

Brookside Centennial—Brookside School

By Sue Cochran

As soon as a mining camp got “settled up” enough that the population included women and children, a church and a school were soon to follow. Many communities started out with one public building that served every possible purpose from elections to sermons to education – there was not a lot of worry about the separation of Church and State. In Brookside, Catholic and Protestant services took turns in the school house, and many a dance or public gathering was held there as well.

Antoinette Cresto’s book *King Coal* tells us that the first school to serve the area around Brookside was a one-room building on the prairie. CF&I maps show the school located on the SE corner of Pinion and Bluff—now an empty lot.

Early school records add that until the 1880s, District 14 was called McCumber District. It was described as stretching from South Canon and Fruitmere to Florence. On June 22, 1887, District 14 became Brewster-Brookside District, with considerably smaller boundaries.

Soon after, Brookside got a new school. \$3000.00 was allocated to provide for children near the newly-established Brookside mining camp. They built a handsome two-story frame structure so tall and narrow that it swayed in the wind. Sometimes, school had to be dismissed on windy days for the safety of the children, but they used that building for over thirty years anyway.

Virgil Bunten’s father was born in 1888 and attended the old two-story school. The community had used tie-down cables to try to stabilize it. When the neighborhood cows wandered by and took advantage of the opportunity to rub their heads and scratch their backs on the cables, the boys would have to run out and chase them away to make the schoolhouse stop shaking.

Children attending Brookside School in 1899 came from the following households: Ashton, Brown, Fansher, Gregory, Jones, Martin, McCumber, McKenzie, Pogliano, Sutherland, Tessiatore, Trombley, and Vezzetti.

In December of 1901, George Colgate, principal of the school at Brookside, was elected County Superintendent of Schools. The Brookside District hated to see him go. Under his leadership, the school board had provided all the students with the text books they needed, and the school was running smoothly.

When school reopened in January of 1902, the new crew included Principal Lewis James Morrison and primary teacher Irene Falkner, who taught first and second grades in one room while Professor Morrison had everybody else in a separate room. He also offered night classes that winter, teaching the English-speaking boys one night and the Italians another evening.

At the end of the 1901/1902 school year, the 14th District held a huge public meeting. 124 votes were cast, electing Elizabeth Gregory secretary. Since the district was reported to be practically out of debt, the levy was lowered from ten to eight for the coming year. The school census showed 204 pupils, but it is unclear whether that includes Brewster. An end-of-year picnic was held “in the grove”. Where was that?

On March 23, 1904, Professor Morrison dismissed school at the usual time. He then collapsed and died of some form of heart failure. He was in his early forties at the time, and was taken to Howard for burial near the grave of a baby he and his wife lost in 1901. They had come to Brookside from the Howard area.

September of 1907 saw the school at Brookside register 64 students. Brewster had 84 students, and the article reminds us that they were still under the same board, principal, and management. Both were proclaimed to be in excellent condition, and both felt they would gain several more students once classes actually began.

On January 2, 1914, Brookside Local United Mine Workers No. 2546 printed a news item thanking E.B. Woodford, Principal of the Brookside School, for his efforts in brightening the holidays for the students in District 14. That was the year of our worst strike, and many children would have had no Christmas at all if not for the school. A night of entertainment featured a band, a decorated tree, and treats for the children.

When the influenza epidemic hit in 1918, schools were forced to close. Our Professor R.J. Harry successfully maintained a home study course by delivering new assignments to each home twice a week. 85% of his students were able to satisfactorily complete the lessons, thus keeping them from falling behind.

In 1920, board members Matthew Graham, J.P. Balagna, and C. Aprato announced that both Brewster and Brookside needed new schoolhouses. Brewster broke ground in September, but Brookside could not decide on a site, and waited till after a special election in October to settle the matter. Three acres were eventually purchased from Charles Vezzetti on Main Street, now 1720 Brookside Ave. A.S. Hall & Son built both new schools of brick, providing two rooms at Brewster and four at Brookside. The new buildings were really very similar in appearance. Brookside's featured a coal furnace and running water.

The 8th Grade Graduation at Brewster-Brookside School District granted five certificates in May of 1934: Annie Colarelli, Josephine Perna, Angelina and Nicholas Moschetti of Brookside, and Helen Balagna of Brewster. Lee Blackwell gave the address. Two years later, in 1936, graduates included Naomi Banks, John Fontecchio, Minnie Andy, Lena Sardini, Elizabeth Perna, Alex Beltramo, Julia Massaro, Mary and Catherine Moschetti and Helen Aprato.

When the faculties for Fremont County's rural schools were announced in September of 1943, District 14 listed Charles Falgien, Mrs. Mary Balagna, Rita Balagna, Charlie Meigs and Mrs. Mildred Cole. Note that two of the women are married. Until the teacher shortages caused by World War II, married female teachers were almost unheard of.

In the Fifties, residents of the Brookside section of District 14 asked to be a part of Canon City District #1. It was not a smooth transaction. At one point, the placing of the boundary between Brookside and Brewster was called "one of the biggest problems in Fremont County if not in the State of Colorado"!!! Finally, after countless meetings, disputes, elections, annexations, disagreements and rulings, Supt. Ralph Monell was able to announce that the transfer had been approved and that plans were being drawn that would use all four rooms of the Brookside building as part of Canon City's School District #1 starting in September of 1957. Brewster soon became attached to the Florence District.

Only two years later, in 1959, the Brookside school, heart of the community for so many years, became a warehouse for Canon City District #1. Over time, the building was also used by New Hope School for Exceptional Children and Fremont County Head Start.

In 2003, the Town of Brookside purchased the property to use as the Town Hall. In 2010, the red-brick schoolhouse was taken down to create a parking lot for the new Brookside Community Center/Town Hall which was built on the property.

Send questions and comments to Renee at Town Hall or to Sue Cochran at 276-0577.