

History Trail Run-Edgerton
by Jack Anthony, 29 Jan 2005

This is the second in a series of articles providing New Santa Fe Regional Trail enthusiasts insight into the rich history of communities and people who lived nearby this recreational trail. This article introduces historical tidbits of the life and times around the Air Force Academy's Ice Lake area. The New Santa Fe Regional Trail starts here and heads north to Palmer Lake.

Mr. David Edgerton homesteaded 160 acres here in 1872. The Denver & Rio Grande Western railroad came right through Mr. Edgerton's property. From Edgerton's ranch rose a village bearing his name. Edgerton was first recognized 1877 Colorado Business Directory as being a railroad station. The town of Edgerton grew with the addition of the VC Lewis Hotel and post office in 1881. Also in this time Dr A.W. Beach was the local doctor in Edgerton. By 1890, Edgerton's population was 50 citizens. Soon W.M. Smith established a General Store, he was also the postmaster. By 1902 Edgerton had grown to 350 people. Many of Edgerton citizens were people suffering from lung disease (they were called "lungers") who came for the beneficial effects of the cool, dry air of Colorado. Later the Woodmen Sanatorium would be established in the Woodmen Valley (today's Rockrimmon area) for these health seekers.

In 1893 the Cascade Ice Company was first noted in the Colorado Business Directory. Their business was ICE! Ice harvesting and distribution was a big deal back then...remember, refrigerators weren't invented yet! The Cascade Ice Company constructed several stone dams on the West Branch of the Monument Creek and created three small lakes for cutting blocks of ice in the wintertime. The present Ice Lake was built in 1969. Except for some stone dam ruins, there's no evidence of the original Cascade Company's "Ice Lakes." The railroad built two sidings off the main route that enabled the Cascade Ice Company workers to load blocks of ice directly onto specially insulated railroad box cars. These railcars had thick wooden walls and often used sawdust between the inner and outer layers to provide insulation. Once loaded, a passing freight train stop along here, the brakeman would throw the switch, the train would back up into the spur, connect and take away the ice laden box car. Along with Edgerton, Monument and Palmer Lake also had ice production operations on their respective lakes. When the highway from Colorado Springs to Denver was built in the early 1920's the road by-passed Edgerton and it faded away as a village.

District 20's first grammar school was located near here. It was on the mesa about a ¼ mile west of the Ice Lake trailhead. Hints of an old road leading northwest up to the Edgerton School can still be seen (barely!) from where the

access road crosses the railroad tracks and leads east to the trailhead parking area. The Edgerton School was built in 1874 and held classes until 1915. Kids from as far away as the Woodmen Valley would walk or ride horses to attend grades 1-8 at Edgerton School. Recess was great—the kids would fish in the Monument Creek and I'm sure they also dropped their lines into the Cascade Company's lakes. The school met with some controversy when Woodmen Valley area parents petitioned to have transportation for their kids. The director of the school denied the request—perhaps he was a cross country coach and wanted the kids to get some distance training in! In early 1915, the Woodmen parents got the OK to have a school built in the Woodmen Valley. By fall that year, the new school was built where the Woodmen Center is located today and the Edgerton School was closed. I wish to thank Sharon Cunningham, local author and history enthusiast, who shared with me info she learned in researching the Woodmen Valley and Edgerton schools. Sharon is capturing the School District 20 history in a book!

Edgerton area was as serene back then as it is today. However, one day in 1886 a mysterious murder occurred. Frank Hall captured the story of the Edgerton murder in an 1891 essay on El Paso County history. An elderly lady and her grandson stayed behind at their Edgerton ranch while the widowed mother went east to Boston on an extended trip. The two lived quietly together and would occasionally go to Denver for a week or so. Thus, the air of desertion around the ranch was not unusual, but after what appeared to be a longer than normal absence, the neighbors grew suspicious--something wasn't right! So the concerned neighbors investigated. They found the house vacant, but noticed the dinner table was set for three! Only two people lived here, who was the third place setting for? That will forever remain a mystery! Then, the neighbors went to the barn and found the normally secured barn door was broken into. Upon entering they discovered the bodies of the lady and the child. It was believed they were attacked in the house and sought refuge in the barn, but met with death there. The murder remains an unsolved mystery of that era.

Next time I will share some insight into the life and times of two pioneer families who homesteaded this area in 1871-72 timeframe. The Lennox family homesteaded northwest of the Ice Lake trailhead and the Young family established their sheep ranch about a mile north of Ice Lake. Each family kept detailed accounts of their efforts to settle in the wild west. Mary Eliza Young kept a diary that chronicled how the Young homestead was established and in 1872 14-year old Elizabeth Lennox also kept a journal. Mary and her youthful neighbor to the south captured their family's life as they settled, prospered and persevered as Colorado pioneers.

Photo of Cascade Ice Company Dam Structures at Lake #3 Follow

