Parked in the Past

Fairplay's Front Street in 1878
Following fire in 1873, business district rebuilt

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April 26, 2013

Town of Fairplay officials, citizens and consultants began in January to develop a Comprehensive Plan for Fairplay's growth. Part of the planning research was a survey completed by full-time and part-time residents of Fairplay and elsewhere in South Park taken in February of this year. The 306 respondents answered questions regarding the future development and growth of Fairplay. Full results are on the town's website at www.fairplayco.us.

According to the survey, 86 percent of respondents rated "Historic Buildings" as important to Fairplay's character. And a majority of all respondents completing the survey ranked the promotion of historic preservation efforts in town as "most important" or "second most important" in the category of "Strategies to Improve Fairplay's Appearance."

Thinking of historic buildings brings to mind Front Street, the largest grouping of historic buildings in Fairplay.

Front Street in 1878

Walking along the boardwalk of Fairplay's Front Street today, one may get the feeling of stepping back in time. But if the clock could be turned back to the summer of 1878, there would be noticeable differences between then and now.

One thing that has changed is the variety of businesses. Fairplay was named the county seat in 1867, and it was in the midst of the gold and silver mining boom. As such, it was the area's supply and service center for miners, ranchers and settlers.

Along Front Street alone, stretching from about 6th Street northwest to 2nd Street, were headquarters for two of the three Fairplay-based stage lines. There was a newspaper, a grocer, a brewery, two billiard halls, two hotels, a jeweler, a blacksmith and at least two saloons. There were stores selling dry goods and millinery (women's hats), jewelry, hardware and drugs.

The land office was here, and one could find the services of a doctor, attorney, banker, blacksmith and tailor on this, the main business street of Fairplay.

One would also notice that all of the structures were new. There were no

buildings older than five years on the Front Street of 1878.

And that is because, even though Fairplay's beginnings were in the 1859 gold rush, the business district of the town's infancy was destroyed in a raging fire in 1873.

Fire

At 8 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 26, 1873, a fire started in the Fairplay House Hotel on Front Street. It is probable that the hotel was near 6th and Front streets, where its replacement was rebuilt after the fire.

Within five minutes of the fire's discovery, the second story of the hotel was aflame. It had been a dry summer; the town was built completely of wood; and there was no water and no fire department to fight the fire.

Business houses were close together, making the fire spread quickly up the street. It was determined that to save the town, buildings would have to be blown up. But there wasn't enough explosive powder in Fairplay to accomplish that; the powder was stored at the mines.

The fire swept from 6th Street, northwest up Front Street to the end of town, leaving the business district in ashes. The wind blew sparks into homes one-half mile away and set them on fire. One witness said flames could be seen 25 miles away, according to a story in Georgetown's Daily Colorado Miner of Sept. 28, 1873. Timing of the fire made the situation worse; two-thirds of the population had no shelter and winter was coming.

The printing presses and equipment at Fairplay's newspaper, the Sentinel, were destroyed, but the story was covered in the Daily Colorado Miner and other Colorado newspapers, reprinted from a

Rocky Mountain News story of Sept. 28, 1883.

The good news is that there was no report of casualties, and all of the legal papers from the Land Office and County Clerk's Office were saved.

Four years later

A correspondent of Pueblo's Colorado Weekly Chieftain visited Fairplay and Alma twice during the winter of 1877 and early summer of 1878. The stories appeared in the Nov. 8, 1877, and June 27, 1878, editions. Following are just a few of the people and places that the correspondent wrote about in the late 1870s; their stories give insight into Fairplay in its youth.

Newspapers

At the time of the fire there was one newspaper in Fairplay, the Sentinel, owned by Dick Allen. In the Daily Colorado Miner's introduction to the reprinted fire story, there was special "heartfelt sympathies" extended from the Miner's editor to Allen, who came across the misfortune of the fire "just at a time when he had everything paid for, and his business was getting a fair start as a prosperous enterprise."

Allen rebuilt the Sentinel after the fire. In 1878, he was still the owner and employed W. S. Howell as editor. A rival newspaper, the Mount Lincoln Times, was published in Alma and was run by W. F. Hogan. It later moved to Fairplay.

The Chieftain correspondent, who signed columns with the name BONA (in all caps), indicated the two newspaper men didn't get along. He called Hogan "a genial cuss" who made "a live paper of the News." He said the paper had a good circulation throughout Park, Lake and

Summit counties and that Hogan "is happy."

But he said Hogan and Allen fight like "the Turks and Russians," (a probable reference to the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78), and at the time of his visit they were indulging in a pastime of "calling each other all the names they can conjure up from the Billingsgate dictionary." (Billingsgate was slang for foul, abusive language.)

Bank

The bank, established in 1872, was owned by Curtis G. Hathaway, who named the bank after himself, "Hathaway's Bank." In the 1873 fire, the bank building was destroyed, but Hathaway saved his money and papers. One of the first brick structures in town was the rebuilt Hathaway's Bank.

In 1887, the Independent Order of Odd Fellows lodge was established on the upper floor of the bank, where members still meet today. The main level of the building is also in use, occupied by Fairplay Antique and Art Gallery.

Hathaway was also a town trustee and agent for the Northwestern Stage Co., with service from Colorado Springs to Leadville. He had a branch bank in Alma (the Bank of Alma) and ran unsuccessfully in the race to become Colorado's lieutenant governor in the 1888 election. In 1897, he died of consumption in Tucson, Ariz. Both banks were taken over by J. H. Singleton in 1898; he was cashier at the Alma branch.

Billiard halls

In 1878, there were at least two billiard halls on Front Street. One, the Eclipse, was run by "big and fat and good natured" Fritz Coleman, said the Nov. 8, 1877, Chieftain story. It was located "hard by the bank" (very close to the bank), said the June 27, 1878, edition.

A speculation is that this is today's yellow brick building with signage indicating occupancy by Miners Moving and Storage, although no definite source could be found. It is so close to the former Hathaway's Bank that the two look like one building. It is known that during its history, this structure housed at different times the store of A. E. Jones, The Senate saloon, and the Park County Republican and Fairplay Flume.

Across the street from the Eclipse, according to the June 27, 1878, Chieftain, was the two-story Cabinet Billiard Hall owned by John J. Hoover. The billiard hall was upstairs, a liquor store was on the main level and a "sample room" was at the back of the billiard hall, "where the best of wines and liquors in the market are sampled by his thirsty customers," according to the Nov. 8, 1877, Chieftain.

In April 1879, billiard hall owner Hoover shot and killed Thomas Bennett at the Fairplay House Hotel and was charged with first-degree murder. A year later, in April 1880, the court allowed Hoover to plead guilty to manslaughter. After receiving what some thought was too mild a sentence, a group of vigilantes broke Hoover out of the county jail and hung him from a second floor window of the Park County Courthouse. That structure now houses the Fairplay Library. (See "Parked in the Past," The Flume, March 30, 2012).

But in June 1878, BONA said Hoover was "one of the best men in the business in the state," and the previous November, he said Hoover was "one of the best known businessmen of Fairplay."

Brewery, Saloon, Meat Market

Farther up the street was the South Park Brewery, also known as the Summer Brewery.

The June 27, 1878, Chieftain story said Leonhard Summer was one of the best brewers in the state, with a beer that "takes rank along with Zang's Denver and the Golden beer (a reference to Coors)." Zang's was a brewery and is now a brew pub restaurant in Denver.

Summer brewed South Park Lager Beer from his brewery located at about 3rd and Front streets. The first brewery on the site burned in the 1873 fire; the structure mentioned in both of the Chieftain stories was built in 1875. The 1875 brewery building was destroyed by a fire in 1892. Summer rebuilt again, and that structure is the one currently seen at the South Park City restored mining town in Fairplay.

Summer's brother, Joseph Summer, was proprietor of Summer's Saloon, which was across Front Street from the brewery. BONA said Joseph Summer's saloon was "one of the popular resorts of the town. A pretty (young woman from Germany) sets them up at this place and the boys all go there when they are thirsty."

In 1879, Leonhard Summer built his own saloon on Front Street; the building is now part of the South Park City restored mining town. By 1897, Leonhard Summer had turned his saloon into a meat market (Flume, Dec. 10, 1897).

In July 1883, at the age of 43, Joseph Summer committed suicide at a Como saloon he had recently rented. It was believed that he suffered from temporary insanity (Flume, July 13, 1883).

Leonhard Summer died by suicide on Sept. 10, 1900, when he was 62 years old, apparently despondent over financial losses (Flume, Sept. 13, 1900). By the end of the month, the meat market was leased to a Leadville man (Flume, Sept. 28, 1900).

Hotels

The Fairplay House on 6th Street had proprietor and ownership changes almost yearly, according to advertising in The Flume through the years. In 1877-78, the business was owned by Tom Kilduff. He was the brother of Alma's St. Nicholas Hotel owner, Ed Kilduff.

Brother Ed Kilduff stayed in the Alma area until at least 1909. But Tom Kilduff owned the Fairplay House for only a year and had left town by April 1879, when Hoover shot Bennett there.

When Tom Kilduff left Fairplay, he started a retail merchandising business in Kokomo in Summit County (Colorado.) He later moved that business to Leadville, Colo., and then to Aspen.

In 1885, Kilduff moved to Meeker, Colo., and became a partner in a 3,500-acre cattle ranch. It was "one of the most imposing and profitable (ranches) on the Western slope" of Colorado, according to the 1905 edition of "Progressive Men of Western Colorado," by A. W. Bowen & Co., publishers.

Another hotel mentioned by the Chieftain was near 2nd and Front streets; the site is on the grounds of South Park City. It was the Buckhorn Hotel, operated by G. J. (Jim) Cole.

He was formerly proprietor of an establishment called the Red Light Saloon in Pueblo, Colo., and "he has here a number of the attractions which made the Red Light popular in Pueblo. Jim knows how to conduct a place of this kind and is a popular man in this vicinity."

The Buckhorn Hotel was also known as the Red Light Dance Hall. The girls who worked in this and other dance halls in the central Colorado Mountains were called "inmates" and not mentioned by name in newspaper stories of the day. Typically, the stories told of a dance hall-inmate's drug overdose or suicide. By 1883, the dance hall was closed and the building was being used to store hay. It burned to ashes at midnight on May 7, 1883.

First brick rebuild

Hathaway's Bank (right) and the building housing the A. E. Jones Store (left) were two of the first brick structures in Fairplay, built within five years of an 1873 fire that destroyed most of Fairplay. The A. E. Jones Store may have been the 1878 location of Fritz Coleman's Eclipse Billiard Hall. In an 1878 newspaper story, the Eclipse was described as being "hard by," or close to, the bank. (Photo courtesy of the Park County Local History Archives, T. C. Miller photo, Credit: Ed & Nancy Bathke Collection)

McLaughlin's livery, Feed

This structure was the headquarters of the stage lines of Spotswood & McClelland and (Michael) McLaughlin's, occupying approximately the location that the Old Red Barn Antique Shop and Silver Scoop Creamery now occupy. The stagecoach on the right and buggy on the left were common means of travel before train tracks were built through South Park in 1879. (Photo courtesy of the Park County Local History Archives, Alice McLaughlin Wonder

collection, Source: South Park Historical Foundation)

Fairplay house hotel

This shot is looking northwest on Front Street. The large building on the left, between 6th and 7th streets, is the Fairplay House Hotel. The 1873 Fairplay fire originated here. After the hotel was rebuilt, this was the site in 1879 where John Hoover shot and killed Thomas Bennett in a dispute over water in the town ditch. (Photo courtesy of the Park County Local History Archives, Isaac S. Smith Family)

Hathaway's bank building

In 1878, Hathaway's Bank occupied the blue building (right) known today as 441 Front St. That blue building has housed Fairplay Antique and Art Gallery since November 2011. (Photo by Laura Van Dusen/The Flume)

Front street 2013

This is Front Street on April 19, 2013. The photo was taken looking east between 4th and 5th streets in nearly the same location as the "Early Fairplay" shot. (Photo by Laura Van Dusen/The Flume)

Early fairplay

This shot was taken looking east on Front Street between 4th and 5th streets. Notice Hathaway's Bank (now Fairplay Antique and Art Gallery) on the far right. The two-story building across the street and next to the restaurant may have been the Cabinet Billiard Hall owned by John Hoover. (Photo courtesy of the Park County Local History Archives, T. C. Miller photo, Credit: Ed & Nancy Bathke Collection)