

*“I brought the last mail into Steamboat from Yampa on the stage. That was the last time I took the stage to Yampa.”*



*Fred Foster, the man of many jobs.*

*by Sharon Kelley*

“I worked different places from pillar to post,” said Fred Foster as he reflected on his life. Fred is 94 years old. As he stated, he’s done about everything one man can do in a lifetime. Everything from farming, to being the sheriff of Routt County for sixteen years.

Fred was born in Pennsylvania on October 22, 1882. He moved to Nebraska when he was two, and then on to Denver at the age of six. He started school in North Denver at the Swansee School.

“We lived there about two blocks from the school and I think the old school house is still standing, it was last time I was there, There was about 100 or 150 kids in the school then. I think in those days they ran the grades up to about the ninth or tenth. When I was eight, I guess we moved up to the mountains to a little place called Pine Grove, on the Platte River. I went to about the sixth grade there. I lived there with my parents until I was about twenty.

“I left Pine Grove and went over to Idaho Springs and stayed with my brother at the Lambertine Mine. They wouldn’t put me on at the mine ’til I was of age, so I started working there the next year. I worked there about a year and I got tired of that, so I went to Denver

and messed around over there. I didn’t particularly like Denver, there wasn’t much wages then, and I had no education so I could get an office job. I worked at whatever I could get. I stayed there awhile, don’t know exactly how long.

My brother came to Routt County and got a ranch up on the Mesa. He wanted me to move over and help him farm, that’s when I came to Routt County. There was only about five hundred people here then, just a handful. In 1903, two other fellows and myself went over to the Snake River and worked for the Gardeners all summer.” Fred thoughtfully recalled, “While I was at Gardeners, I voted for my first time. I voted for Teddy Roosevelt. That summer a horse fell on my leg and nearly broke it. I couldn’t ride my horse so I caught a ride to Columbine and took the stage on into Steamboat. My mother moved to Steamboat Springs so I stayed with her.

“I worked different places from pillar to post. They was running a placer up in Hahn’s Peak then. I guess the company that had it then made about three million dollars. They got all the loose gold out, no one ever found anything that amounted to much after that one placer was through.



their mash, it was sizzling away, you could have heard a pin drop. They sent them both to the Pen, they had to serve a year then.

There was a hotel in Mt. Harris and they had a restaurant and a long meeting house in front of the building. They made wine for their customers to drink and when we run on to them they had five or six fifty gallon barrels of wine. I wasn't going to take it. But Mr. Carpenter, he was the district attorney, he wanted me to take it. So I got a pick-up and went and got it. We put it in the vault there, and left. One day I went down there and wine was running all down under the door into the cellar, and it sure stunk around there. So I really got rid of it then. Soon as it got warm, you know, it busted the barrels. They were full to begin with and that wine sure traveled.

The only thing that happened of any excitement was when a guy robbed the bank. The bank was right across the street from the drugstore. He only got about \$1500.00. We didn't have much money back in those days. The guy wasn't a bad guy. He just gambled a little too much. The boys caught him right out of Steamboat. He got seven years in the Pen. He just died here about a year ago, I think.

In 1929 or 1930, I took a prisoner over to Canon City. When I got there, there was a riot. I guess it got started by a hard case man that wasn't quite right in his head. He decided he wasn't going to stay in the pen anymore and started killing anyone that got in his way. When I got there all the policemen and guards were shooting at the

I met the wife, Bertha Williams about 1912, somewhere's along there, we went together for four years. Got married in 1916. I just worked around for a couple years.

I bid on a stage line in 1918, and I got it. I hauled mail, passengers, freight and other supplies up to Columbine. Since the mail had to be taken everyday, I never got a day off, not even Thanksgiving or Christmas. In the winter when the snow was deep we'd take the sled, but you still had to have good horses. As the snow got deeper, the horses would keep it packed down. The horses had the world beat though, the good ones could walk a trail as wide as your hand. worst time was the Spring, when the snow started melting. You had to go slow because if one of

The worst time was the spring, when the snow started melting. You had to go slow because if one of the horses fell through the crust, they could go lame trying to get out. The line was about thirty-two miles long. It took all day to get to Columbine and back.

I had an old coat, it was made of dog hide. I used to wear it in the spring. And it would get so heavy when it was wet, that I could hardly stand up under it. When it got wet it didn't smell so good but it sure did shed the water.

When I had the stage line I bought a gas station. In the fall of 1922 I sold it. The wife and I and the boy, Tom, all went to California. We stayed there that winter and come home the next spring. Then we bummed around, worked at different things until 1924, then I ran for Sheriff. The other fella won, and that left him 1926 and 1927. I come back in 1928 and won the office. I went in in 1929. I stayed in office until 1942. When I was sheriff I got paid \$191.00 a month. Practically nothing compared to what they make now. I had four or five deputies scattered around here and there, and the undersheriff.

We got a three hundred gallon still while I was sheriff. It was up about two miles north of Harris on Wolf Creek. These two guys was running still and we slipped up way around and come from back of the building. Why, they were boiling



*This picture is of Fred and his wife, Bertha Williams Foster.*

*They were on their way to the Fourth of July Parade, Fred was the Parade Marshall that year.*



*“Fred was quite a horseman in his time”, stated Fred’s nephew Dick Miles. This picture comes from Fred’s photo album.*

In the early part of 1906 I drew a freight team from Kremmling to McCoy. A four horse team. It took five days round trip. I was hauling black powder to blast out the railroad. I drove that about a year.

I then moved up to Leadville and worked for the round house. I took the engines out and turned them around on a turn table. I got real sick while I was up there. It took me a while to get back on my feet again. They say that when a man gets sick up in Leadville they won’t live too long so as soon as I was able, I went back to Pine on the railroad. I stayed there until the fall, and about haying time I went to Steamboat.

I started driving stage from Steamboat to Yampa. I brought the last mail from Yampa into Steamboat. The train went to Yampa, but it was a couple more years until it got to Steamboat. The post office was in the back of what’s now The Cameo. I started driving in the fall and we got a bad snow, about three feet. I was taking the stage out everyday, but I couldn’t make it. The stage I usually took was stuck. So they wanted me to take the big stage out. The same size rig that’s in Steamboat there by the museum. I didn’t want to try it because I didn’t have any clothes that was warm enough. It was bad that night. But, my boss finally talked me into it. I left Steamboat about 4:00 and I was up at Grouch Creek Jones about midnight. That’s about 12 miles from Steamboat Springs. The hubs of the stage were dragging in the snow that’s how deep it was. The poor horses I had were so tired that all they could do was a slow walk. So I stayed there until the next morning. Then I went on to Yampa the next morning. The rest of the winter when it snowed we took the sled.

When I brought the last mail into Steamboat, that was the last time I took the stage to Yampa. Also when the railroad was built into Steamboat the town band wanted to go up to Sidney and ride the train back to Steamboat, so I took them up there in the sled. The railroad got into Steamboat in 1908 I believe.

Well, that winter I went up to Hahn’s Peak and worked in a gold and silver mine. It was at the top of the peak on the Columbine side. I went up there in March and stayed until October. There was about nine feet of snow on the ground when I got there. It is about eleven thousand feet right at Columbine, and I was working up on the peak always. It was cold up there where I worked.

Then I worked at different places until about 1910. In 1910 they built the sawmill in Steamboat and I helped them with that. The year after that I bought a Stanley Steamer from a guy. I was going to haul passengers in it, but it wasn’t too good in the winter. The water was always freezin’ up in it. I was going to take it to Salt Lake, but I didn’t get there that year. We got to Vernal and the engine went haywire. I took the engine out and sent it to Denver and got it fixed up. So the next year I went down, and the man that I got it from told me to trade it off on a Ford. So I did and I drove the Ford home to Steamboat.

One time it took me three days to get to Denver in the ol’ Steamer. We ran out of water before we got to the top of the pass. We had to go over and haul some to get the Steamer runnin’ again. So when we got to the top we stayed there all night. The next day we made it to Empire, if I remember right, we went on to Denver the third day.

*Fred and his niece, and nephew Dick and Agnus Miles*

*celebrating Fred's ninety-fourth birthday*



building with machine guns. They shot out all the windows and they were making a real mess of the place. I thought it was silly because it wasn't doing any good. They decided to set off some dynamite after that and I really never figured out why they did that either. All the dynamite did was blow the cover off of one of those big sewer manholes (they're about 4 ft. across, ya know). Later on that night one of the armored cars from Denver came up and they wanted someone to drive it down the hall. They were going to put a couple of men in the back so that they could shoot out of it, which they did. Well, I volunteered to drive it and when I got to that manhole, I straddled it with my front wheels but one of my back wheels fell into it and there we sat. The windows in that car were supposed to be bullet proof but they looked pretty thin to me. One of the men in the back got out and went back but me and another fella just sat there. We got out early the next morning when it quieted down a little.

About dawn, a guard came out and said we could come in that everyone was dead. So I went in and looked around as best I could. There was dead men everywhere. There were about fifteen killed, I guess. I looked around there, then left and didn't go back in there, it wasn't a pleasant sight.

After I got out of the sheriff's office in 1942, I bummed around until about 1945. I started driving the school bus in 1945. I drove up the Elk River until 1952. After that I drove a truck for awhile. And in 1957 (I was 75 then) I laid off and quit working for anyone."

When asked about the contrast of young kids now compared to when Fred was young, he got sort of a real serious expression on his face and said simply: "There ain't no comparison, young people don't know how to get out and rough it."

I met Fred in 1970. My family rented a house from him. I've learned a lot from him and we have had many good times. He's now residing at the nursing home in Craig, Colorado.