

“I can remember when there was no sign of a town. It was just ranch after ranch after ranch.”

By Cindy Sandelin



**Mabel and Martin Myers holding Melvin Lewis Myers, 4, and
Thelma Ella Myers, 2, in 1907.**

One of Oak Creek's oldest citizens, and one who has lived each of her ninety-five years to the fullest, Mrs. Mabel Myers first came to Oak Creek on June 28, 1899, via covered wagon. She was born in Washington, Iowa, on June 27, 1882. Her folks then moved to Kansas, and when she was three her family came to Colorado.

“I've been in Colorado ever since. We first went to Pueblo and then on to Breckenridge

where my father leased some mines. I was sent to Denver to stay with my uncle's family because it was so far from the mines to the school. Later the next spring, Papa and Mama came out to Denver. We lived there for about a year and a half to two years. Then Papa leased a ranch out by Hudson, Colorado, and I finished my schooling there.

“Papa never liked to stay in any one place, so

he came out to Oak Creek looking for a ranch. The next year my whole family came by covered wagon. It was less than two hundred miles from Hudson where we were living to Oak Creek, but it took us well over a month to make the trip.

"We packed the dresser and trunks and things in the bottom part of the wagon first, and then we put Papa's and Mama's bed on top. We had two tents that my brothers and I slept in.

"When we got to Berthoud Pass we couldn't get over the mountain. It had been an awful hard winter, and we'd started too early. They didn't have machines then, so the men had to shovel the snow off the roads. We stayed at a place on the Frasier River called Spruce Lodge for about two weeks before we could get going again. Then, when we got to Hot Sulphur Springs, we found that the bridge over the Colorado River had been washed out. It had washed out just the night before. We had to go around to Rock Creek where we were going to ford the river.

"It was early spring, the water was pretty deep, and although Papa thought he remembered where the ford had been, he missed it. When the wheels of the wagon hit the bank, the double trees on the leaders broke. There we were, and the team that was on the wheel couldn't pull us out.

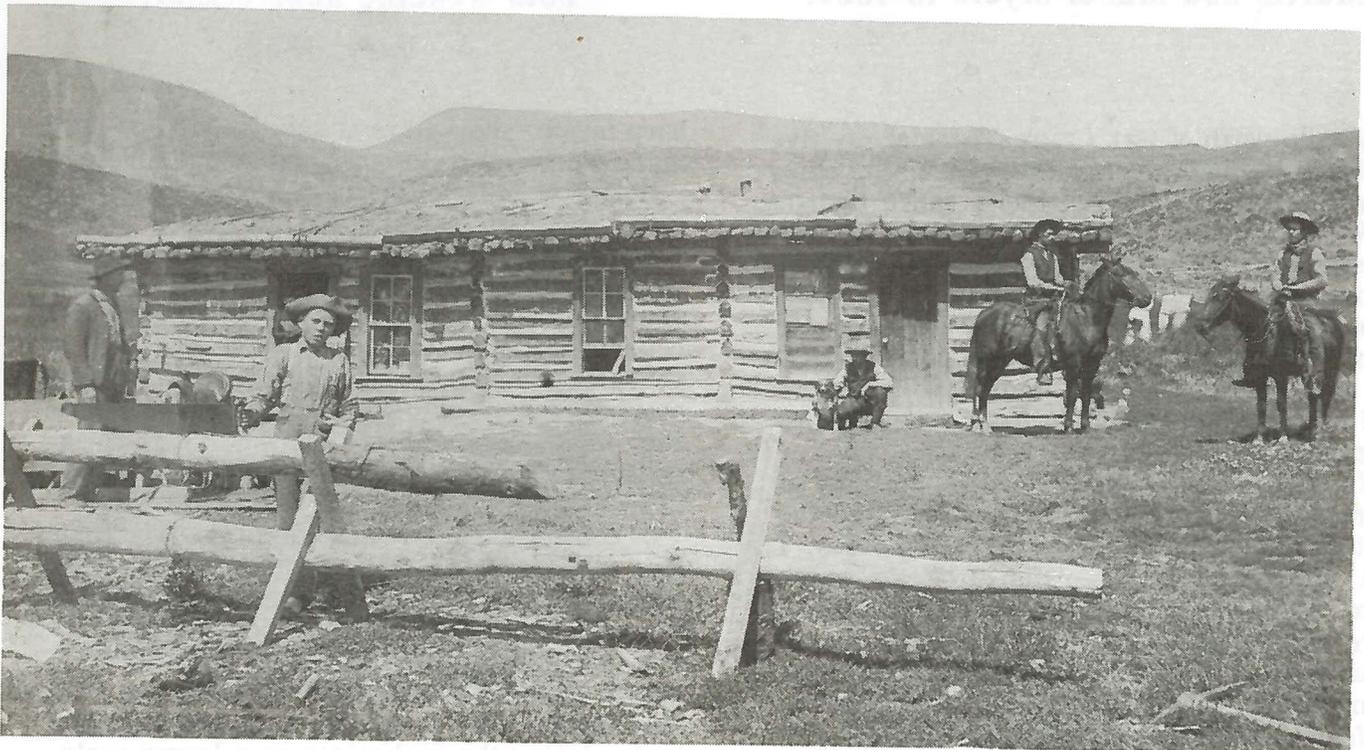
"Out past Toponas they have a stopping place for travelers called the Gate's Ranch. When the

wagon got stuck, Papa went on with the team up to the house, got a double tree and pulled us out of the water. After they pulled us out, Papa went up to the woods and hewed out another double tree for himself. The water didn't quite ever come into the trunks and things in the wagon. We finally made it to Oak Creek on the 28th of June, 1899, the day after my seventeenth birthday. We had left Hudson, Colorado, on May 9th.

"If we could have come clear through without getting stuck and everything, I don't suppose it would've taken more than a couple weeks to make the trip, even with the covered wagon. But we had too big a load, really, for the four horses. The kids and I walked most of the way, especially uphill. We always had to walk up the hills and were there lots of them!! More than there are now. They weren't only steep, they were sidling, too.

"A short time later, Papa and Mama went on to Portland, Oregon, but I stayed here because I had gotten married during that time to Martin V. Myers."

Mrs. Myers chuckled and said, "Just in the common and ordinary way," when asked how she met her husband. "When I got here, he was here. His folks had driven cattle over and come to Oak Creek in a covered wagon in 1887, about twelve years before me. He was already located and had his ranch. His folks lived on the Oak Creek and our ranch was about one and one



1890 picture of the Myers' ranch near Oak Creek.



Martin and Mabel Myers in 1902.



Mr. and Mrs. Martin Myers on their
50th wedding anniversary,
January, 1952.

half mile north of Oak Creek. Three of my five children were born out on that ranch. The twins were born on Martin's mother's ranch though.

"We had lots of hard work, but we'd get together to sing and dance. I'd never danced before in my life before I came to Oak Creek. Papa was just terribly against dancing. He didn't like it a bit, but he said I could go and I'd see how foolish it was. It didn't look foolish to me! I thought it was a lot of fun, the quadrilles especially.

"It was mostly square dances, and, of course, they had the waltzes. I never liked the waltzes as well, but I did like those quadrilles. I still think they're a lot of fun. I like to watch them. Sometimes there were barn dances. They were held anyplace that was big enough to have a dance in. Some people would clear out their living rooms, or we'd use the schoolhouses. On the fourth of July they'd make a big platform and fix it up for the dancing. It was always fiddle and

harp music. They always had something that made you want to step out and step up-lively."

Here Mrs. Myers stopped in her narration and with another chuckle did a lively little wiggle in her chair. Imagine how it would be to have lived a long, full life, be ninety-five years young, and still look at the future with the spirit, boundless enthusiasm, and optimism of a youngster. And there are plenty of youngsters around Mrs. Myers to show her the way, because she has twelve grandchildren, thirty-seven great-grandchildren, and three great-great-grandchildren with two more on the road.

Of course, things are a bit different now than they were when Mabel had only her own five children romping around their ranch, "I remember when there was no sign of a town. It was just ranch after ranch around here. It wasn't until about 1905 that the first sign of a town began, when people began to be interested in developing the coal mines on a larger scale.

There were people mining coal before that, but it was mainly for their own use and few people sold coal.

"The first town was a tent town. The tent houses had a wooden floor and wooden walls about four feet high with a tent on top for the roof. When the first train came, in 1906, the town grew.

"Originally the round house for the railroad was supposed to be at Oak Creek. The round house was a building fixed so that the train engines could be run into it on the track, and it would be turned around by machinery so that the train would come out facing in the other direction.

"They had all the land cleared out for it on some property near Oak Creek and had it all fixed up to start building, but they never did. The railroad people thought that everything was settled, but they thought they ought to make sure that they had an understanding with the owners of the land. It was a good thing they did, too, because they found that the price the owners were asking was so terribly high that they quit all work and went up to Phippsburg and put the round house in there.

"They had a little train that went up to Phippsburg all the time. It carried miners from Oak Creek up to the Moffat Coal Mine and the Victor American Coal Mine.

"I think the Moffat Mine opened in 1904. It was

the first big coal mine. Soon after that the Victor American started opening a big mine on the other side of Oak Creek. The Moffat Mine was called the Perry Mine at first, but it was later changed to the Moffat."

Mrs. Thelma Myers Clark, one of Mabel's daughters, added to Mabel's narration, "My husband was the mine foreman of the Moffat Mine from 1928 until about 1931. At that time they were happy if they got one thousand tons of coal a day, and there were about four hundred men employed there. In those days it took so many more men to get out the coal than it does now. Except for the man that ran the cutting machines and those who worked the hoists and motors that pulled the cars, everything was done by hand.

"They did all the blasting at night when no miners were in the mine. The miners had drilled holes in the coal and had put the fuse and dynamite in during the day. Then the shot firer went in after all the men were out and shot the dynamite. After two or three hours the fire boss went in and made sure all the shots had fired and that all the 'rooms' were safe. The rooms were where the men worked.

"In those days the Moffat Mine was twelve feet of real good coal, so the men could stand up in it. They could work it so much easier than the low coal mines like the Keystone that was only four and one half feet high. The Victor American was pretty good size, too. I think it was only eight feet while the Moffat was twelve.

"A lot of the mines around here have rock on top which was really sandstone or limestone that had the imprint of dinosaur tracks. In those days, the men were so superstitious that a woman didn't dare go in the mine because they claimed a man would die the next day if a woman went in the mine. Of course, my husband didn't believe in that superstition, so when I told him I wanted to go in the mine, he took me in one night when all the men were out, and showed me the dinosaur tracks. They were inverted because the mud that carried the print was above the coal seam.

"There were three of them, about seven feet apart. It looked like an enormous three-toed chicken had stepped across the roof. When the mines were abandoned they had to be caved in, so the tracks aren't there anymore. The mines were also filled with water.

"When they mined the coal they always left big pillars of coal to hold up the roof, and they just worked around them. Also, they had to have water pumps because there's an awful lot of water in this country and they had to keep it out



Ninety-five years young, Mrs. Mabel Myers looks at the future with the optimism of a youngster.

of the mine. When they decided to abandon a slope, they 'pulled the pillars'.

"My brother-in-law was in charge of the Keystone mine when it closed. It was the last big mine to be abandoned. I tried to get him to get somebody to come in and keep the mine open for the dinosaur tracks. It seemed to me that someone could make an awful lot of money charging fifty cents for people to go in and see the dinosaur tracks right where they were.

"In those days, though, everyone who could possibly afford some other kind of heat would buy some other kind. That was how it was in the cities, too. Everyone used oil or gas because the coal dirtied the air and our houses. But a coal fire surely is warm. You can get warm by a coal fire as you can't get warm by any other kind of fire.

"A really beautiful coal is peacock coal. It's different from regular coal. It burns with very little ash and it has the colors of the rainbow in it. It isn't found in veins or seams-just pockets. Very little peacock coal is found.

"There was a house about halfway between Oak Creek and Hayden that was built by pioneers. They fixed the basement so that they could dig coal right out of a coal outcropping in the hillside. They had the coal right out of their basement. If they needed it they could just go down into the basement and dig some coal out of the wall. The property is now owned by the Energy Coal Mine, but the house is still standing. For years it was called The Brimble place after the people who lived there."

Mabel took up the story again, "We never had a problem with the miners except for the Wildcat Strike. That's what they call it now. There wasn't a strong coal miners' union but the miners struck anyway. People were out of work, they didn't have enough to eat, it was wintertime, and it was just terrible. I think that was in 1913. It was so terrible that the militia was sent in. The militia camped up on top of the hill where the school is now. They were here two or three months. Everyone had to give up their guns. No one could keep a gun around. My husband even had to get a permit to keep his 22 out on the ranch.

"It turned out that the president of the coal miners' union ran off with the secretary or something like that. They absconded all the money that had been collected for dues. It made it hard for the strikers. 'Course, the strike didn't last. It wasn't long 'til other miners came in and went to work. They couldn't keep them from it.



**Mrs. Mabel Myers may be tiny, but
good-naturedness and good-will abound
from every inch of her.**

By the next spring they were working all right. I think that was the only time the mine was ever shut down. Just as a precaution against any more strikes or trouble, they put a searchlight up on the hill above the Moffat Mine. They'd keep the whole area here under their supervision to see that no one came in that wasn't supposed to."

With all this in the past, however, Mabel Myers thinks of what the future holds, "I would like to go to Australia to visit my grandchildren. For the country as a whole, the outlook is good. I am optimistic, and I think that things are better-I believe that. There are so many, many changes but they are really for the better. Only I don't think we have as many people that will go to church, and I think they should. Also, I don't think we are as neighborly and friendly as we used to be-as we should be."