

## Slaghts

*History does not exist for us until and unless we dig it up, interpret it, and put it together. Then the past comes alive, or, more accurately, it is revealed for what it has always been - - a part of the present.*

*Frederick W. Turner III, I Have Spoken. 1971.*

In about 1860, just prior to the Civil War, a man named Azel Slaght brought his family from the state of New York and homesteaded an area just east Shawnee in Park County. The homestead became well known and Azel Slaght went on to become one of Park County's early commissioners.

Azel Slaght was born in Ohio in 1825 and as a young man worked as a farmer. He married Harriet Ward in 1844. They had 2 children - Sarah and Everett. In the early 1850's the family moved to Wayne County in the northern part of New York where Slaght continued to be a farmer. In 1856, Mary Ward the mother of Harriet and Alice, the younger sister of Harriet, passed away. Slaght was the executor of Mrs. Ward's will and shortly after her death he and Alice married.

Azel and Alice Slaght began their journey west in the late 1850's. They had a brief stop in Nebraska where son Herbert was born in 1859. In 1860 the Slaght family settled along the North Fork of the South Platte River just a short distance from present Shawnee. Since the counties were not yet organized Slaght recorded his land with the Granite Vale Claim Club.

During the next several years the Slaght family gradually established a popular ranch, little town, post office and a stop for the Denver-Leadville stage coaches. Azel and Alice became known for their hospitality. Their ranch, which was just a few miles east of Kenosha Pass, was a welcome stop for travelers. It was known as Granite Vale, Slaght's Ranch, Slaght's Station or Slaghts.

An 1868 article in the *Rocky Mountain News* gives the following description of Slaght's Ranch:

"Slaght'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 aqua-dente in a milk pan, which we considered the full measure of hospitality, and since which we have entertained the most chivalrous and affectionate respect for her."

Another article in 1868 indicates that in addition to hay, Slaght cultivated land for oats, barley, potatoes, winter wheat and rye.

An 1870 article in the *Rocky Mountain News* states "At Slaght's the coaches meet and stop over night and he (Slaght) is always busy; he runs the saw mill besides, has a fine mountain farm, and is evidently getting rich."

By 1874 Slaght's is shown to have stock and lumber with a population of 25.

The hotel was a log building until 1874 when it is listed as a frame building.

Two years later the *Rocky Mountain News* gave the following description of Slaght's Ranch:

"Tourists are now in the height of enjoyment trouting it along the road leading from Denver to the South Park. . . Those who come up this far in the coach will find Slaght's a comfortable place to stop at. He has during the past year finished his new house, making it altogether the best hotel between the Junction and Fairplay. Slaght is so well known to old settlers that it is superfluous to mention his qualifications for keeping a public house. Suffice it to say, that his table is good, his rooms and beds comfortable, the stage stops to change horses at his place both ways, so that with a daily mail to and from Denver, it is one of the best places on the road for the tourist and Denver businessman, getting away from work."

The article indicates that there was some sort of mail delivery even though the Granite Vale Post Office (Slaghts) was closed in 1870

Azel Slaght quickly became involved in public life. Although Colorado was not yet a state in 1861, the counties were getting organized and in December of that year Park County had its first election. Azel Slaght and Henry Crow were elected justices of Huchinson Township. Henry W. Dorsett (long term), L. L. Robinson and James A. Brown (short term) were elected county commissioners. The following year another election was held and Slaght was elected county commissioner. In January 1863 Azel Slaght began serving as county commissioner, a position he held until September 1868. He was chairman from October 1864 to October 1866.

Slaght's years as county commissioner were not without controversy. In January 1868 acting Gov. Hall attempted to appoint Abraham Bergh, a Republican, to a vacated county commissioner's seat. Slaght and James Luttrell (the other commissioner), both Democrats, refused to recognize the appointment. Slaght and Luttrell said there was no vacancy even though there were reports that Thomas Willey, the missing commissioner had moved to Pueblo and could no longer serve as commissioner. The records show that in June 1868 Willey reappeared and the 3 commissioners were officially Slaght, Luttrell and Willey. Ironically, Slaght, Luttrell and Bergh were involved as partners in some mining claims during the 1860's.

In 1877 the Slaghts sold their 640 acre ranch to Ezra Fairchild for \$13,000. The ranch included a hotel, sawmill, and several other buildings.

Fairchild changed the name of the town to Fairville but Slaghts was still the popular name that was used. Interestingly, Azel Slaght is listed as the first postmaster at Fairville from September 1878 until the office was closed in January 1879. Fairchild may have thought that his town would prosper with the railroad going past it but he was apparently disappointed. In 1880 W. W. Montellins, who had owned a music store on Larimer Street in Denver, bought Slaghts from Fairchild and built a new hotel.

James William (J. W.) Price, a native of England, arrived in the Platte Canyon area in 1876 and obtained a job on a logging crew making ties for the new railroad. When he made enough money he sent for his family which was in Illinois and walked to Denver to

meet them. He then settled his family in the town of Slaghts and later became the postmaster.

By 1886 Slaghts along with Buffalo, Estabrook, Bailey's, Webster and Cassel's were some of the popular summer resorts along the Denver and South Park Railroad. J. W. Price managed a nice comfortable hotel that had a little store where visitors could find cigars and groceries. Fishing was a popular pastime.

J. W. Price and his son, W. H. (Harry) Price began homesteading present day Shawnee and by 1901 the railroad had built the Shawnee Lodge. W. H. moved his store from Slaghts to Shawnee and he became the postmaster, a position that he held for 40 years.

With the establishment of Shawnee, the town of Slaghts gradually deteriorated and today there is no indication that the once popular ranch and resort ever existed. The land eventually became part of the Jess Fitzsimmons ranch and is mostly hay fields today. Perhaps there is one reminder that Slaghts once existed - the Shawnee School which is located in McGraw Memorial Park in Bailey. The school was built in 1897 on what is now county road 64, the original road between Bailey and Shawnee. It was originally known as Slaghts School until the name was changed to Shawnee School in 1899.

Little is known of the Slaght family after they left the Platte Canyon area. When Azel and Alice left the area their family included 3 sons - Herbert, Franklin and Edwin. By 1880 Alice was married to James McGuire and living in San Jose, California. In 1900 Azel was living in Monterey County in California. On March 25, 1902 Azel Slaght died at the age of 76 and was buried in Oak Hill Memorial Park in San Jose. Alice (Slaght) McGuire died on October 26, 1912 in San Jose at the age of 70.

Even though Slaghts does not exist today, Azel and Alice Slaght gave Park County a little history that people can learn from and use today.

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