



Spring 2012 Vol. 6, Issue 2

www.ConiferHistoricalSociety.org

CHSM

Conifer Historical Society and Museum

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*** DID YOU KNOW ***

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Some of the bold words
are linked to websites
associated with those words.
Make sure your browser
is set to allow pop-ups.

Click **HERE** to view photos of the
Lower North Fork Fire taken by
CHSM members.

*CHSM's mission is to share the
region's legacy by collecting,
preserving and exhibiting historical
and cultural materials and providing
public access to services, collections,
exhibits and a research library.*

This issue of CHSM can be found at:
www.ConiferHistoricalSociety.org

Fires and History Intertwine

Lower North Fork Fire

by Elaine Hood, CHSM Secretary



photo by Elaine Hood

The Lower North Fork fire, as viewed from Riley Peak about 7:30 pm on Monday March 26, 2012. The photographer is looking southeast toward Reynolds Park.

The tragedy of the Lower North Fork Fire brought many place names into the news that are historically important to Conifer's history.

Lower North Fork

The title Lower North Fork refers to the location of the fire at the North Fork of the South Platte River. The north and south forks converge south of the fire, to form the South Platte River that flows to Strontia Springs Reservoir in Waterton Canyon, and eventually northeast through Denver and continuing northeast to Nebraska.

The Lower North Fork of the South Platte River was the location of the first railroads into our area, as train tracks were laid down next to the river. Although the first white settlers in Conifer came by wagon over

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A Letter to the Community

by Janet Shown, CHSM President

Wildfire! The word has surely struck terror in the hearts of rural mountain dwellers for thousands of years. Our generation is not the first in the long history of mountain settlement to suffer ravaging, merciless flames that raze our beloved homes and forests, but it is the newest.

I watched helplessly last week as our close-knit, isolated neighborhood was turned into ashes in a few short hours; changed forever as the Lower **North Fork Fire** raced up the mountain on wild, hot winds from Foxton that consumed homes, lives, and history on Kuehster Road and adjacent lanes. Our family evacuated, along with 900 other households, and we were lucky to have a trailer and all our animals to comfort us over the long week away from home. We were luckier to have a home to go back to.

As I write these words, I know that some future historian will read them, hoping to glean some story, some kind of understanding of how the fire of 2012 changed and shaped the historic Critchell area and its residents. Yet words come haltingly, painfully as I work to make sense of the muddled emotions, disorderly thoughts and visions, and memories of the fire and its aftermath. I can barely absorb the steady updates on Facebook, email and phone messages from friends who are still displaced or whose cherished homes or pets are gone forever, or the accounts of those who went door-to-door to save people as they courageously battled the fire, and now fight the feelings of aching despair to know that three human lives were lost. I know that the visual scar of burned and blackened landscape will linger as a visual reminder of the fire for decades to come.

But it isn't the fire that I hope future generations will remember. Instead, I hope they learn about the resiliency, the steadfast strength, the interdependency and the stalwart



support for neighbors that characterizes this close-knit and caring community.

Throughout the week of the fire, I was deeply touched by the generosity of friends who offered their homes, food, showers, pet care, and other forms of assistance to our family, as well as to other evacuees and fire victims. My heart warmed when I heard the Director of the Conifer Area Chamber of Commerce turned away more than 300 volunteers because so many others had already filled positions to cook and serve food to 700 firefighters. I felt a deep community pride as I witnessed countless

people in the 285 Corridor reaching out to help, to comfort, to share, to love each other.

I imagine that it has always been so in this community. Isolated by geography and topography, neighbors must become interdependent, must rely on each other, comfort and support each other, communicate with and befriend each other, to survive daily life and periodic but inevitable disasters. Through this disaster, my life is now more securely linked to the lives of those who came before and survived the fires, blizzards, floods and other disasters that have punctuated this area's recorded history: I have experienced and shared in the resiliency that is the heartbeat of our community. And I've tasted the love that can't be recorded in words, but only written on the hearts of those who share it.

It is this history of love streamers, like strands in a tapestry, that bind us together and to this special place and create a history that's immeasurably rich and beautiful. What a history we're writing!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Janet Shown".

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CHSM is published quarterly for the Conifer Community, past, present, and future. It is intended to be an online publication with limited hardcopy distribution. Story ideas and contributions are encouraged. The photo of Norm Meyer's yellow house on the front page was taken by Lana Turner. Editor: Elaine Hood hood1959@yahoo.com

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the Bradford Trail up South Turkey Creek, it was the railroad that eased westward migration and brought the tourists that made our area a popular resort at the turn of the 20th Century.

Foxton

The first reports of the fire were that it was on Foxton Road near Reynolds' Park.

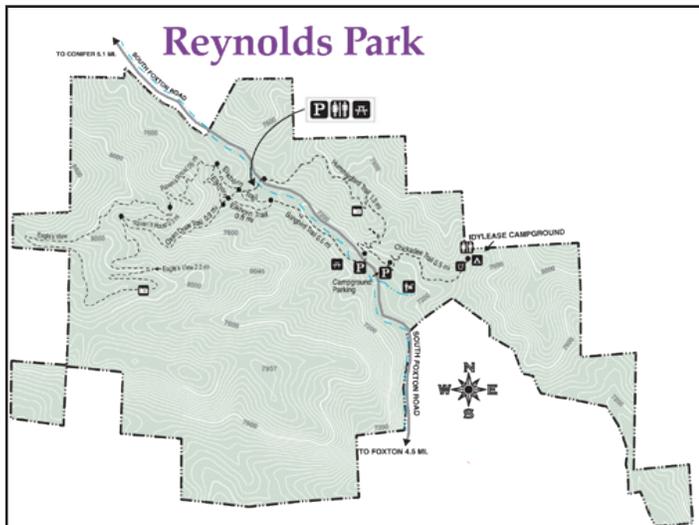
Foxton Road was called Kennedy Gulch Road until Conifer Meadows was developed by Roy Romer in the 1970s – before he became the 39th governor of Colorado. The road was then renamed Foxton for the small community that once thrived six miles south of Highway 285 next to the river.

The town of Foxton was established in 1876. It was originally called Park Siding, because the area was park-like. The name was changed to Foxton in 1909. Foxton was a stop on the Colorado and Southern Railroad line that followed the South Platte River (<http://jeffco.us>).

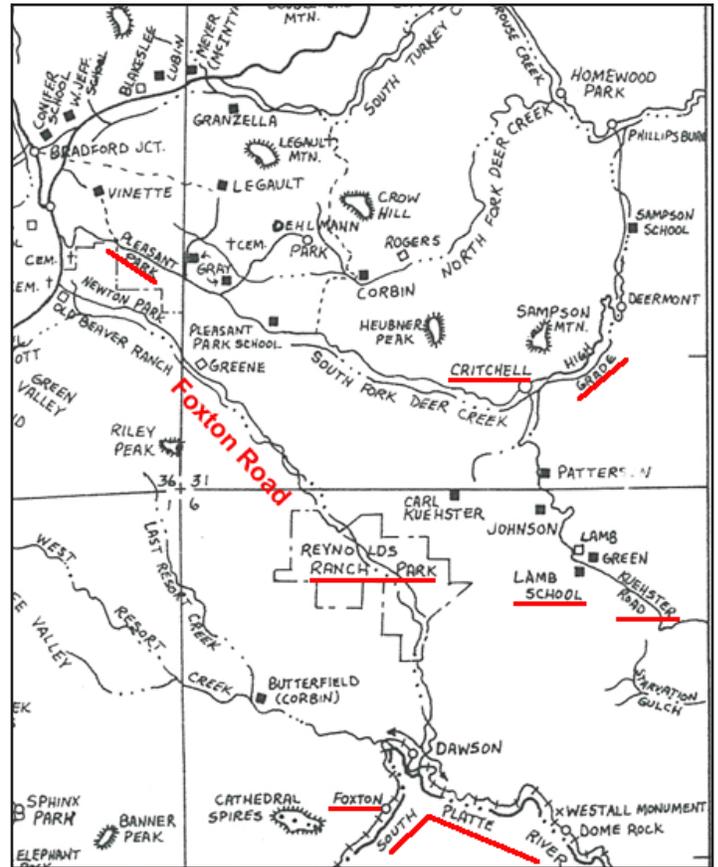
Reynolds Park

Reynolds Park, located 5.5 miles south of Highway 285 on Foxton Road, was created by Jefferson County Open Space in 1975.

John Reynolds homesteaded 640 acres in 1919, and later bought neighboring land from Louise Rutledge, Bennet Shepperd and Dr. O.J. Butterfield to create the Bar Lazy T Ranch. It was later renamed the Idylease (Idle-Ease) Resort and Ranch, with 14 cabins accommodating 40 guests. The resort operated until 1942. Reynolds' ranch house now serves as the park manager's residence (<http://jeffco.us>).



http://jeffco.us/jeffco/openspace_uploads/reynolds_map_color08.pdf



This map is from the book *The Upper Side of the Pie Crust* by Margaret Bentley.

Pleasant Park Road

Pleasant Park Road was named by a French man who fell in love with the beauty of the meadows.

Joseph Legault immigrated from Montreal, Canada, in the 1860s, hoping to strike it rich with the newly discovered gold in the Rocky Mountains.

Upon arrival in Denver, he walked up South Turkey Creek canyon, when he came upon the Duncan McIntyre sawmill and ranch, where Norm Meyer's home now exists. Legault took a job working at the sawmill planning to make some money before heading west in search of gold. That was his original plan, but things would change.

On Sundays Legault would often hike over the hill south of the McIntyre place (now called Legault Mountain) to hunt on the flat land. In 1875 Legault homesteaded land in this area he named Pleasant Park for the wide open meadows, and soon others began homesteading on the land that still lives up to its beautifully descriptive name (*Upper Side of the Pie Crust*, by Margaret Bentley, p.111).



photo provided by Carl Kuehster, Jr.

The home of Carl Kuehster Sr., along South Kuehster Road, as it appeared in the 1940s.

South Kuehster Road

South Kuehster (KES-ter) Road was the neighborhood where 27 homes were destroyed and three lives were lost in the Lower North Fork Fire.

Today Pleasant Park Road meets High Grade Road, Critchell Lane, South Kuehster Road and Arnett Ranch Road at a junction known as Critchell at the base of Sampson Mountain. Critchell was a thriving town 100 years ago.

In the 1870s the Fred Kuehsters homesteaded six miles southeast of Critchell on what is now known as Kuehster Road. Mr. Kuehster served on the school board and helped to establish the Lamb School.

Descendants of Fred and

his wife Lena built homes in the area, populating the area with more Kuehster homes. One of their sons, Otto, lived at the end of Kuehster Road where one can look out onto the plains and see the lights of Sedalia, Chatfield Reservoir, and the suburbs of Denver (*Pie Crust*, p. 138).

Bob Kuehster, the grandson of Fred and Lena, and son of Carl Kuehster Sr., grew up in the house shown at left, two miles southwest of Critchell. It was built by Bob's father and maternal grandfather Joseph Huebner in 1912.

Bob, who now lives in Castle Rock, was happy to report that the original homestead cabin at the end of Kuehster Road and his childhood home survived the recent fire.

Lamb School

Although it did not make the news, one of our historical one-room schools was lost to the fire. The Lamb School, named for the Lamb family who operated a post office nearby, was located five miles south of Critchell along Kuehster Road. The original school, opened in 1887, was destroyed by fire in 1919. A new school was built on the ridge above the original school location, and this is the one that burned in the March 26, 2012, fire (*A Century of Jefferson County Mountain Area Schools*, by Phebe Granzella, p. 13).

The loss of lives and homes from the Lower North Fork Fire was a tremendous tragedy for our community, and we grieve for everyone for whom this fire was personal.



photo origin unknown

The Lamb School, as it appeared in 1993, was located along South Kuehster Road. It was destroyed in the Lower North Fork Fire.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Call us with questions: 720.333.0223

- May 16 CHSM Membership Meeting, Aspen Park Community Club, 6:30 pm
- June 6 Lecture Event; evening
- July 14 Wine at the Ranch
- August 12 Conifer Community Ice Cream Social