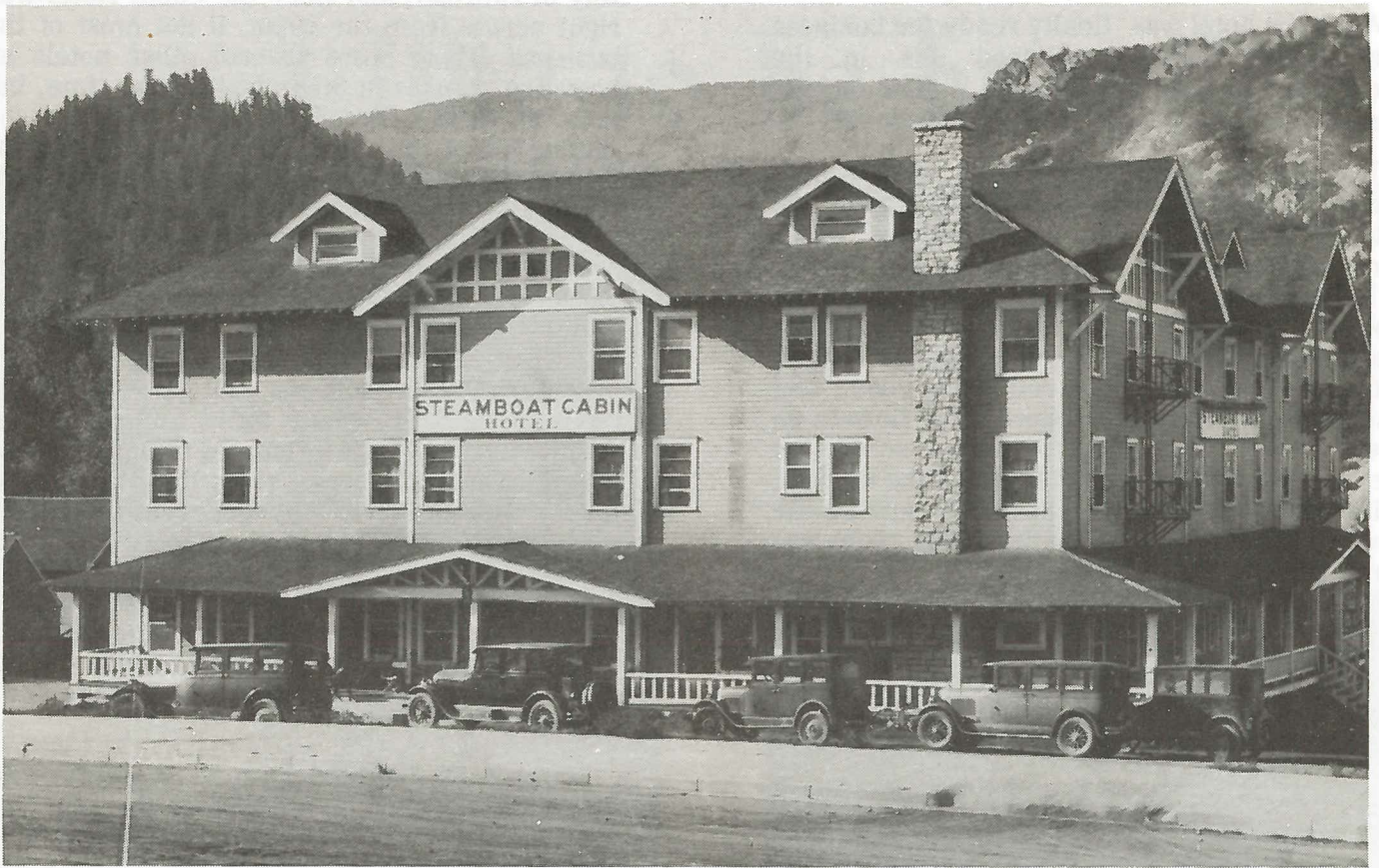


# Steamboat's Finest Cabin



## 1910 - 1939

By Duncan Craighead  
research by Allen Kittle

On a chilly morning in 1939, flames consumed Steamboat's historic Cabin Hotel. The fire was so rapid that the entire three-story, one-hundred-room structure burned to the ground in less than an hour. Though the hotel was showing signs of neglect in its later years, it was once depicted as one of Colorado's most elegant hotels.

"It was a beautiful hotel," Dorothy Wither, a local businesswoman recalled. "People came from all over the country to stay in it for the whole summer. They weren't the weekly tourists that come now."

The hotel was constructed in 1909 because several citizens felt that a large hotel was needed. A committee was elected by the

Commercial Club, a local organization prominent at the time, to campaign for money to be used in construction. The committee members were: F.E. Milner, F.A. Metcalf, M.E. Houston and Floyd Frazier. All of the money was raised locally, and when the hotel was finally completed in the summer of 1910, a general feeling of pride prevailed throughout the town.

Elmer Baer, a long-time resident of Steamboat, was contracted to build the hotel. He, along with other men, started and finished the building that was to be known throughout the state as the "Steamboat Cabin". The name of the hotel was derived from a name that was given to

the first post office here, the Steamboat Cabin.

This was a place where people if stranded, lost, or just too tired to go on, could stop, rest and get a home cooked meal. The comforts of the hotel were many, and the town boasted skiing (though the major skiing industry was still years off), and its wonderful bath house with its mysterious "healing powers."

When the hotel was finally ready for business, the owners rarely published ads in the Steamboat papers, but instead aimed for the Denver set, and people out of Colorado.

The conveniences of the hotel were many. There was one bathroom to every hallway of five rooms, and there was even running water (provided the handle was pumped a few times). A large dining room occupied most of the first floor, and was famous for its warm atmosphere and excellent food. A fire was always burning in the large fireplace at one end of the room, and during the summer there were fresh flowers on every table. One could always smell the tempting aromas that drifted out of the kitchen.

Every Saturday night the tables and chairs would disappear, and the large dining room was turned into a giant dance hall.



Also on the first floor was a sitting room and a lobby with stuffed animal heads of every variety. A magnificent stairway led to the upper rooms.

The sitting room, which also had a large fireplace, was used for card playing, reading, or just relaxing. Here, too, a fire was always roaring to keep the guests comfortable on those cold Colorado nights. The hotel did have heating, but a large building with poor insulation was hard to keep warm.

There is no end to the list of activities that the guests, young and old, could participate in. Steamboat was all ready well-known for the mineral baths that could be used year round, and for the more adventurous, there were the beautiful mountains and meadows that were always abundant with wildlife.

Guests usually came to Steamboat Springs by way of railroad, and since the Cabin Hotel was right across from the depot, it got most of the business. There were several other hotels and boarding houses in Steamboat at the time, but none of them seemed to equal the size and distinction of the Cabin. The Sheraton and the Onyx Hotels were close competitors but like the Cabin Hotel, neither is around today.

During the winter months, the hotel played host to many local special events and gatherings.

"When they had the first Winter Carnival," Dorothy Wither told us, "it was held on Woodchuck Hill where the (Northwestern Community) College is located today. And since the hill was right across from the hotel, all the guests who wanted to stay there rented rooms on the upper levels so that they could watch the jumping."

"When they had the second Winter Carnival, they had a Carnival Queen. She came down this beautiful stairway (in the hotel) and went into the dining room where there was a stage and a throne."

Alma Baer, another long-time resident, recalls a few childhood memories of the gun club dinners that were held at the hotel.

"The gun club would have contests, and they would split the club up into two teams and shoot it out. The team that broke the most blue rocks was the winner. They had lines to stand on, and they would throw the rocks into the air. The one that broke the most was the winner. The losers would have to entertain the winners. They would have big dinners at the Cabin Hotel."

A few years before the hotel burned down, it was taken over by the county because of failure to pay \$16,000 in delinquent taxes. By that time, though, the hotel was becoming slightly dilapidated, and it was no longer the showplace of Steamboat Springs.

Under a lease from the county commissioners, Mr. and Mrs. C.P. Homer began operating the hotel. They had previously been managers for an association of businessmen who had reopened the hotel a few years before, after it had been shut down for a short time. The Homers continued to operate the hotel until the time of its destruction.



### The biggest blaze in the history of the town

The fire was the biggest in the history of the town. J.V. Bradley, manager of the telephone company at the time, stated that on the day of the fire, more calls were put through than on any other day. The whole town was at the site of the fire. Even the schools were let out so the teachers and students could watch what was going on. No one at the time knew that two people were still caught inside. One of the two was Merle Sweet, a retired rancher who was staying at the hotel and recuperating from an illness. The other person was Mildred Keltner, who also was staying at the hotel. She had worked for many businesses in town, and was living at the hotel as a semi-permanent resident. Both died in the fire, but the other guests and residents managed to escape by windows and doors. One day later, all that was left of one of the most magnificent hotels in Colorado were two brick chimneys. These were shot down the next day in order to prevent an accident.

For 30 years after the disaster, the vacant lot upon which the hotel had once stood remained unoccupied. Then in 1964, another tragedy struck the small town. Buddy Werner, an Olympic skier from Steamboat was killed in an avalanche while being filmed for a skiing movie in Switzerland. The whole town was deeply moved. In 1967, on the site of the Cabin Hotel, the Buddy Werner Memorial Library was dedicated.

Not until the ski boom of the 1960's was another hotel equal to the size of the Cabin Hotel built. With the rising ski industry, it is easy to see why large hotels are needed in Steamboat. But it is amazing to think that a little town almost totally removed from the rest of the world would construct such a large structure as the Cabin Hotel back in 1910. It was truly Steamboat's finest cabin.



High water - Yampa River - 1917.

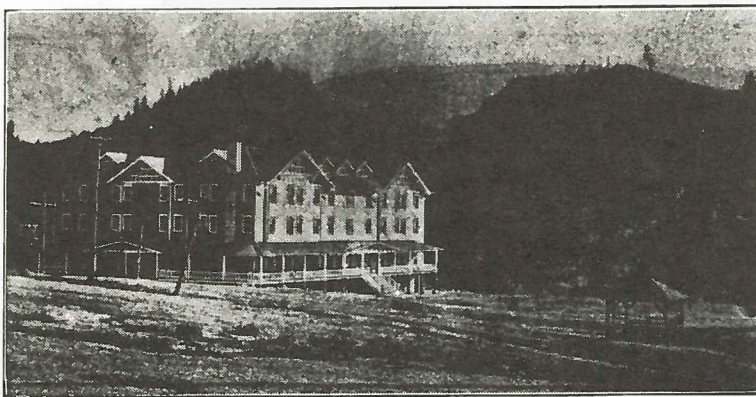


# Steamboat Cabin

H. S. DeLONG, Manager

HOTEL EUROPEAN    ABSOLUTELY MODERN  
ONE HUNDRED ROOMS

Located in the Most Delightful Resort  
in the Mountains

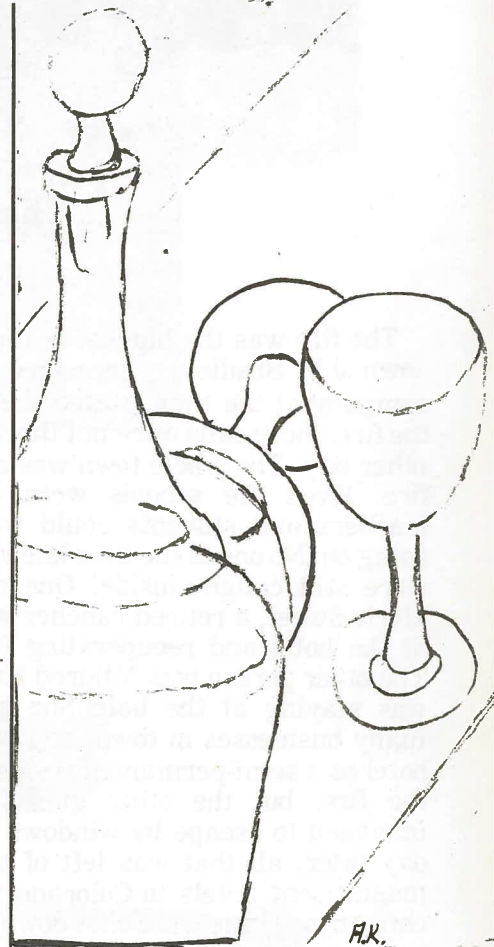


Within a Short Distance of the Famous  
Mineral Springs

One Block from the Moffat Depot

Large Sample Rooms for Commercial Men

Splendid Cafe in Connection



Many thanks to:

Dee Richards, Dorothy Wither,  
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