

Brookside Centennial

By Sue Cochran

During 2013, Brookside will celebrate 100 years as an incorporated town. We're hoping to have a history-related article in each issue of Brookside's monthly newsletter.

Topic 1: Overview of the Town's History

In May of 1913, there was an air of excitement in our little community of Brookside. Fifty men and women who were residents at the time voted to cause the Town of Brookside to become an incorporated place. All fifty votes were cast in favor of incorporation. Not one vote was cast against the measure.

Newspapers reported that the election was held "at the one story, brick store building, known as the Colorado Supply Company's Store, at or near the corner of Main and Second Streets". That's the corner of Brookside and Colarelli today, and the building is now a residence.

Within a month, the community had elected Louis Fleming as their first mayor. Trustees were George Johnson, Stephan Coughlin, Peter Tonso, Antonio Moschetti, John Fontecchio and Joe Volpe.

Although newly incorporated in 1913, the village of Brookside had already been a thriving coal community for about 25 years.

Early pioneers in the area had found coal outcroppings along a little creek coming down out of the hills to the south of the Arkansas River. They started burning some coal for their own personal use. It burned pretty well, and word soon spread about their find.

Coal was in demand at the time. Railroaders looking for fuel to power their trains heard about the coal, bought up the land and opened a mine. They ran a spur from the main line to the mine, following that same little creek, which the pioneers had eventually named Spring Creek. Early maps show the spur to be owned by the Pueblo & Arkansas Valley Railway, which later sold to the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe.

A community soon sprang up around the mine so that the coal miners had a place to live. They called the mine and the collection of homes there Brookside because it was beside Spring Creek.

But the town always belonged to somebody else. The Canon City Coal Company filed a plat in 1888, stating that they were both owner and proprietor of the 48.74 acres making up the town of Brookside. Mahlon Thatcher of Pueblo was one of the officers of the company, and a book titled *The Thatchers: Hard Work Won the West*, written by Joanne Dodds in 2001, explains it pretty well. Talking about Rockvale and Brookside, Dodds says, "First, the coal from a series of minesprovided fuel **for** the railroad. Second, the coal was a cash crop to ship **on** the railroad. And, third, the coal was the fuel that ran Mahlon's smelter business in Pueblo."

This was a pretty typical arrangement. Investors owned an interest in several inter-related businesses. Canon City businessmen George A. Baker and B.F. Rockafellow opened a general store in Rockvale and several years later added a branch store at Brookside. Both stores became the property of Colorado Fuel and Iron of Pueblo in 1896 when CF&I took possession of the mine at Brookside. CF&I also owned mines at Coal Creek, Rockvale and Williamsburg.

During the time that Brookside was a CF&I company-owned camp, they were provided with educational opportunities and many other services by the company. "*Camp and Plant*", a weekly newspaper published by the Sociological Department of CF&I that was "devoted to news from the mines and mills" tells us that company instructors offered night classes in English and Italian on alternating evenings, as well as contracting with doctors to provide health care to the community. They also provided a lending library in a corner of the company store.

Unlike some of CF&I's coal camps, many of Brookside's houses were privately owned. In 1902, "*Camp and Plant*" reported that only about ten houses in town were company-owned, and that contractors were at work painting and making repairs to them as part of a camp clean-up.

Brookside had its own Post Office from May 1888 to Oct 1905 and again from Dec 1908 to Mar 1909. Mail was delivered and picked up from the post office as part of a regular daily route from Canon City to Chandler.

A two-room public school offered classes to children of the community until about 1921 when a new brick school containing four rooms was built. Local residents remember that brick building as an early home of Fremont County Head Start and as City Hall for a time. Today Brookside is a part of the Canon City School District.

The old, two room school house was converted into a Catholic church in the 1920s. Although standing vacant today, St. Anthony's served the local Catholic community for decades. No other denomination built a church in town, so Protestants attended churches in Canon City or Florence.

The community's water system had for years pumped water up the hill from the Arkansas River. CF&I changed that around 1900, putting water mains in every street, fire plugs on every corner, and pulling water from the mine. This was thought to be a huge improvement in water quality. Later, the Brookside Domestic Water Company was formed to purchase water from Lincoln Park, but many households still pumped water from a well. Finally, in the 1990s, Canon City's water system began to supply the community's water needs.

Brookside has struggled to stay alive at times; for years Mayor Tony Beltramo and Clerk Martin Vezzetti met once a year to pay the light bill for the town's two street lights. They said if they ran out of money, they'd have to raise taxes or turn out the lights. But we're thriving again today, and want to share some of our stories of the past and thoughts for the future.

We hope you've enjoyed this short summary of the history of Brookside. We plan to focus on several of the above-mentioned subjects, such as the schools, churches, the mine, etc. in individual articles throughout the year.