"ANYTIME'S A GOOD TIME IF YOU USE IT RIGHT"

By Dale Coyner and Lance Miles

"It was a small ranch for that time, but most people figured on homesteading and then trying to buy land to enlarge on. Dad built a log house on the homestead and started to clear land. He cleared up land to raise a crop of grain on and had enough irrigation water to irrigate a little land for meadows. Our main livestock was a herd of Jersey milk cows and Dad and my older brother had to work out down in the valley to provide hay and feed for them."

Leo Coyner was born in Oklahoma in 1908 and came with his family to Clark, Colorado, in 1910. Clark is a small ranching and resort community twenty miles northwest of Steamboat Springs. His father took up a homestead in March of the same year. They had come here in an immigrant car bringing with them their household goods, livestock and machinery. Immigrant cars were a means of railroad transportation for families to travel with all their possessions.

"Winters were pretty bad on the homestead. In fact, most of the time we moved down to a cabin we had built by the Elk River. We moved down there in the winter, and usually fed out our supply of livestock feed we had stored on the ranch before we left in the fall.

"While we were at the homestead, the job of splitting wood and getting it belonged to my brother and I. We had 20 Jersey cows that had to be milked every night and morning. We ran our cows on open range which was one of the provisions in homesteading. If you joined the National Forest, you were entitled to run so many cattle without charge, so we ran ours on the reserve. Lord only knows where you would find the cows when night came, unless you watched in what direction they left. We did not know where to go to look for them in the evening, and once in a while they would stay out all night because my brother and I could not find them. We had to search for them on foot because we did not have a saddle horse at that time. It was quite a problem, sometimes they would be just a little ways and sometimes they would be three or four miles. You never know just how far you were going to have to go when you left."

"In haying you pert' near always asked for help and someone always would."

Leo and his dad also did a lot of hunting while he was growing up on the homestead. They hunted a lot of deer and had to keep the bears out of the livestock. "Back in the times we were on the homestead, deer and grouse and that sort of thing were plentiful. When I hunted I was after the meat and I wasn't just out for the sport of it. The two went together, but the primary reason for hunting was for meat. I have always had an interest in guns. At one time I had a .45-70 and I carried it a good number of years, but it got so heavy I finally decided if I was gonna pack it any more I was gonna put wheels on it and haul it. So I finally got me a .30-.30 rifle. I used that up until the last four or five years, then I went ahead and got a .30-06."

Deer hunting - 1940

When Leo was a boy his family decided to take their first long trip out of the Steamboat area. His dad purchased their first car for that journey. "We went back to Kansas and Oklahoma in 1919. Dad wanted to go see his father and mother. For the trip back there, Dad bought his first automobile. It was a 1917 Model T Ford, and we were ten days making the trip from Clark to Southeast Kansas. Of course, it was a slow proposition. Mother went by train, but Dad had just acquired the Ford so the rest of the family came with him. Dad did not know much about driving, but of course my older brother thought he knew all about it. He wanted to drive but Dad would not let him. One of our neighbors by the name of Edmondson wanted to go back to Oklahoma so he drove us as far as Kansas. During the trip, Dad learned to drive the old Model T, and my older brother got to where Dad would trust him to drive. But he'd sit there with his eye right on the speedometer and any time Delbert got over twenty miles per hour he'd have to slow down. Dad would give him a bad time about going too fast and that was one of the reasons it took ten days to make it back to Kansas. We had our camping equipment and that old Model T looked like a freight car. We had a grub box loaded and tied on the spare tire and we looked like Okies goin' down the road. When

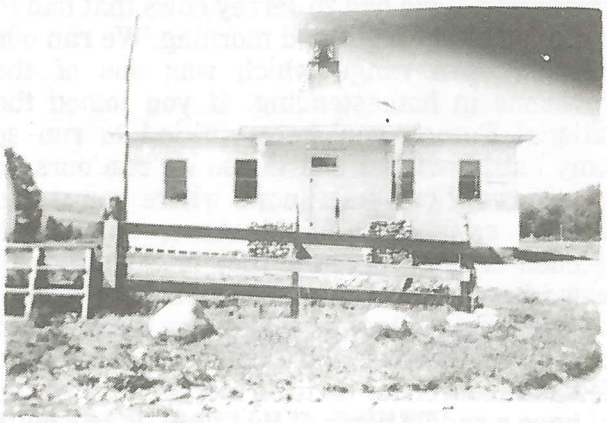
we came back from Kansas and Oklahoma in the spring of 1919 we had quite a time getting home. We had to go through Wyoming because a spring snow storm closed the Colorado passes and that was the only road open. The old Ford broke down while we were in Wyoming and we had to go to Laramie for repairs. While we were there we did not have anything to drink but alkali water.

"All of the roads in the country were dirt. There were very few gravel roads at that time and all of the road work was done with horses and horse graders. There was no such thing as tractors and power equipment then. I can remember very well the road to Clark back at that time. It was just two tracks with grass growing in the middle and ran along the Elk River. When I was just a kid, Stanley Larson bought a Buick car and made it from Steamboat to Clark in thirty minutes. Everybody thought that was really tearing up the sod! Really it was, because the road was narrow and cracked and really wasn't in very good shape, but you could see his dust for a mile before he got up there.

Tearin' up the sod

"When we lived out at Clark, Dad would get to town maybe once or twice a year. A good many years went by that Mother and us kids never got to town at all. We used to have no fresh fruit unless it came by parcel post. I can remember getting price lists in the mail from Paonia and Palisade, Colorado. You could order what fresh fruit you wanted and they would send it parcel post. Of course you didn't buy very much fresh fruit that way, but I can remember Mother getting a couple of bushels of peaches and pears and maybe some apples. In the stores there was no such thing as fresh fruit; it was all dried apples and dried pears and prunes and that sort of thing."

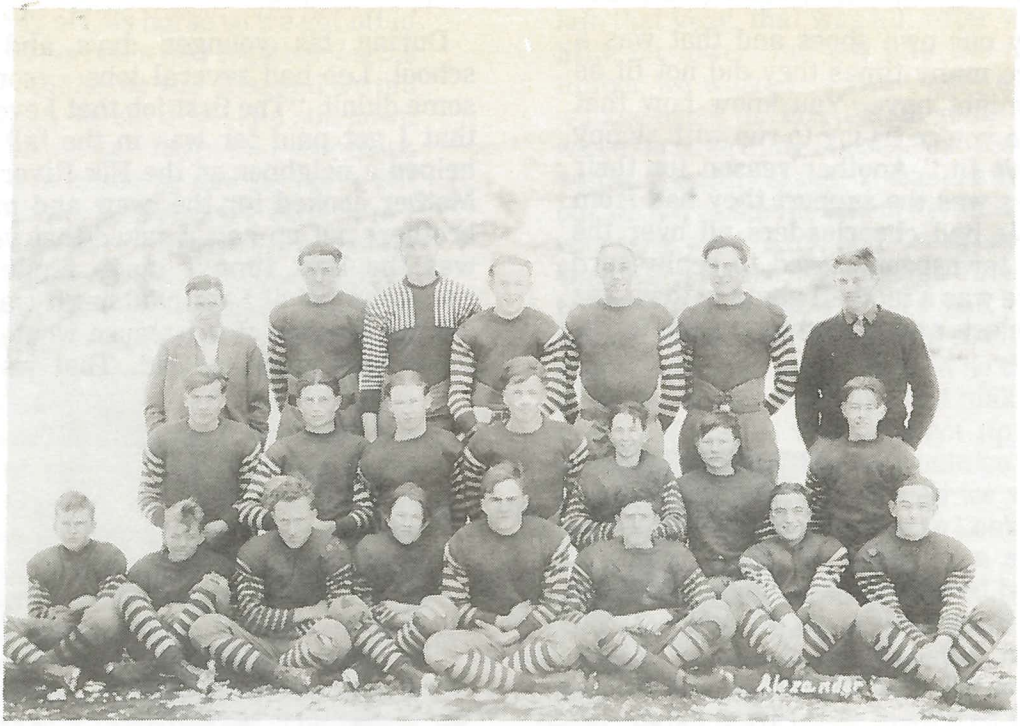
Schooling in Leo's life was a story in itself. "The school was down in Clark; that's where I went for my first year. My second year of school they provided a new building where it sits now. That was in 1915. My dad was on the school board and they had quite a round in the community because some of them wanted a school there and some of them wanted it somewhere else. I remember two of our neighbors had a fist fight over it. They finally decided to put the school house where it is and the county agreed to put a bridge across the river. As a general rule, about thirty kids went to the new, two room schoolhouse. Audrey and Hazel Light were the first teachers. I didn't get into much trouble but there were some kids that did, Carl Brown used to get a lickin' about every day. If he didn't get his daily lickin', there was something wrong with him. At that time a willow switch was standard equipment."



The Clark school built in 1915.

Leo's burro was also standard equipment in getting to school. He had to travel about seven miles a day to and from school as long as he lived on the homestead. "We had a burro that I would ride, he would unload me about as fast as I could get on, and his skin was so loose you could not get a saddle on him. He would just stop, duck his head and away the saddle would go. So Dad attached a cripper to the saddle and fastened it under his tail and that solved the problem."

Leo was involved in athletics and social activities during his high school years. "I went to high school here in Steamboat and I graduated in 1928. It was where the junior high is now. I never had a date until I was in high school, and that's when I learned to dance too. We used to just go to the dances at the old Grange Hall on the lower Elk River and watch everyone else have fun, of course we had fun too. In high school, Florence Adams and a friend decided I needed to learn to dance. At the class party they wouldn't let me stand out once. First one and then the other would dance with me until I learned. I got to havin' a good time and that's all it took."



1927 Steamboat football team:
Coyner third from the left, back row.

Leo went out for several sports in high school including football and basketball. "I played football for Steamboat and I played basketball for them too. I never did get to go out for track because I had pneumonia. We played Oak Creek, Hayden, Craig and Meeker. When we went to Meeker, that was quite a trip. Fred Foster used to be sheriff and he had a Reo Speed wagon with curtains on the back. It had a top on the rear and metal slats on the sides. There was a long seat on each side in the back of the Speed Wagon and that's the way we went to the ball games. Of course some of the townspeople would go and take their cars and take some of the boys if they needed transportation. They took the cheerleaders and what members of the band that would go at the time. When we went to Meeker that was an overnight trip. We'd usually go down the afternoon before the game and then we'd stay overnight. We'd play the game and we'd get home late the night of the game. Sometimes we'd go down early the day of the game and stay overnight after the game depending somewhat on the weather. If the weather was good we could make it down the same day as the game, if the weather was bad, why we'd have to go the day before to make sure we got there. The trip to Craig was easy enough to go and come in the same day to play a game. It wasn't an hour's ride or less, like it is now, it took three hours to drive to Craig.

"Our teams were pretty successful. The year I was a junior we had a line that averaged 190 lbs. That was pretty good sized boys for a high chool football team. I played football with two of the Dougherty boys. Bill Dougherty was kind of the star of our team since he was a natural born football player. He was like some of the players they have now in the professionals. They always have one outstanding player who can make better gains and more yardage than any other player, so you more or less rely on that particular man and that's how Bill was on our team."

One of the reasons we were successful, it seems, was because of the practices. "Yeah, we had some pretty rough practices. Coach Roach used to put us through the mill pretty good. Part of the time we didn't have enough people to make two teams among ourselves to scrimmage, so some of the boys that had played football the years before would come to the field and give us a good scrimmage workout. We used to play on the old rodeo grounds over there. There wasn't much grass on it and sometimes it was pretty rough going. As you know we used to play the latter part of the season with a little snow on the ground and that gets a little tough as anyone knows who's ever done it."

"We didn't have the best equipment in the world, but we did have helmets. Of course they were different than the ones they have now since most of them were made of leather lined with some kind of padding. We had regular football uniforms. They were not always matched up, but we always had some kind of jerseys and pants.

We had to buy our own shoes and that was a drawback since many times they did not fit as well as they might have. You know how that works out when you're trying to run with sloppy shoes that don't fit." Another reason for their athletic success was the support they had from their fans. "We had cheerleaders all over the place and the townspeople used to really turn out. When there was a football game in town, the stores would close and everybody went to the game."

During his younger days and throughout school, Leo had several jobs – some paid and some didn't. "The first job that I ever worked on that I got paid for was in the fall of 1918. We helped a neighbor on the Elk River put up hay. Mother cooked for the crew and my two older brothers put up hay. I raked that year and that was the first time I made anything. I don't remember what I got paid but it wasn't much. I did not see any of it because whatever the kids made was given to Dad. That was what was

1927 Steamboat basketball team, Leo with the ball.

After graduating from high school, Leo went to the University of Denver to further his studies and play football. "I was at D.U. in 1928 and '29 and the first semester in 1930. While I was in college, I stayed part of the time in the Sigma Phi Epsilon Fraternity house, and part of the time I lived with some folks right near the University. I worked for my room and took care of the furnace and the lawn. The winter I was there, I dug all of the dirt out of a half sized basement under the house and painted all of the outside woodwork in the spring. I also worked at the University cafeteria for two meals a day. That was about the size of it and that's all I needed anyway. At that time the schools were not as big as they are now, but I was only able to go a year and a half. The depression hit in '29 so you couldn't even buy a job by 1930. You couldn't pay the $400 to 500 a year tuition. It doesn't sound like much now, but it sure was hard to get a hold of then."

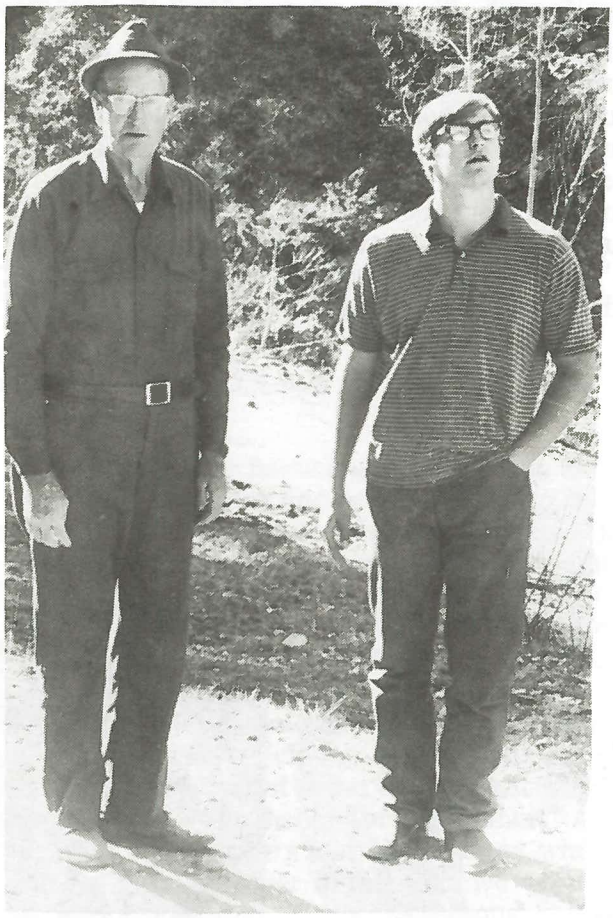
expected. Haying was just one of the jobs in the country that had to be done. In haying you pert' near always asked for help and someone always would.

"We always milked fifteen to twenty head of cows and Mother always had a flock of chickens. Dad raised lots of hogs. As a matter of fact, we were raising them when the Moffat Tunnel was finished. Dad had about a hundred and fifty head of hogs that he shipped by rail car to Denver. He had his picture taken since he was the first shipper with a carload of hogs through the Moffat Tunnel. There was another carload on the train, but his was in the lead."

Leo combined farming with a mine job in his adult years. "After I left college, I came back here and helped Dad in the gas business. In 1933 I got married and we moved to Clark for a few years. Up there is where our children, Delmar, Jean and Carma, were born. We bought the place we were renting, but at that time it was hard for

the kids to get to high school. It meant my wife would have to move to town with them. We did not like that prospect, so we sold the place and bought another one in Phippsburg. That is when I started working at the mine in 1947."

For twenty years he worked at the Edna Coal Mine about two miles from Oak Creek. "When I first started I worked around the tipple. I was the weigh master and dropped and loaded railroad cars in the tipple. We had to stop the load on the scales, get off, weigh it and take it down. I did that for quite a number of years until I had a siege of blood clots in my legs and had to leave. When I came back, there was a job open for bid on the hill dumping truck loads of coal into the hopper. They would come in and I had to get them to their dump spot. It was a much easier job than the one I had and much easier on my legs too. I continued that job until I retired in 1976." I was making $12.00 a shift which would have been a dollar an hour when I first started. We kept on getting our wages raised until in 1976, I was making $16.60 an hour."



Leo points out the mine to Dale.

The people of Steamboat relied on coal from the nearby mines of the area. "All the coal used to be hauled to Steamboat by sled and horsepower. There were years and years when there was no such thing as a truck to bring coal. They used to haul coal from the old Block Mine located right under the Pilot Knob. They also hauled it from Mt. Harris and McGregor. There were little wagon mines scattered around the country. Tom Cherago had one little mine in 20 Mile Park that he operated by himself. Then the McKorskies at Milner had a mine that they ran with wagons and sleds. They hauled coal with four horses and number 5 sleds with huge boxes on them. Stanley Larson and another man named Gibbs were well known coal haulers in this area. They had a big outfit to haul coal and they would haul about seven tons with four horses from the Block Mine at Pilot Knob to wherever someone needed a load of coal. If someone wanted Cherego coal then they'd go to that mine and bring it from there. Sometimes they went to the McKorskie mine, but most of the coal brought to Steamboat was from the Block Mine. It was some of the best coal in the country.

"My brother and I used to make a little Christmas money hauling coal during Christmas vacation. We'd take a light sled that would haul a ton and a half and a single team of horses and we'd haul a load of coal. We'd go to the mine and get it one day and then take it to town the next day. We lived out on the lower Elk River at the time, and I think we got $3.00 a ton delivered. At that time you could buy it at the mine for $1.00 a ton. A lot of the little wagon mines didn't have scales so they'd measure your box and calculate so many cubic feet to the ton, and that's the way they sold coal. They used to heat the high school and grade school buildings with coal. Later the old creamery had a boiler and they piped steam from there to the school buildings. They have been torn down now though. They'd run that steam pipe all the way from the location of the Allen's Men's Store (828 Lincoln Avenue) up to the school building on the 300 block of Seventh Street. The heat from the steam would keep the snow melted off the strip through there. The first nice days of spring the kids would all be lined up on the bare ground where the steam pipe ran to play marbles. That was a big thing — playing marbles where the steam had melted the snow!"

Not only was coal a necessity for Steamboaters, but ice was too. Leo described the process men used to cut and store ice. "There was an ice house out on what they called Baer's Lake along Fish Creek. They would go out when the ice was about three feet thick with a few men to cut the ice and put it in storage in an ice house. They had what they called an ice plow. It was a beam about two feet long with a blade that ran the length of the plow. The blade was built somewhat like a saw. There were teeth on the bottom edge and handles like a walking plow. They'd hook a sharp, shod horse onto it and plow straight across the ice. Usually the plow blade was about eight inches wide. They would measure the blocks and plow it crosswise to mark it off. They used ice saws that were about

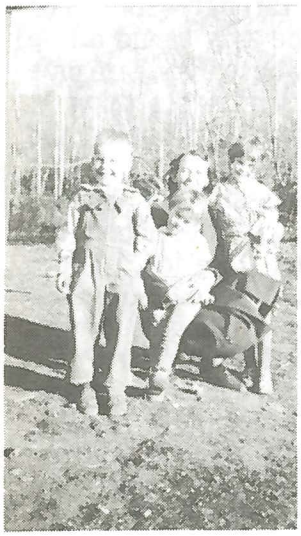
six feet long with teeth in them and a crossbar handle so that you could stand up and start sawing in the cracks where the ice plow had gone. They didn't saw too much by hand. After the ice plow had marked the ice and carved down the width of the blade, they'd use a spud bar. It was like a crowbar but had a blade on the bottom about eight to ten inches wide. It was wedge shaped, about half to three quarters of an inch wide at the top, tapering down to a fairly sharp edge. You could just take that spud bar and jam it in the crack where the ice plow had gone. It would break off those ice blocks perfect just about every time. Each block would weigh about 350 pounds.

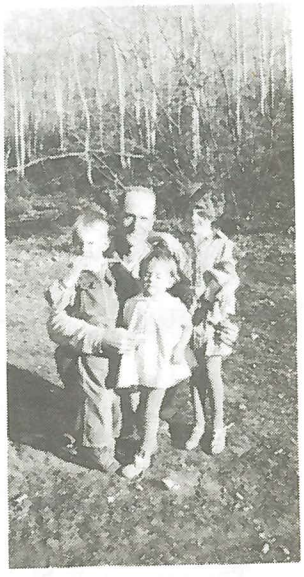
"They would usually take three blocks at a time off of the water to put in the ice house. They did that with a team and a long rope. A chute came out of the ice house to the lake's edge with another chute running down into the water at an angle. It looked just like a cattle chute. They would float these big blocks of ice into the mouth of this chute, and they had a loop on the rope big enough to go over the blocks of ice. The rope went around on pulleys. The team of horses would then walk out from the ice and pull the blocks into the ice house where it would take a slide. There were two or three men inside to stack and take care of the ice. Later when you needed ice, they would take the spud bar and break off what you wanted and sell it to you. The farmers would come with their sleds and hayracks and pull up into the chute and load what they wanted. I think they sold the ice, cut and loaded, for 50 cents a ton which was cheaper than they could cut it themselves.

"The future looks good".

"The creamery would also use the ice through the summer to freeze ice cream and for storage. Stores had to use ice boxes to keep their foods too. It was years before anyone kew about refrigeration."

Ice houses, coal wagons, homesteads, Model T Fords and one roomed schools—all have been part of Steamboat's past. Leo Coyner has been part of that past too for sixty years. He looks to the future with optimism. "The future is good. I can't help but feel that way. A man once said, 'Anytime is a good time if you know how to use it.' That's the situation here now. If I was young, I'd take my chances right here!"





The Coyner Family
Leo's the youngest one.