

## Early communities by Anne Bond

### Slaghts (Shawnee)

Azel Slaghts homesteaded in this valley that opens west of Platte Canyon in 1859 some say 1860. He dug ditches, farmed, had a sawmill and mined. He became

one of the early Park County commissioners. It is quite a story and Anne Bond our historian wrote it this way.....Early communities



Figure 1: Shawnee from the east, ca.1900-1910, Azel Slaght home in foreground from Ferrell (2003).

An early recorded settlement in the area around present-day Shawnee was the ranch of Azel Slaghts, who came to the valley in 1860. A native of Ohio, Azel Slaght was born in 1825, married Harriet Ward in 1844, and became the father of two children before the family moved to Wayne County in northern New York state. Soon after the move, Harriet died, as did her mother. Azel married Harriet's sister Alice about 1857 or 1858, and soon thereafter, began the journey west. In 1859, Alice gave birth to a son in Nebraska, and the next year, the family

completed the journey across the plains to Colorado. In 1860, the Slaght family established a home along the banks of the North Fork of the South Platte River, and the property was recorded.

The closest official site was the town of Granite Vale, a short-lived settlement within a few miles of current Shawnee, and the site of a post office from about 1863 to January of 1870, although the early date is disputed in some references. While cited on Elbert's 1866 Map of Colorado Territory, Central Gold

Region, the size and composition of the community is unclear. What is known is that Azel Slaghts served as Postmaster for Granite Vale, that there was a posted stage stop at the site, and that several notices regarding the post offices are documented in the public record. Over the course of the 1860s, the Slaghts ranch became a well-known site as small town, accommodations for guests and a stop on the Denver-Leadville stage line.

The Slaghts ranch was described by the Rocky Mountain News in 1868:

*Slaghts's Ranch, on the Platte, Denver and Buckskin road is a pretty place, the comfortable home of the weary and hungry traveler... Mr. S. cultivates some 200 acres, cuts all the hay he wants near home.... He is now building a sawmill with which to cut his own lumber. Mrs. S, treated us to agua-dente in a milk pan, which we considered the full measure of hospitality...*

By 1870, the site had grown in size and diversity of industry. The ranch operations expanded to raise oats, barley, potatoes, winter wheat and rye. The sawmill produced lumber for local use and shipment to other communities and guest accommodations were more regularly requested. In 1872, the publication Out West noted in its column "Farming Matters" a citation from the Central City Register about "A Mountain Ranch" to the west:

[Slaghts]... at an elevation of nearly 8000 feet above the sea level. To one not familiar with mountain farming in Colorado, the productiveness of the soil at this high elevation is surprising. ... Mr. Slaght informed us that he raised over 40,000 pounds of potatoes from fifteen acres of ground, besides large quantities of barley and oats. He has also one of

the best stock ranges in the country – keeps 100 head of stock and very rarely feeds any ... except in heavy snow storms.... About 60 tons of hay are cut annually...

Four years later, reports of tourist enjoyment of this valley appeared in the Denver newspapers, citing Slaght's as "a comfortable place to stop." The owner had completed a new house and the site was increasingly known as a welcoming hotel on the road between Denver and Fairplay, attractive to both leisure and business travelers. Slaght became active in civic life, as a county commissioner, justice of the local township for Park County, and postmaster.

In 1877, the Slaghts sold their 640 acre ranch with its houses, sawmill and farm buildings to Ezra Fairchild, who laid out a new village and changed the name to Fairville. The name of the post office was changed in 1878 to Fairville, but only for a few years. Several small businesses operated in the "new town of Fairville" in 1879, including the general merchandises of L. H. Whitney and Jonothan Blanch, blacksmith shops of G. Kruse and R. H. Gardener, restaurant of Culbert and Horn, livery stable of Head and Wonder and hotel of J. McNasser. Additional enterprises over the following four years included hotels of Herrick and Co., Chas Winkler, and W. K. Clay, lumber mills of W. H. Hildebrand and C. J. Morris, cattle dealer Judson Flowers, Justice of the Peace C. M. Taylor, and general store owner J. W. Price. The Fairville listing disappeared from the Colorado State Business Directory in 1885