



Park County Historical Society visits Hartsel Program revealed details about early Hartsel

by Flip Boettcher, Correspondent

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The Park County Historical Society hosted two successful dinner programs this summer in Hartsel at the community building.

Linda Bjorklund, local historian and writer, spoke at both of the programs. The first, in June, was about local pioneer Sam Hartsel. The second program, held Sept. 17, was about the town of Hartsel. Around forty people attended each of the programs.



Early Hartsel

This early panoramic picture of Hartsel shows what the town looked like in the early 1900s. The arrow is pointing to the Hartsel Depot, which is still standing. (Photo by Flip Boettcher/The Flume)

Sam Hartsel was born in Bucks County Pennsylvania, population about ten people, in 1834.

Sam came to Colorado in 1860, like most of the early pioneers, to find his fortune in the gold fields. Gold had been discovered at Hamilton and Tarryall, near Como, in 1859, and the rush was on. Note: this

was not today's Tarryall which was originally called Puma City.

It took Sam and his four buddies but a few short weeks to run out of money. Sam, being a resourceful person, realized there were other ways to make money and he started buying up the thin, tired cattle and oxen that had pulled the wagons west.

Sam fattened them up on the rich South Park grass and then sold the beef to the miners. This proved to be very successful and led to the start of Sam's ranching career.

With the passing of the Homestead Act in 1862, Sam filed for his 160 acres where the Middle and South Forks of South Platte River meet.

He was the first homesteader in the area. A short time later Sam developed Hartsel town, which was never a platted town and the Hartsel hot springs across the river from the town. Sam's ranch house was located one and a half miles southeast of the town site and the hot springs.

In 1877, at 42 years of age, Sam married 31-year old widower and descendant of Daniel Boone, Nancy Boone. They had three daughters and one son, Sam, Junior, who died at the age of one.

The Hartsel ranch was successful and Sam started purchasing surrounding ranches.

When he sold the ranch in 1907 to the South Park Land and Livestock Company, there were 9,000 acres. The livestock company eventually acquired about 100,000 acres.

Sam moved to Denver but kept the town site. By 1910, though, he had sold that as well. Sam died in Denver in 1918, but his town prospered on. For more on Sam Hartsel see the June 24 issue of The Flume.

The Colorado Midland Railroad was built through Hartsel from Colorado Springs in 1887 and they promoted excursions to the Hartsel area.

The wildflower excursions were very popular in their day. The railroad also would bring extra cabooses and leave them in the area to provide accommodations for vacations, outings, hunting and fishing expeditions and then pick them up for the return to Colorado Springs. The old abandoned Midland depot is still standing today.

The Hartsel Hotel, located where the Badger Basin gas station is today, was very popular in its day.

The old carriage house, the barn next to Bayou Salado, housed the horses and carriages which the hotel used to take its guests across the Middle Fork of the South Platte River to visit the hot springs.

Many came to soak in the hot spring's medicinal and healing waters in hopes of cures. Dances were held every Saturday night at the hotel.

The hotel stood until December, 1972, when the vacant building caught fire on

the second floor and burned to the ground.

A cattle company owned the building at the time and there was speculation that they had started the fire on purpose.

The fledgling Hartsel fire department could not get their fire engines started and had to call the Fairplay fire department to help put out the fire. A water bucket line was started from the river, but to no avail, the historic hotel burned down.

The only portion that survived the fire is now the one story Bayou Salado. It was the one story handicapped section of the hotel. At one time, school teacher Betsy Hanlon lived there with 20 to 30 cats.

Besides the hot springs bath house and the large outdoor pool, there was a floating shed with a hole in the floor, a bathtub, an empty bucket, and a bucket full of cold water.

Each visitor would dip a bucket or two of 130 degrees hot water from the hole in the floor and pour it into the bathtub and then mix cold water from the other bucket to get the right soaking temperature.

Before one left, they were supposed to leave a full bucket of hot water to cool down for the next visitor.

The hot springs have fallen into disuse. They were abandoned mainly because of the water's high radium content. The spring is still there and the waters are still hot.

In the 1920s when the cattle business was experiencing a downturn, sheep raising became popular and profitable in the Hartsel area.

By the 1930s there were more automobiles than horses or railroad passengers.

The Hartsel School, now the community building, was started in the early 1870s. The middle and high schools were right next door. Each of these buildings has been moved at least once in their lifetimes.

Eventually, the middle school was added onto the back of the community building. The original chalk boards are still on the walls in the building today.

At one time there were three gas stations and a Plymouth car dealership in Hartsel, as well as two mercantile stores.

One was a general mercantile store, housed in the present day Highline Café, and started by the Kleinkenckts. They just stocked general merchandise. The other mercantile, across the street, catered to the ranchers and stocked ranch equipment.

Today, Hartsel is a small community with a gas station, post office, café, bar, realtor and several shops.

For a complete history see "Hartsel: History of a Town" by Linda Bjorklund, her first book. The next Park County Historical Society program in Hartsel will be next summer.