned more from that little boy than all the rest.

"I had Malaria fever so bad that I had it for three years after I came home. I don't think there was ever a case of yellow fever that originated on the Isthmus, but it would come in on the boats. They'd take 'em off the boats and bring them to the hospital. All they would do was put them behind a screen where mosquitos couldn't bite them. Mosquitos are the only carriers you know.

"I was in Panama when the first boat went through in 1914. I bid on a contract once but I didn't get it, so I did a lot of work for the man who got it. The most work that I did was working on one of those dumps. They'd bring these trains in

there on a track and they would plow just like a snow plow, only it was pulled with a cable over the cars. They'd plow that off the side with a cat until it got so high they'd bring in a big snow plow and push that away from the track until that got so wide that we had a machine called a track shifter and it would pick the track up and move it somewhere else. I suspect it was one and a half to two miles across the ocean that we had to fill in.

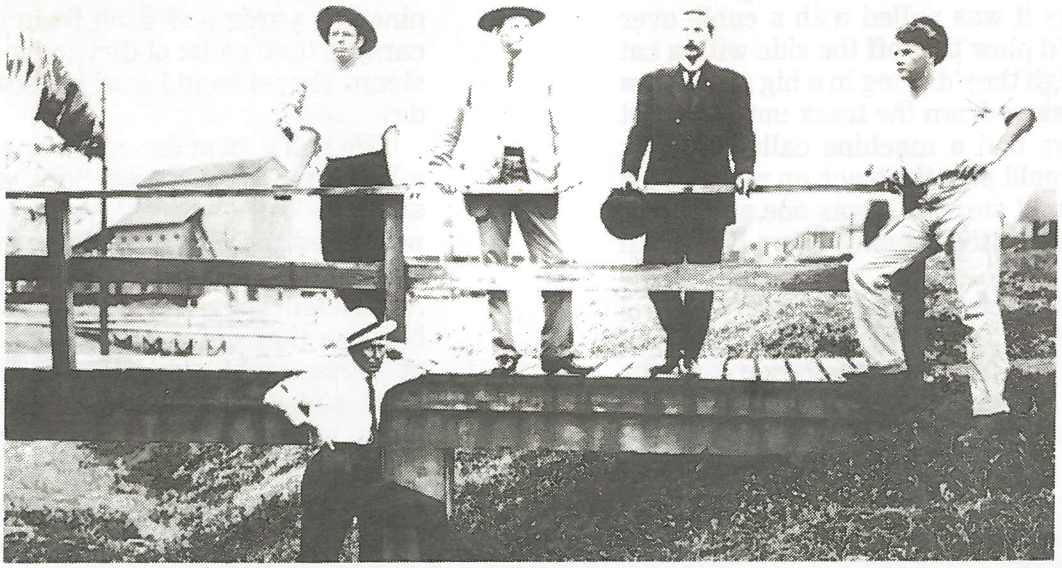
"There were terrible accidents every day. I had my brother killed down there. A rock fell down off this slope and he was standing on the ledge, somebody hollered at him and he jumped down to the next ledge, the rock bounced where he was standing and hit him on the head. They came down and got me and took me to the hospital but he was dead when I got there. We sent him home but I regret that we didn't bury him there in Panama. He was one of the first ones down there, went in 1904.

"Taft was president after Roosevelt and he was down there while I was, so I got to see him. Teddy Roosevelt was the one that started the whole thing. The French had worked there and the way they worked, we did in 10 years what would have taken them 50. If they had built the canal the same way they were going, it would have taken them 50 years. Of course they didn't have all the modern machinery; steam shovels, and things that we had. The cars used to hold nineteen yards and each train carried nineteen cars, so that's a lot of dirt going out of there. One steam shovel would load several of those every day.

"We had a lot of dances in Panama and we had a lot of moving pictures, but they were all silent and they'd show the guys and then they'd put what they were saying underneath. Down there they had to put it in two languages, Spanish and American. They really had to act in those days because they didn't say a word. We were living at Corsa, right alongside the canal. One night after supper we went down by the canal and swam across it. It was about a quarter of a mile across and seemed more like a lake than a canal. The trouble was there was a ship coming right towards us.I waved at it a couple of times but it just kept on coming and finally we were about ready to dive under, when the ship went around us. We never would have made it. We somehow got to shore but I'll tell you that was a close call.

"It could be all sentimentality, but I think giving the Canal away is the worst thing that could happen to the U.S. The president had a speech telling all the benefits of giving the Canal back to them but I couldn't see any of that. If you worked on a place for seven years and had your brother killed there you sure wouldn't want it given away, would you? I don't know if the U.S.

CHARLES M. SWINEHART AND HIS CREW IN PANAMA.



FREE TIME IN PANAMA

would be better off without it or not, but I can't see how. The president says we never did own that strip that is ten miles wide across the Isthmus they call the Canal Zone, but we bought and paid for it. He says we never did own it, it was a lease or something. We own it the same as we bought Alaska from Russia. Some people say if we give that away the Russians will come and say, 'Give us back Alaska'. We bought Alaska from Russia the same as we bought that strip for the Canal Zone. Yeah, we bought and paid for it and now they've given it back.

"I was in World War I after I came back from Panama. I met my wife when I went back to Tijuana, I never had enough money to come back here to marry her, but I sent for her and she came out. We were married in San Diego on May 17, 1920. I first met her in 1919, dated her all the time. Used to go to a lot of dances. We used to ride horses 15-20 miles just to go to a dance, sometimes even to Hahn's Peak. Parties and dances were about the only places to go.

"We were in San Diego for a few years, then we came back here and bought the place where we lived for 45 years. It was in Strawberry Park, we raised cattle and hay. You probably know where my ranch is, you go into the Bear Pole Ranch and if you don't turn you run into my house. We bought that and it was just like coming back home. We lived in it for four or five years. See, we owned it and when Bob came back from the war, he was married and we gave him five acres. We also fixed up that house for him. That's one of the oldest houses in the county now.

"I made a good living in San Diego, that's how we bought the ranch. During World War II we rented the ranch and I went back to San Diego and worked there for three years. I worked making airplanes. I was a welder and my wife was a spot welder. I worked there just three years and I'm still getting a pretty good social security pay from that.

"I only have one boy, he's fifty-seven now. He was a bomber pilot in World War II, and was shot

IN PANAMA, BOB AND TWO NURSES DURING SOME FREE TIME.

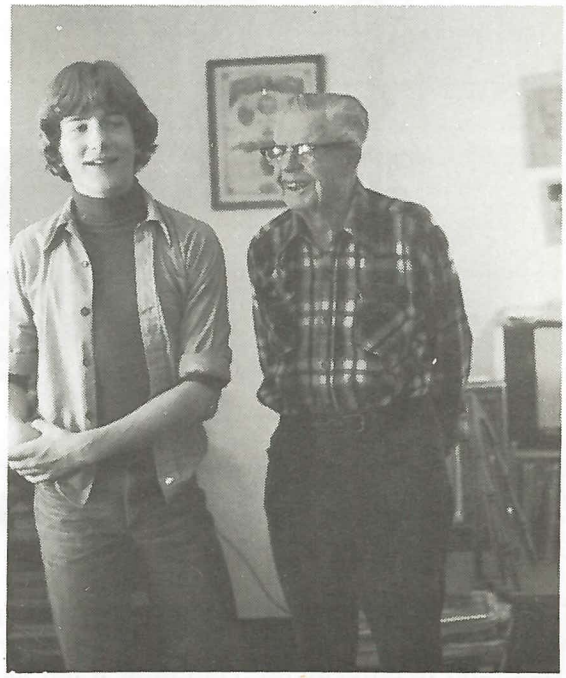
down twice. Once he was shot down and he managed to get to a friendly base but the plane was so badly shot up it was never flown again. He flew over Hungary and was shot down then for good. The plane was on fire and they all baled out. They were prisoners of war for nine months. About four of those months we didn't know if he was dead or alive. We finally heard through the Red Cross that he was a P.O.W. in Berlin. General Patton was the one who liberated them. Bob said he could hear the shots of the cannons and bombs getting a little bit closer, so they knew they were going to be liberated. They came in and took the town over and turned them all loose. He wired us right away when he was rescued, so it wasn't very long before we heard. They treated them well except they were often hungry. He said if it hadn't been for the Red Cross they'd have pretty near starved. Once when they were moving them from where they were rescued, the Americans saw this column of men and thought they were Germans, they went down and shot at them with airplanes. Didn't kill anyone but they went right down and shot at them. That was quite a time.

"We came back to Steamboat in 1944 or '45. The town hadn't changed in that short time. But it's sure changed a lot since I came here. The block just east of the post office was about the only business block in town. I think Harwig's was the post office when we first came here but then the post office moved to the Cameo. I think it moved right close to where the Oak Street Plaza is next, then to where it is now. There have been at least four different post offices since I've been here."

years. "This town had no paved streets in the '50's except Lincoln Ave. There's been a lot of changes I'll tell you. Just in the last ten years have been the biggest changes. I've seen the town change, but I just can't put it into words. It's the ski industry that has brought the big changes. The population has grown by about 2000 since they've taken in the ski mountain. There have been a lot of buildings put up, especially around Strawberry Park. When we first moved out there we only had one neighbor now there are dozens of people. I go up there now and then and there are a lot of houses on the field where I used to farm.

"When we first came here the only coal we could get was from a coal mine, halfway between here and Hayden. Everybody went there and mined their own coal. Now look at all the coal that goes in and out of here every day, ten to twelve trains, maybe sixty car loads. They claim there's more coal in Routt County than in the whole state of Pennsylvania and that's a big coal producing state. I think we're still going to progress a lot in that way; in coal, in oil and in skiing.

"I have often said that I have lived in the most interesting generation, from the horse and buggy to men on the moon. In the next ninety years there'll be more changes than in the ninety years that I've seen. It's beyond my imagination. I can remember when the Patent Attorneys closed shop and said that everything that is going to be invented has already been invented. That was fifty years ago if you can believe that. I don't know what the future holds, I'd believe anything they told me."



BOB SWINEHART AND CURTIS LAISLE WRAPPING UP THE INTERVIEW.