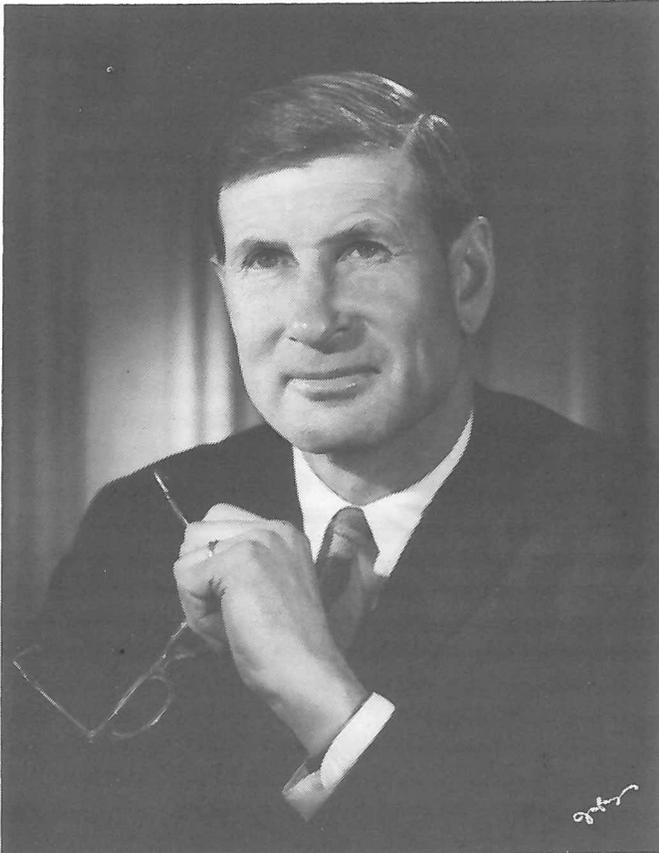


John Fetcher: An Inspiration for our time

By: Tommy Sharp



John Fetcher is a unique man who has made outstanding contributions to the Steamboat community, the Elk River Valley, Routt County, and the State of Colorado. My father, Tom Sharp, has known John for about eight years, done legal work for the Mount Werner Water and Sanitation District of which John is the Manager, and presently sits with John on the board of directors of the Upper Yampa Water Conservancy District.

Perhaps the most significant reason for my choosing John Fetcher for a story is that my father told me I would find him to be one of the most fascinating persons I would ever interview. I had heard my father's acclaim for John Fetcher's contributions to the Mount Werner Ski Area and to the building of Yamcolo Reservoir in south Routt County. He had also pointed out to me the productive Fetcher Ranch, one of the

largest in the area. Thus, when it came time for me to choose a story for the 20th edition of the Three Wire Winter magazine, I chose John, and now I am happy to bring you the inside story on John Fetcher.

"I was born on January 1, 1912, in Winnetka, Illinois. My dad was an industrialist in Chicago with a company that manufactured all kinds of ornamental ironwork for buildings and elevators. In those days, elevators usually included quite a bit of fancy ironwork. During the 1st World War, however, his company converted its factory to making shells for the U.S. Government.

I went to New Trier High School, which is a very famous school in that area. The curriculum was a little more formalized than it is now, but it included the 3 R's, history and languages. I remember taking 3 or 5 years of Spanish in high school. There was also great emphasis on extracurricular activities, such as athletics, of course. We had a fine swimming team at New Trier High School. I don't think high school life for the student was really any different in those years than student life today in Steamboat High School. After graduation, I was fortunate enough to be high enough in my graduating class that I was admitted to Harvard without having to take any entrance exam. Now, you can't do that any more.

I obtained my drivers license when I was fourteen. There was no test, I just applied for the license and was issued. In those early days, my family owned a Model T Ford, and I wish I owned it today. I was allowed to take that old Ford out on dates. Of course dating was a little more formal in those days."

While in High School, John kept himself busy with a number of extracurricular activities. "I was always interested in mechanical things, fixing little problems around our house, including electrical wiring problems. That's the kind of thing I've always done, and I still do. I remember I was a stage manager for the dramatics club. I was in charge of the lighting for the plays that were put out in our high school. In addition, I was always interested in athletics. I played baseball and was on the swimming team."

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As a youth, John lived in France with his family.

"My dad had business in Europe, so the whole family moved over there and we lived in southern France for two years. I remember starting in school there, not knowing one word of French, and having to learn French from ground zero. We lived 1 year in Switzerland also. That's where I started skiing. I started skiing when I was about 14 years old, in 1926. I've been skiing ever since.

Switzerland had several ski resorts, and we travelled up to these resorts in what are called funiculars-cable cars that were pulled by a cable on tracks. My father took my brother and me up to an area. There were no lifts then. We just climbed and skied down on 8-foot skis, and it was quite a challenge. The first turn that we ever learned was a telemark. I can still do a telemark, because that's the first turn I ever learned. We certainly got going fast on those 8-foot skis.

Skiing was part of our curriculum at the school in Switzerland. In Switzerland, school was held on Saturdays, but all the students were let out for Wednesday afternoons. Usually during the winter, my classmates and I would all go up on the Cog Railway to the top of the mountain behind the town. The engineer would run the train and the conductor, who was also our ski instructor, would take the tickets. The conductor would get off at the top, the train would go down empty, and he would ski with us all down to the bottom of the mountain. That was kind of fun, and I can still remember his name — Monsieur Chevallier."

John graduated from high school in 1929. He then went on to Harvard. Today, John particularly holds fond memories of his college days.

"The first year was a little tough, but I had the advantage of having an older brother over there, and he sort of got me through the first year. The freshman year of college is tough no matter where you are. The fraternity system didn't exist as such at Harvard. Instead, Harvard has several clubs under a house plan which is quite different from the fraternity system. Instead of joining a fraternity where the members are selected by college peers, the selections for the men going into the dormitories of the clubs at Harvard are made by the faculty. The dormitory for a club was called a 'house.' The freshman has a first, second and third choice, but the faculty made the final choices, and they tried to keep a varied mix of men in the houses so that the students wouldn't form the cliques that occur so often in the fraternity system."

"When my classmates graduated in '34, some of them sold apples on Wall Street."



"In those early days, my family owned a Model T Ford, and I wish I owned it today."

Throughout college, John was active in athletics. "The first year at Harvard, I swam competitively, but then I got bored with that, and my real sport became squash racquets. I made the Harvard varsity team in squash racquets. I remember beating Yale in my senior year. It was a great triumph, of course, to beat a team from Yale in any sport. I rowed on a Harvard rowing crew at one point, a House crew. We competed against other houses at Harvard."

John graduated from college during the Great Depression of the 1930's. Because of his lifelong interest in electrical engineering, he landed a job with the Budd Company of Philadelphia. "I tell you, it was difficult for my father to put not only me but also my older brother through college. Most things didn't come easy in those days, because of the Depression. And when my classmates graduated in '34, some of them sold apples on Wall Street, because there was almost no work available. Things were really tough. I was very lucky. Since I was a specialist in electrical engineering and particularly in the field of electrical welding, and since I also spoke French fluently, I was able to find a good job in a company in Philadelphia called the Budd

Company. The company needed an electrical engineer in their offices in France, and I got a job because they could send me to Paris to work."

John went to Paris for 2 years shortly after he graduated from Harvard. Single and in his mid-twenties, John had the time of his life.

"American girls who were 'friends of friends' would come through Paris, and, of course, they naturally wanted to see the town. I got to know Paris very, very well. My best French girl was a neat gal, and I still correspond with her. She was from a very distinguished family in Paris, and we used to go to concerts together. There was a quite a bit more supervision of what young ladies of good families could do. In fact, I think that it was only towards the end of my 2 years in Paris that her parents would let her go out with me alone. It was a big triumph. In fact, I think the parents trusted the Americans more than they did the French. That is quite different from the attitude of most Frenchmen today."

While in Europe, John decided to attend the 1936 Summer Olympic Games in Berlin. He was excited with the pomp and circumstance of the games, and awed by the military displays. Like many others of his generation, he had no knowledge of the evil nature of the Nazis and the persecutions of the Jews going on behind the seemingly hospitable face of the Germans.

"Hitler was at his prime in power and I remember driving over to Berlin in my Plymouth and meeting young people on the road, picking them up, and talking to them in German as best we could. I didn't happen to be there when Jesse Owens won all of his gold medals, but I did go to a soccer game when Adolf Hitler was there. Everybody was putting up their hands to salute the Nazis, and it was quite impressive.

There were lots of military displays and of course, as a young man, I was quite taken back by it, because everything looked clean and organized and the people looked prosperous. I remember driving on a one-way street going the wrong way, and a cop, or the Schupo as they call them in Germany, politely came up to me. He saw that I was a foreigner and instead of making me turn around, he walked the full distance of the one-way street and led me through against oncoming traffic. That made a great impression on me as a young man of 22 years. I met my parents shortly afterward and they straightened me out on what Hitler was doing. The fact that Hitler was persecuting Jews was completely shoved under the rug. Nobody knew about it.

When I was in Paris living with a French family, the news broke out in Paris that Hitler's army marched out over the Rhine. This was the first sign that he was not going to pay any attention to the Versailles Treaty which said that there would be no movement of armies over the

Rhine. When the German army marched over the Rhine in 1936, I remember well how the Parisians trembled."

"I can remember making those fragmentation bombs at the rate of 6 per minute."

When John came back to the U.S., he immediately began to work in his promoted position for the Budd Company which was then supplying the U.S. armed forces with war materials.

"I came back to Philadelphia and became the chief electrical and welding engineer for the Budd Company for several years. During the war years I was promoted to the position of the plant engineer in charge of the department that designed all the manufacturing facilities. At one time, by the way, I had 400 engineers and draftsmen working for me. Even though I was qualified to go into the military service as far as my physical condition was concerned, they wouldn't take me because I was too valuable to the Budd Company. We were making various kinds of ammunition. Under highly secretive conditions, we were the first and only company to make the bazooka. We made some horrible things like a fragmentation bomb which, when exploded, sends fragments off in every direction. I can remember making those at the rate of 6 per minute. We converted our plant, which was in automotive body construction, into manufacture of ordinance materials.

I was living in Philadelphia when Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941. Of course, we all knew that something was going to happen, but we didn't expect it to happen just like that. Sadly enough, my mother died just 2 days later. My younger brother, Bill Fetcher, a lieutenant in the Navy, was killed on a Cruiser in 1942 at the battle of Guadalcanal. In fact, he was on the cruiser, Juneau, where the 5 Sullivan brothers from Iowa were all killed. From then on, the Navy didn't permit brothers to be on the same ship."

John met his wife, Chris, through his roommate and best friend, Dick Wells. "I went down to visit Dick at his home in Plainsfield, New Jersey, and happened to meet his sister. She was attending Smith College. We started to correspond but then I went to Europe for 2 years and we sort of lost track of each other. When I came back from Paris we started dating and were engaged in 1943. Travelling was fairly tough in those war years. We were married in June of 1943, and the only way we could get away on our honeymoon trip was to locate extra gasoline coupons, since gasoline was being rationed to provide for the war effort. I was able

to scrounge a couple of coupons, and we went up to a summer place in Michigan that my parents owned."

After the war, John continued to live in Philadelphia and work for the Budd Company until 1949.

"We both agreed to go out west and see if we couldn't find a cattle ranch to buy, and that's just what we did."

"My brother was working at Dayton Air field in Ohio. He wanted to leave Dayton and I wanted to leave Philadelphia. So in 1949 we both agreed to go out west and see if we could find a cattle ranch to buy, and that's just what we did. We thought that there was a better way to live than driving through 40 stoplights every day on the way to work. Chris and I disliked all of the artificiality that goes with living in suburban Philadelphia. We left many friends in Philadelphia, of course, and to this day, I miss the frequent games of squash racquets which I played in Philadelphia. I was on a team and we played with a league in the tournaments in the New York area.

My brother and I decided to go into partnership, and we thought that anyone could be a farmer: It wasn't that simple, of course. We purchased our present ranch in the Elk River Valley, and after experiencing many hardships we gradually built the ranch up. My brother left the partnership in 1962, because we were gradually going down the drain financially, and there wasn't enough income for the two families. That is about the time I got into the ski business, because I felt I could do better with people than I could with the cows, even though I sometimes prefer the cows.

We picked Steamboat Springs because the real estate agent convinced us to buy the ranch that we are on today. Although it was too big for our pocketbook and what we could borrow, the owner, John Barber, agreed to divide it in half, and we purchased one of the halves.

When we came to the ranch, there wasn't a bent nail. There wasn't anything except a few buildings. The people who owned it before just took everything from the ranch when they left. They even took a tank that was buried underground. Not even the corrals were left, so we had to start from scratch.

We didn't realize how run down the ranch was when we bought it, and we discovered in short order that the real estate agents had exaggerated the number of cattle we could carry on the ranch. They said, 'Oh, you can carry 600 cows on this ranch.' We were lucky to carry 180



"We thought that anyone could be a farmer."

cows, which isn't enough to support 2 families. We bought the ranch at a reasonable price compared to what the prices are now. It's taken such a long time to improve the ranch and its productivity. My son, Jay, runs the ranch now and he is continuing to improve it. He's doing a great job with the breeding of our cattle. So the ranch is in pretty good shape, physically. Since we bought it, we have improved a lot of land and improved the irrigation system.

It takes a long time to get started in the ranching business, because during the first year you have nothing to sell. The ranch wouldn't produce enough hay for the cattle that we had and we had to level the meadows and reseed them. The reason for the run-down condition of a ranch like this is that it had been operated by tenants for about 6 years before my brother and I bought it. Whenever you have a tenant operation on a ranch, the tenant does not take care of the place the way the owner does. That's why I frankly hate to see tenant ownership in the Elk River Valley, or in any other place. Unfortunately, I see it everywhere. I see it down at Stagecoach where the meadows are being leased. The owner never bothers to come and check to see what kind of a job the tenant is doing. He generally doesn't take care of a place the way the owner does. That's just human nature. If a tenant walks by a post that is rotten, and if it doesn't belong to him, he'll just say, 'Maybe it will last another year.' We didn't know enough to watch out for a tenant operation. In fact, we really didn't know much of anything about the ranching business when we began in 1949. So we hired Vale Ellis, who helped us for the first 2 or 3 years, and he taught us the business."

The neighbors of the Fetchers in the Elk River Valley were very hospitable and helpful.

"We had no problem making friends, particularly with our neighbors. The Bedells and the Tufflys, who lived nearby, were especially

helpful. One of my outstanding neighbors, Orval Bedell, who died prematurely, was a great, close friend of ours. Another one was Bill Ross. Bill Ross was a great help to us in those early days when we struggled to get organized. We hired Bill Haulis to show us how to milk a cow, shoe a horse, and other basic ranching skills. Another person who was a great help to us is Leonard Snowden. The Snowden family is very well known in this area. Leonard still ranches in the Yampa area. Clark was a very closeknit community in those days, and all of our social life centered around Clark rather than Steamboat.

The ranch cost about \$150,000. It would cost about 10 times that amount now, not because of the ranching business, but rather because of the increased real estate prices as a result of the ski development here. I, for one, don't want to see all of the ranches in this area being cut up for houses. Our ranch was originally about 1,300 to 1,400 acres. It is a little bigger now, because we bought some more land. Before Steamboat Lake was constructed, we owned most of the land that the lake now occupies. We sold that land so that Steamboat Lake could be built, but then we bought some other land. That made our ranch a little bit larger than before. Right now, we maybe have 1,800 to 1,900 acres. But it is still hard to make a living in agriculture. Cattle ranching was much bigger when we were first starting to ranch. There were 12 active cattle ranches in the Clark area then, and now there are only 2 or 3. The remainder were mostly sold out to people that are just holding on to them as absentee owners. This, as I said, we don't like to see."

When the Fetchers moved here, the difficulties didn't end with the learning of a new job. They also had to adjust to Steamboat's harsh winter climate.



"When we came to the ranch, there wasn't even a bent nail left on the place."



"There is an advantage with a team — they always start in the morning."

"We didn't realize how tough the winters were. When we saw the ranch, it was in July, and we didn't realize how different the winter was going to be. We moved onto the ranch on October 31, 1949. That was a tough time to move in. Usually, you move onto a ranch in the spring, not in the fall. We just didn't know any better. We had to put up so much hay to feed our cattle throughout the winter. I think that was the main difficulty of our move.

We feed with a team all winter long, but we don't start until we really have to which is when the snow gets deep. There is an advantage with a team — they always start in the morning. It's easier with a team too, because they walk through the gates and you don't have to get off the tractor. It's just a little more efficient in terms of winter feeding.

We only had one homestead in which there were 3 or 4 bedrooms. They were all pretty small and both families had to live in that house the first winter, all 11 of us, and that was pretty tough. We didn't get cabin fever though, because we were outside most of the time. Well, maybe the girls might have gotten cabin fever."

Even though the Fetcher family went through many hardships those first years, they still found time to enjoy the lighter aspects of Steamboat, particularly the Winter Carnival.

"Steamboat was a dead town. Just think of this — Harbor Hotel was closed in the winter because there was no business. We had to plead with the owner of the hotel, who had moved down to Arizona, to come up and open it for the Carnival. There was virtually no activity here in the winter time. Only one motel was open, the one next to the bank. You could walk down the middle of Lincoln Avenue and not worry about getting hit.



The bad part about it was that in those days there were no jobs for the young people. They all had to move away to the cities to get jobs. For example, I remember the Gates Gooding family. Both Tyler and Butch Gooding had to move away to get jobs. Marvin Crawford had to go to Denver for work. Even though there are now a lot of people in Steamboat who don't want to see any more people move here, at least now Steamboat is growing and there are opportunities for young people.

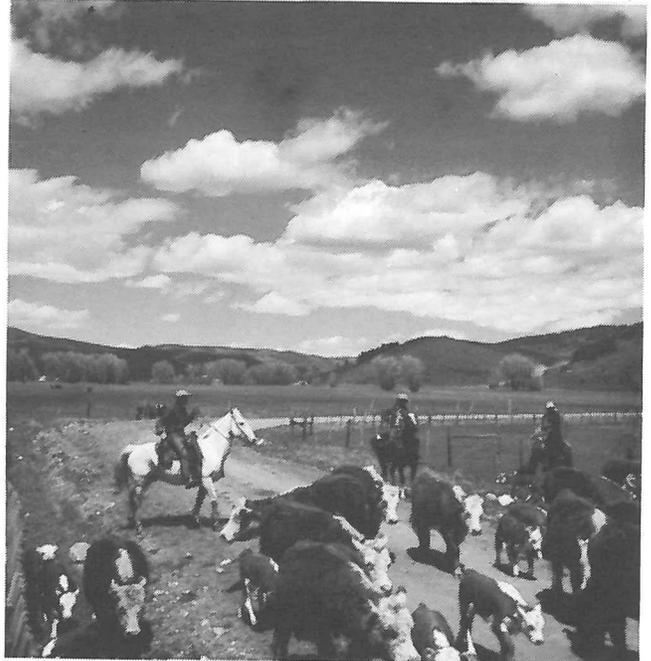
The Winter Carnival had been going on for years when we came here, but I was always involved in the Winter Sports Club. In fact, I was on the board of directors back in the 1950's, and I still am a director. The events of the Winter Carnival were a little bit simpler back then, but they were basically the same as we have now. My three sons all participated in the Winter Carnival.

I would speak to the hotel owners because a lot of people would come in to Steamboat for the Carnival and there was no place for them to stay. People in town would open up their houses, but that wasn't enough to accommodate the flood of people that often came up from Denver. We put up a lot of people even out at the ranch.

In those days, one of the big events was the arrival of the 8-car Rio Grande passenger train from Denver. It would leave Denver at 7:00 in the morning and arrive here in Steamboat right at noon. The train would stop by Howelsen Hill, unload its passengers, and when they had walked over to the hill, we put on the jumping events. Finally, the passengers would have a brunch at the Harbor Hotel, assuming it was open, and then they'd get back on the train and go back to Denver. We wish we could do that again, but Rio Grande isn't very anxious to have passenger trains anymore. In the early days, we used to go to Denver on the train. It was about a 6-hour trip. It was kind of long and slow, because it went all the way down to Bond and then went through the Moffat Tunnel before it arrived in Denver.

In those first years, John had many difficulties with the ranch. All too soon, the Fetcher kids were grown up and ready for college, and John had to come up with the financial means to support them. "We weren't going to send our kids to college with those cows. That's how I got into the ski business, really." John saw this opportunity with the proposal for a new multi-million dollar ski area development. Being a long time sports lover, particularly with skiing, John took this opportunity and helped to turn the dream of a ski mountain and destination area into the reality Mt. Werner is today.

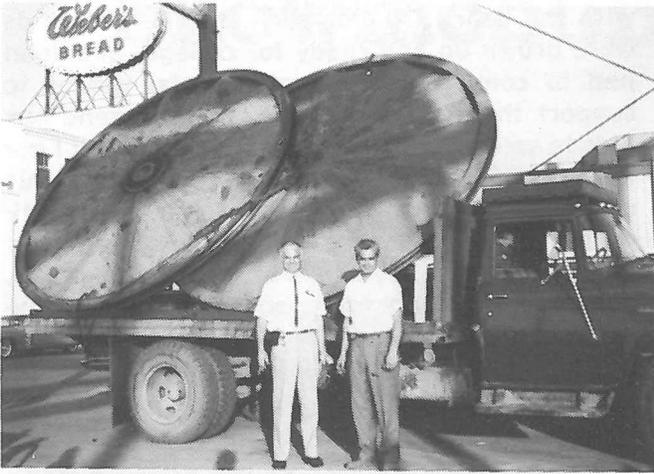
"The chap who got me interested in Mt. Werner was Jim Temple. Jim Temple had the dream of the ski area, and although he didn't have the financial backing to put it together, he asked me to head it up from an engineering standpoint. When he finally gave up because of financial difficulties, another group from Denver took over, and asked me to run the show from this end, which I did from 1962 to 1972.



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The reaction of long-time Steamboat residents to the proposed new ski area was pretty negative, actually. There wasn't much support. They thought Howelsen Hill was good enough. One of my incentives for working on the project was that in the 1950's and 1960's, there were no opportunities here for the young people. The sons and daughters of my friends all had to leave Steamboat. There were simply no jobs.

The company in California which was building the structural parts for the ski lift just about went bankrupt in the fall of 1962, and it didn't



“I had to take the ranch truck out there and we figured out a way to load up those big 12-foot bull-wheels.”

have enough money to ship the wheels out, so I took the ranch truck out there and we figured out a way to load up those big 12-foot bull-wheels. You can see that putting a 12-foot bull-wheel on a 50-inch truck bed would have made the cargo over 16 feet high, which of course is above the allowable height. If we laid them flat, they would

have stuck out about 2 or 3 feet on each side. In California they're very strict about overwide loads. They would have guided me through the back roads instead of over the freeway. So we made a frame and set the bull-wheels at about a 30 degree angle. They stuck out a little bit and were a little over height. We left on a Saturday afternoon, right in the middle of the big traffic rush, and arrived in Steamboat the next day about 9:00 a.m., and then the next moment they were up on the hill.

I remember stringing and splicing the cable on Christmas eve, and Buddy Werner came over that year to help us, during Christmas vacation. Our little construction crew from Steamboat built it. We did all the surveying and poured the concrete and put the tires in, strung the cable — we did it all. Another person who worked for us that first year was Pete Wither who's now head of the ski patrol. He was then working at Winter Park, but he came over and helped us pour the concrete for the towers.

The first day the new ski lift was open, January 12, 1963, was the coldest day I can remember in 35 years. You can imagine there weren't many people. Last year they had 839,000

“The oil was so stiff in the gear box on our first lift we couldn't even start it.”



At top: William Nash, Glen Stuco

At bottom: Jim Temple, Buddy Werner, Marvin Crawford, Bill Sare, John Fetcher



skier days, but that first year there were only 3,000. There were 4 of us that ran that lift. Corky Fairbanks and a chap by the name of Verner worked for us. Merle Nash and I were kind of the head people. There was only one chairlift that first year, and a little poma on headwall where Southface is now. We had one operator on the poma lift and 2 or 3 of us would take turns operating the chairlift. We didn't even have a top attendant. We just told our passengers, 'Get off at the top — if you don't get off, you'll just come back down again.' We never had any accidents.

Thunderhead lift was constructed in 1965, and it was used that winter of 1965-66. Four-Points lift was installed during the summer construction of 1967, the Burgess Creek lift went up in 1969, and the gondola was constructed in 1970.

“We didn't even have a top attendant. We just told our passengers, 'Get off at the top — if you don't get off, you'll just come back down again.' ”

It would have been impossible then to predict what was going to happen to the Mt. Werner ski area. We struggled the first year, and we didn't make any money until the last half a dozen years. The ski business is a very difficult business, because you have 4 months of income and 12 months of bills. That makes it very hard. Many other major ski areas have made money from the sale of their real estate. Of course, the real estate prices on land at the mountain went up as soon as we started building the lifts. We kept selling off our best real estate to meet our payroll. We made some mistakes as a result of that. For example, because we subdivided and sold land close-in around the base of the lifts, our successors, first LTV and then the Steamboat Ski Corporation, were hemmed in by land planning mistakes we made originally. But in the early

days of the area, people wanted to buy land close in, and that was the only land we could sell at a decent price which we needed to do in order to meet the payroll and keep the area going. I'm glad we didn't make so many mistakes or we wouldn't have the valuable recreational destination area we have now.

The gondola, of course, was a big project. The installation of the gondola was the thing that really put Steamboat on the map. People began to take notice that this was a real ski area. The gondola was what really kicked it off, and several companies came to us and were interested in buying the ski area. LTV in Dallas was one, of course. Johns Manville was another, and we met with the board of directors of Brunswick in Chicago to discuss its interest in purchasing the area. LTV was the company who finally bought it.”

Today, the Mt. Werner Ski Area ranks second in size of all ski areas in Colorado, behind Vail. It has the highest uphill capacity in North America, and ranks high in skier days as well. As John points out, with the size of the skiing terrain on the mountain today, there is little room left for expansion.

“I think the area with a few modifications probably won't expand much in terms of skier days. There may be disagreement about this, but I think you're looking at an area that can accommodate at the most 10-12 thousand skiers a day before it gets so crowded that people won't want to come here. The area itself is limited as far as possible expansion. If we keep expanding south with more ski runs, we get into south facing slopes which are generally less manageable. Expanding north into the Fish Creek basin is simply too precipitous and rocky. I have skied all of that area to the north and there's not very many intermediate trails off of the top. It's the intermediate skier who comes for



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a couple of weekends from Chicago or Indianapolis who is the person you have to cater to. They want groomed slopes, and the number that will ski the tough slopes is somewhat limited. Remember that ticket sales to experts won’t pay the bills. Granted, skier techniques have improved a lot, and there is more demand for the steep trails today than there was 10 years ago. But still, you’ll find the good skiers on the tough trails 2 or 3 times a day, maybe a little more, but then where do you find them? You find them on the intermediate trails going too fast, and making slalom poles out of the Ski Corporation’s customers.

I ran the mountain until 1971. LTV bought it in 1969, and I was asked to run the mountain for another two years. After that it just became too demanding, so I decided to turn the mountain operation over to others. I continued to advise on some technical matters and continued to participate on National Safety Committees with the ski business, but running the entire mountain just got to be too much.”

Not only has John been involved with the alpine side of skiing, but he was also involved with the nordic side as well.

“The jumping program back in the 1950’s was pretty good. The hills weren’t up to standard, but there was a good program that was run by Gordy Wren in the early days. Gordy Wren was the one who got me interested in the Winter Sports Club. Not long after I arrived in the Steamboat area, Gordy found out that I was an engineer. Somehow we met while skiing, and he asked me to help with the design of the jumping complex at Howelsen Hill. That’s how I got involved with the design of the jumping complex.”

In the early 1970’s, Colorado had been the successful bidder to host the 1976 Olympic Winter Games. John was all for it, but unfortunately, the majority of the population of the state thought otherwise. Indeed, in early 1972, the 90 meter landing platform at Howelsen Hill was burned down. Many people suspected arson. John determined to convince the state that Steamboat was the best place for the Nordic events.

“We were kind of surprised, because we thought that the Olympics is like motherhood.”

“The State had decided to host the Olympics, so I supported it. The Olympic Organizing Committee asked me to try to find a site for the ski jumps near Denver, but I wasn’t particularly

in favor of that. I thought the nordic events should come to Steamboat, but they wanted the jumps to be near the Denver area. We did finally find a site near Evergreen, but it wasn’t a very good site.

I was quite disappointed with the outcome of the vote in November of 1972 when the people of Colorado decided not to host the 1976 Winter games. I think a lot of people were afraid of the impact that the Olympics would have had on the State. The Olympics certainly brings in a lot of tourists, but I don’t know if the Olympics would have been that great with events to be held in 3 separate areas. They would have held the alpine events over in Vail/Beaver Creek, the nordic events — jumping, cross-country and the biathlon — over here, and all of the skating events, including hockey and figure skating, in Denver. If you wanted to see all three events, you would have had to take a plane or drive a fair distance. I guess we were kind of surprised, because we thought that the Olympics is like motherhood and I assumed that everyone would vote for it, but there was quite a lot of organized opposition against bringing the Olympics to the State.

John has always been active with the Olympics. He was at Squaw Valley in 1960, and has officiated at both the Sapporo and Lake Placid Olympic games.

“I was a jumping official. My job was to be a referee for the markers. If the marker miss-marked a jumper, then I was the one to say, look, you made a mistake, and he should have had another meter, or you marked him too far. As a matter of fact, a very interesting story occurred. At the 90 meter jump in Sapporo, a chap came off from East Germany by the name of Schmidt. There were three of us who were referees opposite the Japanese markers. The Japanese had a marker at every meter. I was down at about 105 or 106 meters. An East German referee was above me at about 103 meters, and then there was a Russian referee above him. When Schmidt jumped, the Japanese markers marked him at 101 meters. The East German referee said, in German, ‘nein, nein, nein, hundert zwei meters!’ (meaning, no, no, no, 102 meters). So the chief official marker came down and got all three of us referees together, and he asked me what I marked him at. I said ‘hundert-einz’ (101). Then, of course, the East German said 102, and then, I thought, for sure the Russian is going to say 102 meters to back up his behind-the-iron-curtain friend. But he said 101. The Russian and the American shook hands, of course. I’ve never seen him since. But I suppose the American and the Russian were both thinking that if we reversed the Japanese and their marking, we were liable to start World War III. The three winners of the 90 meter jump in Japan in 1972

were a Polish boy from Tuna, a Swiss boy named Walter Steiner, whose movie was shown, by the way, last fall in Steamboat Springs, and the third one was the East German Schmidt. If we had given Schmidt that extra meter, which we had the right to do, he would have gotten the gold. It was that close."

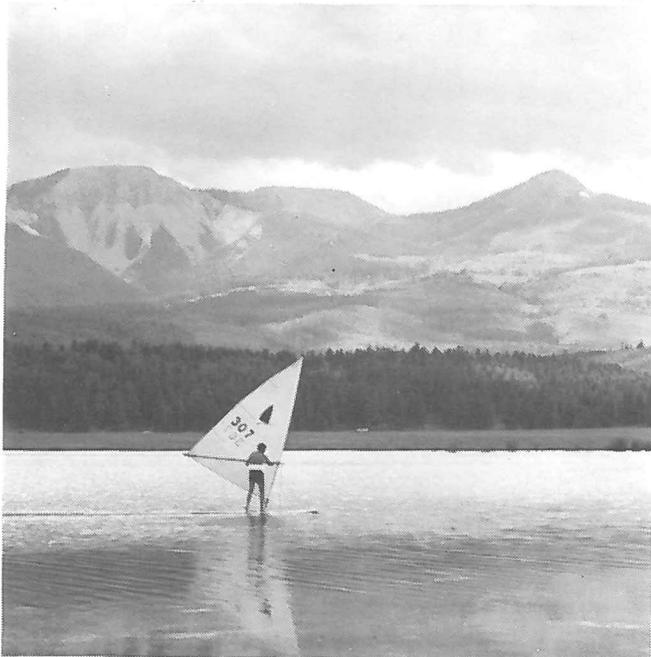
John enjoyed officiating in Sapporo so much that he decided to continue and officiate at the 1980 Olympic Games at Lake Placid, New York.

"Lake Placid was great. The weather was kind of mean, but it was a great event. It was well attended, of course. There was great competition and the facilities were marvelous. The Lake Placid people just put on a great show."

"It was too much. I was coming in from the ranch 8 days a week, and so they asked me if I would run the Mount Werner District."

In addition to his many activities in skiing, John spends much of his time now on his duties as manager of the Mount Werner Water and Sanitation District, which includes the area of the ski mountain. He got into the water and sanitation business when he decided to resign his position as President of the ski mountain for LTV.

"It was too much. I was coming in from the ranch 8 days a week, and so they asked me if I would run the Mount Werner District. That's how I got involved with that operation. The District supplies the water and treats the sewage for all of the residential and commercial properties at the mountain. Right now, we are just finishing the construction of the new Fish Creek Water Filtration Plant which will filter the water for



"I started windsurfing back in the 1970's - I have a number 307."



"We exchanged the ocean for the mountains."

the old part of Steamboat as well. The new plant went on-line on December 14, 1984."

John has been very involved at the state level with water issues. For 10 years, he was a member of the Colorado Water Conservation Board, spending one year as its chairman. He was also an ex-officio member for several years of the Colorado Water Quality Control Commission. He is now off of both boards, but he remains a director and secretary of the Upper Yampa Water Conservancy District, the district which is trying to build Stagecoach Reservoir and which earlier built Yamcolo Reservoir. He was recently elected a Director of the Colorado Water Congress.

Besides working "8 days a week" at the ranch, the ski mountain, and the Mount Werner District, John still seems to find some time to pursue lifelong hobbies. John has been on the National Ski Patrol and presently patrols both at Mount Werner and at Howelsen Hill. Several years ago, he was elected to the Colorado Ski Hall of Fame.

"When I got into ranching, I kind of gave up the violin because of the physical work. I hope I can get going again now that I have a granddaughter who is starting on the piano. She is threatening to get me to try to play some duets with her. Also, I had to give up squash racquets. I also had to give up things like going to the seashore. We were among the first people to start to get surfboards on the New Jersey shore before we moved out here to Colorado. Of course we miss the ocean, but we exchanged the ocean for the mountains, and there are more activities we can do in the mountains than there are on the ocean. I miss things like sailing, because I

always used to sail. It's not too bad, though, because I often go away and sail, which is what we did in April, 1984. We sailed for 2 weeks off of Honduras that spring. It was fun, and a good time to get out of Steamboat in the mud season. I started windsurfing back in the 1970's. I tried to get some of my friends interested in wind surfing. Nobody was interested back then, but now it's taken off like wildfire. I have a number 307 windsurfer. Somebody came up to me the other day and said, 'That must be a museum piece.' The numbers are up in the thousands."

John and his wife, Chris, have 3 boys and 1 girl. Jay is the youngest boy and now manages the Fetcher Ranch. Amie, his younger sister, is a professor of veterinary medicine in Knoxville, Tennessee. Their oldest son, Ned, is a research assistant working on plant ecology, commuting between Costa Rica and his research position at Duke University. Their middle son, Bill, has spent almost 20 years in the Navy, playing and repairing instruments in Navy bands. He will be getting out of the service shortly and will be moving to Steamboat to live.

John now spends most of his time working on some of the water problems in our community and the state. His biggest and perhaps final goal is to see the completion of the Stagecoach reservoir.

"The Stagecoach Reservoir will be the 'Grand Finale'!"

"We're trying very hard to get the Stagecoach reservoir built. Not only will it be a valuable water source for much of the surrounding area, but it will also be a great recreational area. Stagecoach was meant to be a recreational area. Of course it has a ski mountain and a number of condominiums have already been constructed. So far, we have managed to execute contracts to buy all of the needed land from Colorado Ute Electric Association of Montrose. We will dedicate some of our upper pastures for elk feeding and wildlife habitat. That way, we can give back some of the environment we will have to take for the reservoir.

The public referendum on the reservoir has already received the approval of the voters. Of course, there was some opposition just like with everything else in this world, but we got the voters' approval. We need to obtain approval for a 7 million dollar grant and loan under the Small Projects Loan Act administered by the Bureau of Reclamation of the Federal government. If we get the firm commitment for that money this year, we'll have the reservoir built in two years. But if the commitment for the federal money is delayed for a year, why then it will take all that much longer to complete the project.

The Stagecoach Reservoir will be my last project. It will be the 'Grand Finale'!... But, of course, I would also like to see the local water districts consolidate, and...."



"The Christy basin before development. With lots of hard work and ongoing dedication from men like John Fetcher, a small ranch has become the Steamboat Springs ski area, an undisputed asset to our community."