

Petty disputes led to Plateau City on Grand Mesa

By Kathy Jordan

There are two different stories on the origin of Plateau City.

One story is told by Reuben A. Pitts in his book, "The Bull and the Bees or the Facts of Life in the Plateau Valley." Pitts writes that Sam Kiggins wanted to put in a lumberyard and hardware store in Collbran. When T.G. Underhill of Collbran objected, Kiggins became angry and told Underhill "O.K., Bub, I'll fix you! I'll start a town of my own."

The other story was told by Helen Hawxhurst Young from the notes of Alex Hawxhurst in the book, "The Skin and Bones of Plateau Valley History." When Hawxhurst found out that the July 4th picnic was going to be held at Kiggins Grove instead of Collbran, he refused to attend. Kiggins took offense saying "I would like to give him something to be mad about. This is a better place for a town, and this is where it should be".

So Kiggins donated the 40 acres he owned about one mile west of Collbran as the town site.

Scott Walck, a longtime resident of Plateau City, said that either way the small town became the trade area for those who lived to the west and to the south in the Kansas Mesa area. When you had to travel with a team of horses in knee-deep mud, a one-mile trip was a long one.

Walck said that it didn't take long for business to sprout in Plateau City.

The Keystone Store, carrying general merchandise, was built by Jim Baldrige and Jim Post. It also served as the post office until 1941. There was a dance hall, complete with a baby grand piano, above the store. The structure is still there today.

Peter Lefever built the Plateau City House, a hotel and restaurant. After Leo and Nell Ryan purchased the hotel from Lefever, they added a livery stable and operated the stage line. The loading dock in front of the hotel was level with the door of the stagecoach so that when the stage pulled up, passengers could easily step out onto the dock.

No doubt this dock was appreciated by the Easterners who took the Midland Railroad "out west" to De Beque. There, they boarded the stage for an overnight stay at the Plateau City House before making the trip to Squirrel Cabins or Mesa Lake on Grand Mesa for their vacation.

Walck said the town also had a pool hall and ice cream parlor, plus a cigar factory where Annie Koch and Laura Sandstrom hand-rolled Annie Laurie cigars. There were a couple

of blacksmith shops, a millinery shop, a couple of creameries, a saw and planing mill, a brick factory, and a Methodist Church.

Ralph Kinney built a brick garage, which was later used as a county shop building and then became the American Legion Building, where there were a dance hall and meeting room.



Looking south toward Plateau City between 1900 and 1905. Sam Kiggins donated 40 acres for the small town's founding after a dispute with the residents of Collbran, which is just a mile away. Scott Walck Collection

Plateau City had the Hoel Academy which offered more advance classes. It later became the Hoel-Ross Business School in Grand Junction.

The Plateau City brass band, directed by Mr. Phillips, performed at a bandstand on the corner of 330 and 57 ½ Road.

Dr. Watson, the town's only physician, also owned the drug store.

Walck said a public well in the middle of Colorado Highway 330 in front of the general store remained until 1949, when the county oiled the road. The townspeople packed their domestic water from this well to their homes. Those who drove in with teams of horses or cattle drives through town would pump the trough full to water the animals.

The Plateau City Water Works built a reservoir on top of the hill at Highway 330 and 57 ½ Road so there would be water pressure for a town system. Plateau City had citywide water before electricity arrived in 1941.

In the late 1940s or early 1950s, Bill Mailey opened a trucking business, and cattle ranchers started moving cattle in semis. Until then area cattlemen would trail to De Beque and ship by railroad.

Originally, Plateau City residents had to pick up their daily mail at the post office, but that changed when Rural Free Delivery was instituted by the United States Post Office Department. After that time, a rural postal worker picked up outgoing mail in the morning, and in the evening it was distributed along with The Daily Sentinel by a newspaper carrier. .

For a number of years after the Sentinel started delivery, the residents could call in prescriptions to the Palisade Pharmacy to be picked up and delivered by the paper carriers. Pharmacy customers were billed once a month.