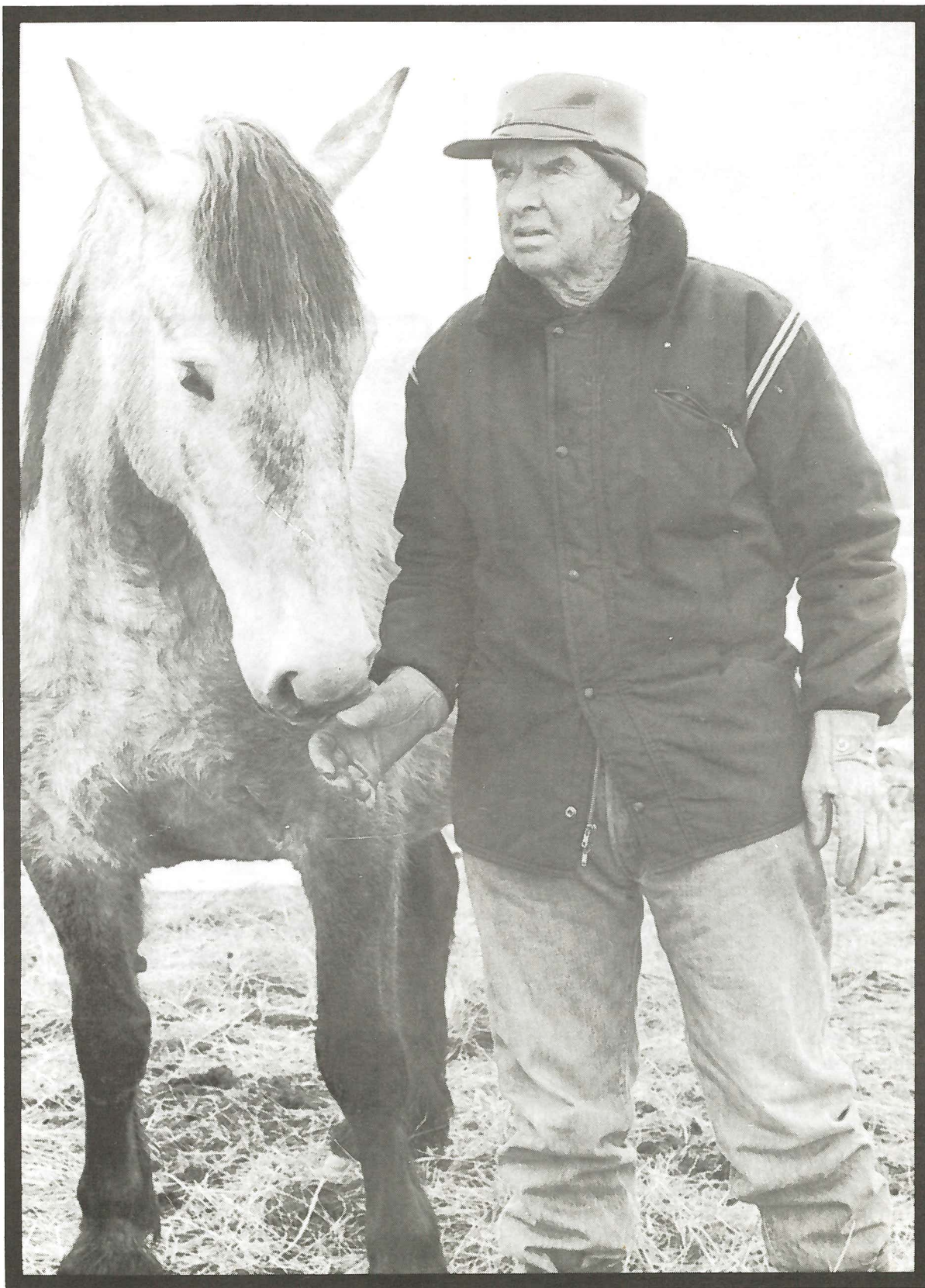


**“I take a pleasure in that.”**

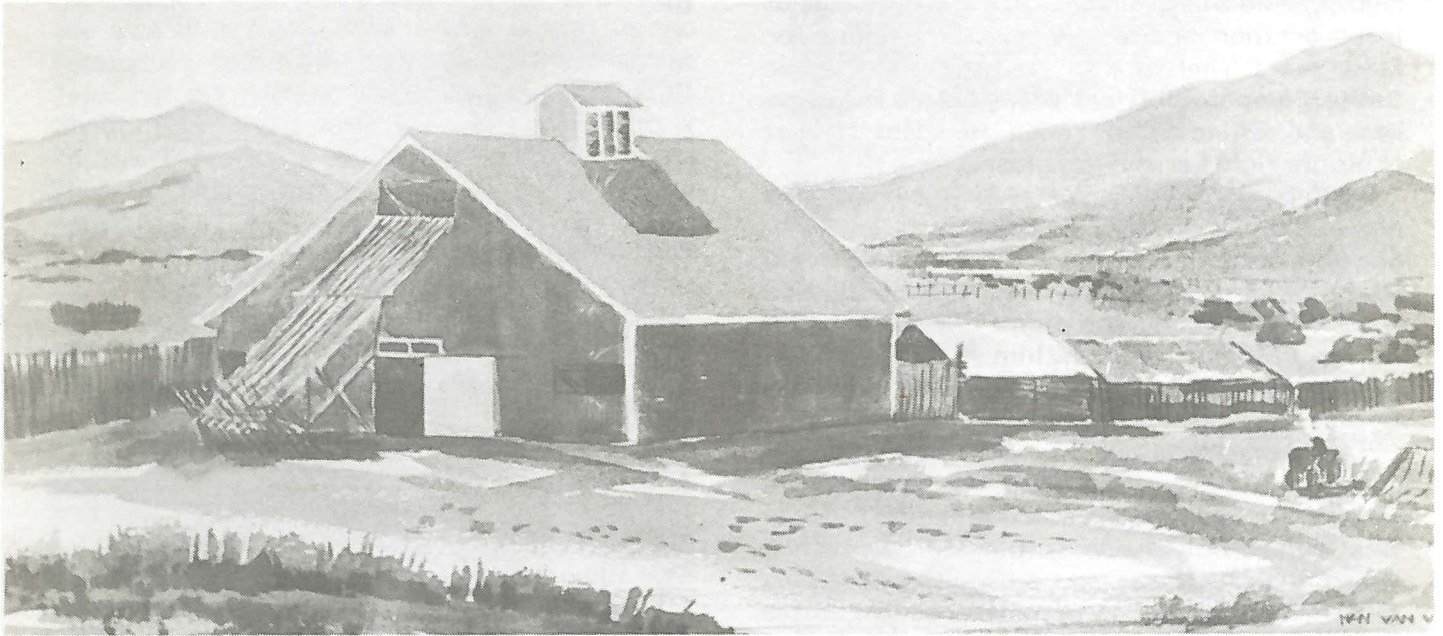


**Ordway Mellen**

**by Grace May**

As you drive north along Hiway No. 14 to Walden you can't miss seeing a big red barn off to the right. The barn itself has some history behind it, and the man who owns that barn and the rest of the NE ranch on Buffalo Creek has quite a history behind him. It is hard to capture the character of Mr. Ordway Mellen in writing and pictures; but anyone who meets and visits with this remarkable man soon realizes that this old time rancher is a living sample of the kind of men who transformed a raw wilderness to a fruitful empire, the kind of men to whom we owe so much for the proud heritage we too often just take for granted.

Sulphur. That winter of '78-79 he carried the mail on skis. He was a scout or guide for government troops also in 1879. That was the year of the Meeker Massacre and my father was scout for a company of Negro troops from the Ninth Cavalry, stationed in Middle Park under the command of Captain Dodge. Dodge received orders to go to the White River Agency because trouble was brewing. Before they got to Peck's trading store at Hayden they learned that Colonel Thornburg and twenty five of his men had been killed and forty two others wounded and all their horses were killed. It was still forty five miles to Milk Creek, and Dodge's men had already made a hard day's march, but they left



Mr. Ordway Mellen has lived on a ranch near Walden, Colorado, all of his life. "I was born here in 1895; January 10, 1895. My father settled here in 1885, I think. My father was Wm. G. Mellen, he was known as Sandy Mellen. He was born in Ohio in 1846 and was raised in Illinois. He was in a cavalry outfit in the Civil War, and after the war he stayed in the army and came out to Wyoming where he got well acquainted with old Jim Bridger. From Wyoming he came to Hot Sulphur Springs and then to Steamboat Springs, the same year as Crawfords - 1875. There were five men who came to Steamboat Springs that year; each one built a cabin and took up 160 acres. James Crawford was one of the five; the others were my father, Perry Burgess, Wm. Walton and Joseph Coberley. My father owned the springs there at Steamboat. I think it was 1879 my father traded his interest in that thing for twenty six head of horses and went to Wyoming."

I asked Mr. Mellen what kind of work his father did before he left Steamboat and what he did in Wyoming. "Well, in 1878 and 1879 he carried the mail between Georgetown and Hot

**A painting of "Sandy's" big red barn hangs in Mellen's livingroom.**

their wagons so they could make better time and after a short rest my father guided the troops on to Milk Creek and arrived at the battlefield just before dawn the next morning. Captain Dodge headed his men for the final 600 yd. dash to the rifle pits under a rain of rifle fire from the Indians who were located in the surrounding bluffs. Amazingly enough, not a man was hit.

Mr. Davis, of Fort Steele, Wyoming, who was a survivor of Thornburg's command and occupied one of the pits together with an Irish soldier, related an amusing story about my father. "When the Irishman saw Sandy Mellen leisurely walking along above the pits looking for one that suited him, he asked me who that man was and I replied that I supposed it was some sergeant looking around, and then Pat says - "Oh, no, laddies, it must be the interpreter for them Naygers."

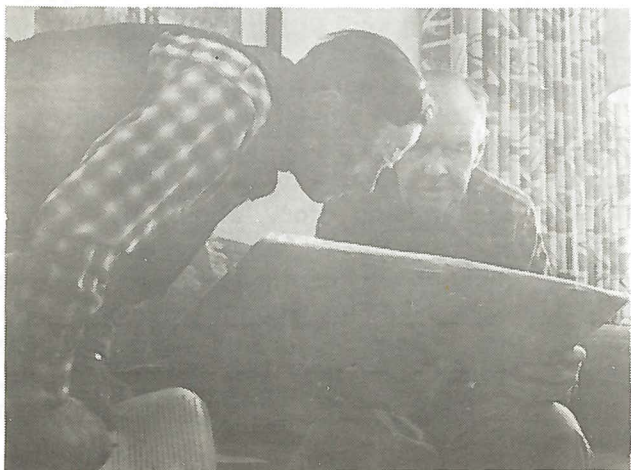
The massacre was on September 29th and Dodge's troops arrived on October second. General Merritt's command (from Rawlins) came to the rescue of the beleaguered troops in the pits on October fifth, having received the fearful news from Scout Rankin who had slipped out under cover of darkness the first night of the siege and had ridden the 160 miles to Rawlins in twenty four hours (a most remarkable accomplishment in view of the fact that this would be considered a hard trip if covered in twice the time.)

"When my father went to Wyoming in 1879 he was in charge of a recruiting station for government horses and mules at Ft. Steele. The next year he was sent to Ft. Bridger in charge of transportation and was wagon boss there for three years. Then he was foreman for the Carter Cattle Company for two years before he came here and settled on this ranch. He spent the rest of his life right here on this place.

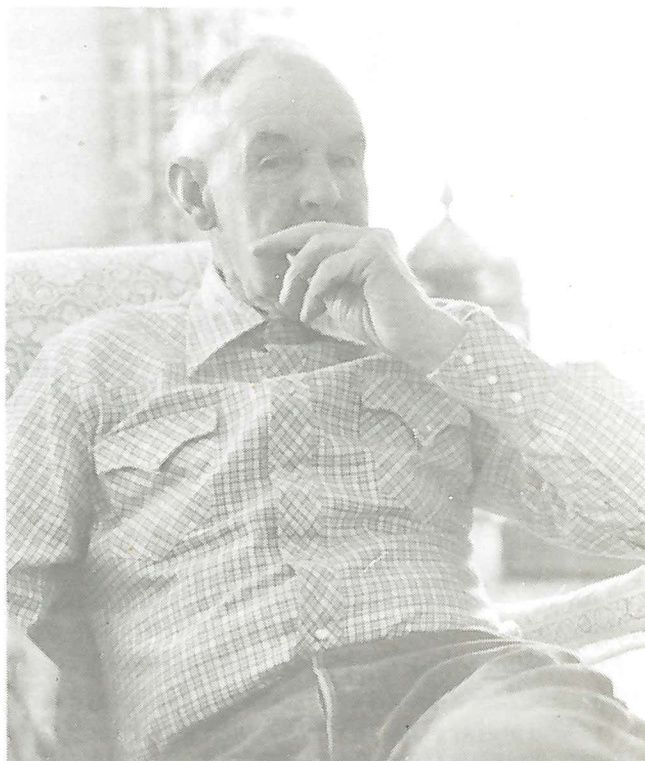
"My mother was Fannie Mellen. Her maiden name was Fannie Ericsson. She was Swedish. She was born in Missouri and grew up at North Platte, Nebraska. She and Buffalo Bill's children were great friends; she didn't like Buffalo Bill though, said she never saw him in his own house. One of Buffalo Bill's daughters was her dear friend for a long time.

"My mother's father was Emil Ericsson, and he had the very first homestead in Lincoln County, Nebraska. Emil had a brother Fred who was a government blacksmith for twenty two years at Ft. Bridger and places like that. My father and mother were married May 31st in 1883 at North Platte - (or at Cottonwood Springs, near North Platte.)

I asked Ordway, "Did your father ever do other kinds of work after he started ranching here?" Ordway answered, "Oh yes, quite a few things. This was part of Larimer County until 1909 and they didn't have any kind of a commissioner in here in those days. My father was road overseer here for the county for quite a good many years. Then later he was county commissioner for Jackson County."



Ordway told me what roads were like and what the road overseer's job was. "Of course the roads weren't like now; just dirt roads. The road overseer was responsible for the condition of the roads — see that they were kept up. Had to do the work himself if he didn't have someone to do it. He did a lot of work on the roads with a team and slip-scraper, the old fashioned way. There was lots of arguments over who had the right of way when teams met on the road because the roads weren't wide enough to pass. When Dad was working on the road and someone came along, he generally got a cussing because he wasn't somewhere else. Them things weren't considered much then; if it happened now, it would be."



Mr. Mellen reminisced about his younger days. "Well, I just helped with the ranch; that's all I've ever done is ranch. We took turns, the ranch and me—it supported me, I supported it. I only went through the eighth grade at school. The first school I went to was called Spicer; I went there awhile, then I went down here at Hebron and I went to school in Denver two winters. I only had one brother, and he died when I was just a little fellow, so I didn't have any brothers and sisters at school. One time at Hebron we got the teacher up in the barn-loft to eat her lunch and then pulled the ladder away so she couldn't get down—kept her up there all afternoon. We got into some kind of trouble most of the time—never anything serious, though.

**Ordway shows Grace's dad a picture of Sandy Mellen with other county commissioners at convention in Denver.**

"I've lived here all my life. I've never traveled much—Kansas, Nebraska, and down to California a few times. Don't feel as good down in California as I do here though. Now you take down in Nebraska, I feel fine down there, but I like to be here at the ranch. The winters here are pretty hard and cold for me now though.

"I've always enjoyed working with horses and cattle. My dad started with Shorthorns, then he crossed them with Herefords. We've just had Herefords since about 1920. There have been good times and bad times in the cattle business. There were some bad times in the Twenties, worse than now. And you take the Thirties, they were a whole lot worse. For a few years here lately, we haven't paid expenses, but prices are better now, and I think cattle will pay this year.

"In the thirties one time my cows topped the Denver market and I got \$26.00 a head out of them. Then I had a carload of steer calves at the Omaha feeder calf show and took third place and got \$18.00 a head for them. I have shown about 400 head of cattle; that is not showing them at halter. All I've shown were by the carload or pen lot. They weren't trimmed and blocked like the 4-H shows. I was never in 4-H; 4-H didn't become popular until after I was grown."

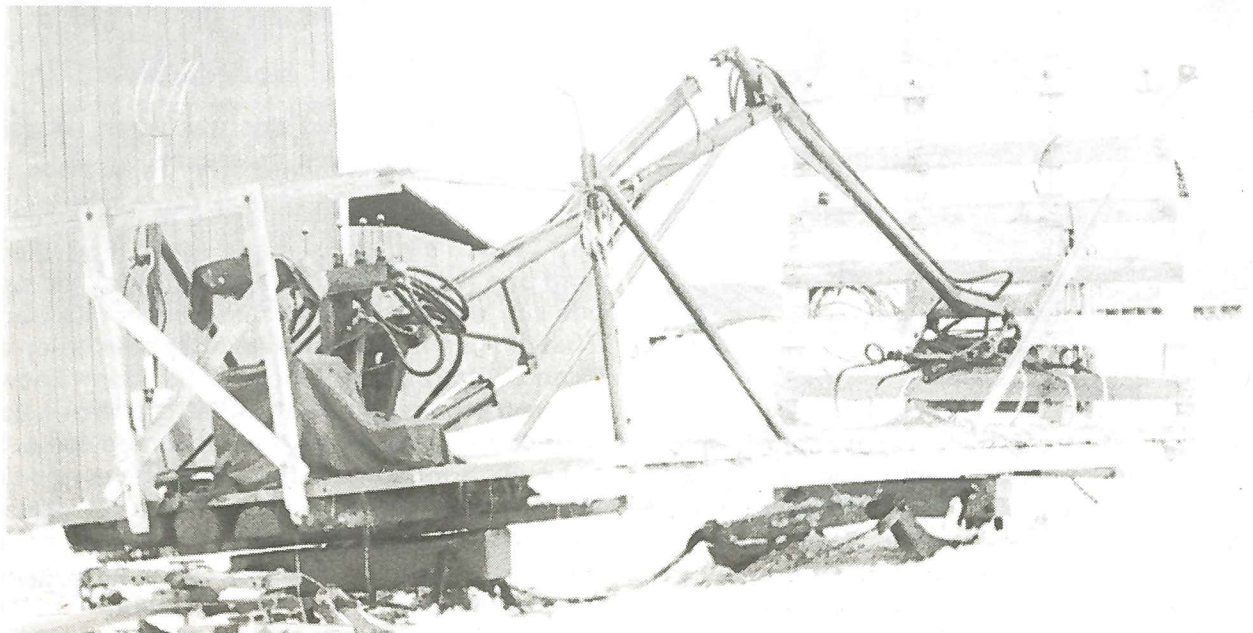
I knew that Mr. Mellen had some fine horses, because a few years ago my dad took one of our work mares to North Park to breed to Ordway's Percheron stallion, so I asked him about his horses. "I have about twenty-five thoroughbred Quarterhorse saddle stock and Percheron work horses including some young stock coming on. We've had a lot of horses over the years. I was riding by the time I was eight or nine and I still ride to look after cattle and gather them up in the fall, but I don't break my own saddle horses any more and I don't shoe horses any more. I never



**One of Ordway's favorite pets is this young Percheron mare "Daisy".**

was what you call a bronc rider, but I broke my own saddle horses and a few for the neighbors and I shod my own horses till the last few years.

"When I was young I had a horse I could go out in the field and catch any place — just call, and he'd come to me. And I could get on him and run the other horses in, with just a handful of mane. I'd have given quite a lot for a horse like that later on. I have broke quite a lot of work horses. We've always used a lot of work horses and still use quite a few. I still put my hay up loose and use horses on the sweeps and then use a four horse team to feed the loose hay in the winter — to pull a sled with a Hydra Fork. I just have Percheron work horses; all Percherons since 1916. Before that my dad had these other horses, all kinds - then he had Clydesdale - Percheron cross and then Percherons; just Percherons since then."



**Loose hay is still fed with team and sled, but "Hydra-fork" makes loading easier.**

I inquired about how he goes about breaking his work horses. "To break work horses I always start them with a well broke gentle horse and I use a foot rope or running W on them. I had one horse that it came time to ride him and he just kept getting a little worse. He was big enough to work so I decided to break him to work and I was getting along pretty good working him. A fellow who worked on the railroad came along and wanted to buy him. I had him broke to work but you just had to watch him all the time, so I told this fellow I'd drive him a few more times. I drove him over here to the oil well to get a casing to put in a ditch to make a crossing. I had him tied to a post of the drill rig. When I went to get him he whirled and kicked at me and then jumped past that post and pulled it over. Then he lunged forward and hit that post so hard that it ran it clear thru him and killed him.



**Ordway's horses are as fond of him as he is of them. "When I was younger I wasn't afraid to hook any of 'em to a sweep to get them started."**

I got a real spill one time. It was sort of funny. I was out here breaking some colts when I saw this coyote. I took a shot at him with that old gun there and hit him in a back leg. The coyote took off but I got on this colt because I thought I could head him off. We were really going and I was about even with him when my colt picked up a badger hole and did we ever roll! Didn't hurt me or the horse, just shook us up good. Of course the coyote was clean gone 'fore we got ourselves picked up, and I was so full of snow I just went on home.

That afternoon a fellow came by and said he's seen the trail of that crippled coyote in the snow and thought we could track him down. We followed him several miles and finally did get him. His hide brought a little, but really practically nothing compared to the worth of the calves the coyote gets.



**Sandy Mellen carried this gun when he guided Negro troops to Meeker massacre.**

The old gun Ordway referred to interested me and I asked him about it and asked if he liked to hunt and fish. "That is a 45-70 Sharps; the same one my dad carried to the Meeker Massacre. That old gun is about my favorite possession and I can still buy ammunition for it. I don't know of any more guns like that in the country. I don't hunt or fish very much. I have hunted some, but not a whole lot. I like to hunt - just never had time to do it very much. I have shot a lot of sagechickens. There used to be lots of chickens here; they were so thick you didn't really have to hunt them. Now they have a hunting season for them and there isn't any sagechickens to hunt. I like to fish, too, but don't have time to fish very much.

"When I was younger we went to dances a lot. These other things took time away from your work, but we could go to dances at night. We'd go horseback, or take a team and buggy. Dances were about the only kind of sport we had. Matter of fact I was going to a dance when I met Lois out here in front of the house; she was a nurse in Laramie and came in here as a kind of an escort for a girl who was going with the boy over the hill here, and I met her right out here in the road. I dated her and we got started going together, we were married in forty one. My wife's maiden name was Lois Best. She was raised down there in Nebraska."

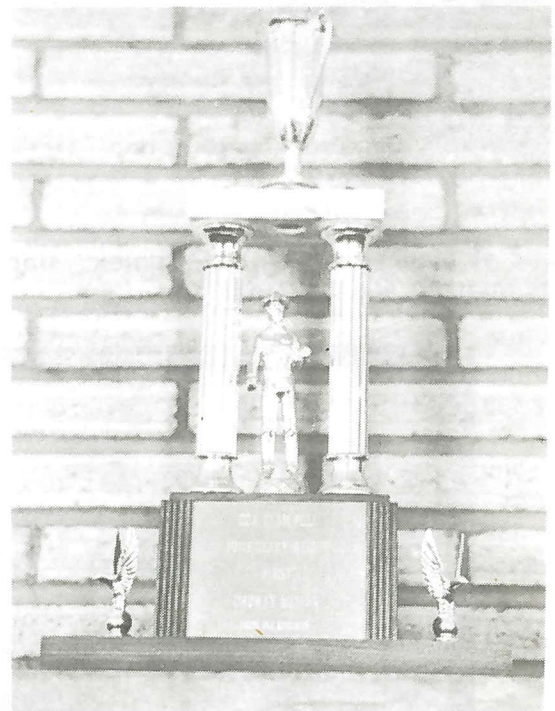


**Mrs. Mellen treated us to a fine meal.**

Mr. Mellen told me a lot about his ranching career. "I took over the ranch when my father died in twenty nine. Dad got killed driving a team on a mowing machine when he was eighty three years old. Ranching hasn't changed a whole lot since then. We still run our cattle about the same except now we sell calves; in those days everyone kept their calves over and sold them as yearlings. And we used to ship all our cattle out on the railroad - now we have trucks come right to the ranch to pick up our calves. Our summer pasture is mostly out here on the open range just like we have always grazed our cattle except that before the Forest Service was set up there was no control on grazing and no charge for grazing on the 'public domain'. Of course now you have to have a permit to graze on the Forest and you have to keep your stock within your defined allotment - the government decides the number of cows you can run, sets the length of the grazing season and sets the grazing fees. My cattle mostly graze up here on the

Rabbit Ears Range and down the Muddy clear down to the ranches on this side. My ranch is 1920 acres of private; see the private ground has to grow all the winter feed and furnish pasture for all the time my cows aren't on range. I keep around 350 mother cows. My cattle winter the same as we always did - just feed loose hay with team and sled, except now we use a Hydra Fork to load the hay instead of doing it all by hand.

"I put hay up pretty much like in the past, just stack it loose with a pole stacker; only, of course, in the old days it was all done with horses. Now I use horses yet on the sweep rakes, but the rest is mostly done with tractors. When we used all horses we used a bigger hay crew. One year I think we had thirty seven on the hay crew. Right now I have two hands. One is an Indian, he hasn't been here too long. My other man has been here over ten years, ten years last October. You can't find enough men who can work horses any more to make a hay crew, so I have to use less men and more mechanized equipment. The slide stacker (made of poles) was invented here in North Park by one of the first ranchers who tried putting up hay here."

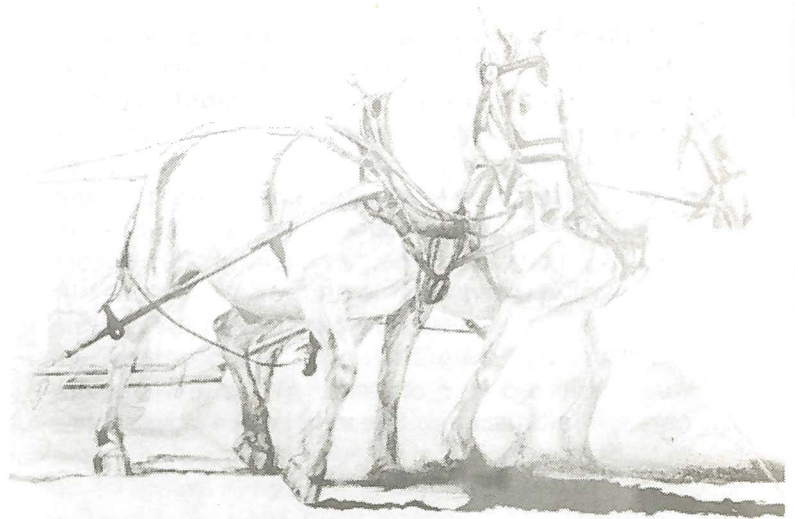


**One of the many fine trophies Mr. Mellen has won. This one was for a team pulling contest.**

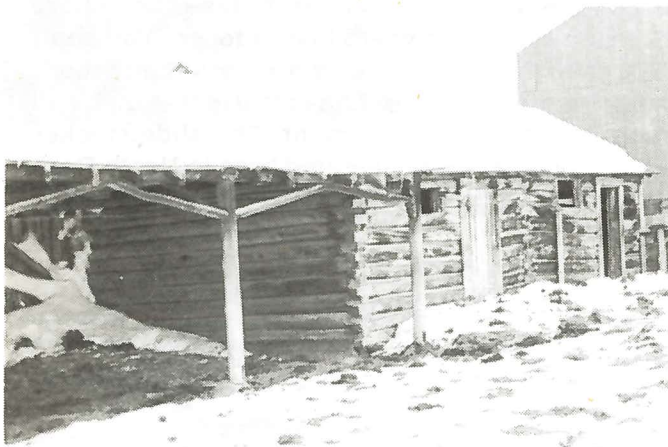
Mr. Mellen expressed a keen interest in county government, youth activities and the welfare of his neighbors; but went on to say, "I never raised a family and never held any public offices. I was president of the local cattlemen's association once, that's all." Then he showed me a beautiful trophy which had been presented to him by the cattlemen's association - an obvious display of the high regard his community holds for him.

Mr. Mellen told me some of the history of his ranch buildings. "Dad built that barn in 1901. He took his teams up in the mountains and worked at a sawmill getting out logs and took all his pay in lumber to build that barn. The shingling that was put on it at that time was all hauled in from Laramie with a team and wagon.

"We built this house in '51; hadn't moved into it yet when the garage burned down. Would have burned the house too, if it hadn't been for our neighbor Mr. Meyring. He lives about half a mile over the hill there. He and his hired man got over here on horseback and they saved the house for us. They moved the gasoline tank before it blew up. The fire was so hot that it cracked the glass in the house here. Lois was here when it happened; I wasn't at home."



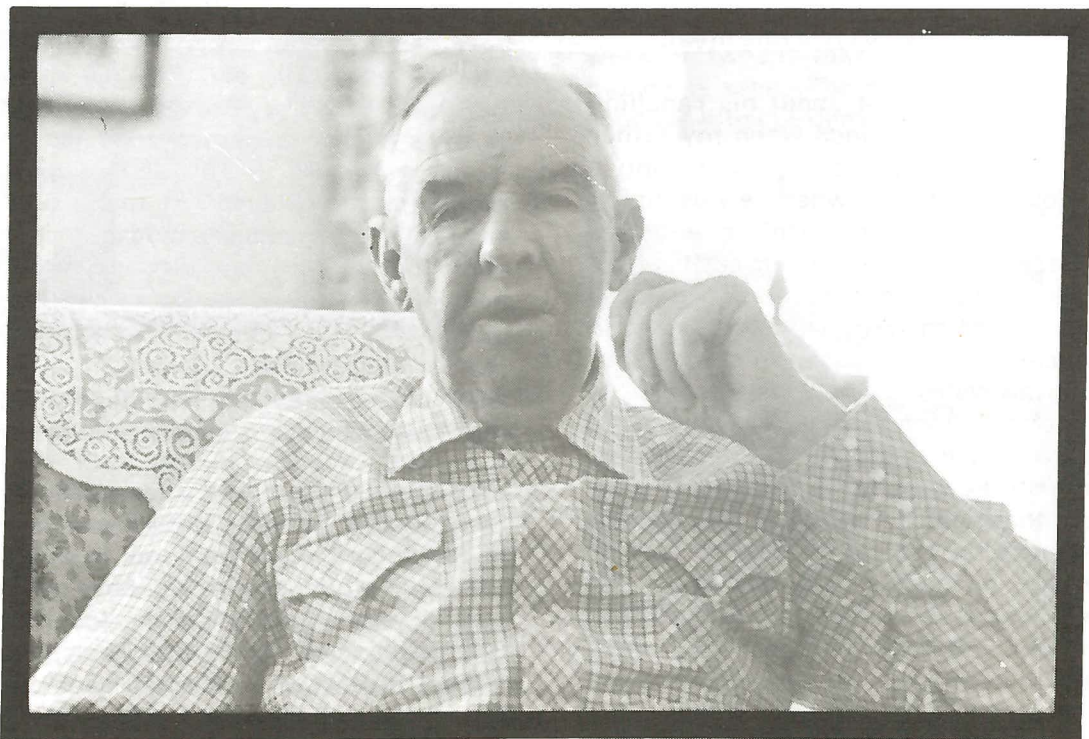
**A most attractive sketch (presented to him by a prominent artist) of Ordway's Percheron team in pulling contest.**



**A relic of pioneer days, this "duplex" stabled Sandy Mellen's two stallions.**

I agree with one of Mr. Mellen's views which he shared with me, "Neighbors aren't as friendly as they used to be. That is, the newcomers aren't. There are still some of the oldtimers and they are friendly, but it seems like nobody has the time to be neighborly, like they used to. The oldtimers are more like a family."

Mr. Mellen is a busy man, but when he gets a chance he likes to do various things. "Well, I like to go to fairs and rodeos — to see my old friends mostly. And I enjoy working around my ranch. I have always liked working with livestock. I like to work good cattle. I've always tried to upgrade my cattle and always try to improve my ranch a little all the time as I go along; I take a pleasure in that.



**One of the true "builders of the west".**