

# HISTORY OF CHERAW, COLORADO

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Early History of the Holbrook Valley and Cheraw.

In the beginning, the Holbrook Valley was part of a vast acreage of dry prairie land belonging to the State of Colorado. Colorado is known as the Centennial State, having been admitted to the Union on August 1, 1876, the 38<sup>th</sup> state.

The Holbrook Valley is the land lying over the hill 8 or 10 miles north of La Junta. It is a stretch of land from 4 to 8 miles wide and around 20 miles long. It extends from where the ditch takes out of the river west of Rocky Ford, to about 6 miles east of Cheraw to the County line. It receives its irrigation water from the Holbrook Ditch.

The Laguna Canal Company with Henry R. Holbrook as President acquired some land from the State and put the large irrigation ditch through some time before 1900. Then the small ditches and reservoirs were added later about 1906 or 1908. The Valley, one main ditch and one reservoir were named Holbrook, after Mr. Henry R. Holbrook. Home steads took up this prairie land under the Laguna Canal. Some of the families who came to this new country before 1900 were: the George Blands in 1892, the Robert Hansens in 1893, the Jenkins family in 1894, the Houck family in 1898. Others were the Harris family, Chris and Nick Rick families, Sherman Balls, Charles Moores, Osbornes, Rickmans, Henry Noncales, Wadleighs, Sheltons, Carringtons, Gregorys, Groms, and Reeders. The Casteels lived out at Timberlake for a while. Timberlake was older than Holbrook and was a storage reservoir for the Fort Lyon Canal Company. It was named for a prominent man, Senator Timberlake.

Some of the families who came right after the turn of the century were: The Esteps in 1902, the Luginbills in 1904, the Coles and Basingers came about the same time, all from Kansas. Isaac Kulps, Wilson Bergey and the Thuts came from Pennsylvania in 1908, followed by Leathermans in 1910. The Zooks, Nunemakers, Bells, Headricks, Goffs, Hersheys, Snyders, Millers, Henards, Lances, Stantons, Randalls, Averys, Ebersoles, Jens Hansens, Planks and Jim Lewis, who was one of the first ditch superintendents, followed these. Also Don Pauls came then.

The first schoolhouse, the Bee Hive, was built in 1896 on the corner where Joe Wadleigh lived. Besides serving as a grade school, it served as a community-gathering place. Church and Sunday school were held here including social functions, etc.

The people who had taken up land, built homes, some sod houses with tarpaper and dirt roofs, some frame, some adobe and some stone. They got their water supplies, (drinking, etc.) from the ditch, hauling it in barrels. They broke up the land with walking plows pulled by horses, no mechanical equipment here. They had to drive to La Junta or Rocky Ford for most of their supplies. It was a long hard drive by horse drawn vehicles over prairie roads and took a full day to make the round trip.

The first trading company or store in this new land was two miles west of the present Cheraw, and was called Center. Charles Moore and a Mr. Walters operated this store. There was also a small church located here called Mennonite Brothers in Christ, and a little later a grade school was added. Some of the teachers who taught here were Dalbey, Yates and Claude Kane at the time this school and the East End school consolidated with the Cheraw School.

As the population grew and had to have better water for household use, several artesian wells were put down. One at Center, one near the Cheraw town site and one northeast. Farmers would take their water tanks, which they had acquired by this time, to the wells and fill them. Some were making cisterns and others were keeping the water in the tanks.

In 1902, Mr. Henry Holbrook had acquired water rights from the Laguna Canal Co., of which he was President, and in 1906 he acquired land from the State of Colorado. In the same year he sold 40 acres of this land to Arthur S. Beymer of Rocky Ford, with some water rights. The same year Mr. Beymer bought more water rights from the Laguna Canal Co. and presented the land and the water rights to the public for a town site. He also gave a plot for the town with specifications for streets and alleys. He had recorded in all abstracts that if at any future time, liquor was sold on any of the land, that it would be forfeited and reverted to the original owner. These 40 acres were south of the railroad right of way and extended to the lake. It was marked off in lots sold and the town was started. Jim Lewis, being a surveyor, helped plot the land for the town site.

About this time in 1905, a Mr. Wiley, for whom the town of Wiley was named and where he had settled, had come from Cheraw, South Carolina and named Cheraw after his hometown, - a small town by a little lake. Cheraw is an Indian name and means "Sparkling Water". AT that time the Cheraw Lake was just a small pond. Some old timers say there were two springs in the bottom of the lake which fed it water. Mr. Wiley was also instrumental in getting the railroad put through in 1906.

By this time the farmers were finding out that they had fertile land which would grow most any crop if they could get water on it. They had begun raising some sugar beets with the factory in Swink, the Holly Sugar Company, and the American Beet Sugar Company in Rocky Ford. The railroad had been put through to Swink with a branch going straight across the river to Rocky Ford. This railroad through Cheraw is a branch road running parallel to the main line from La Junta, through Swink to Holly.

The Rocky Ford line across the river was abandoned in about 1912 when a flood washed out the river bridge and it was never replaced. Sugar beet dumps had been built every few miles along the railroad and the farmers hauled their beets in trucks and loaded them into the freight cars from the dumps, where they were taken to the factory. Men and horses did all this work, no mechanical equipment yet.

Between 1906 and 1908, the small ditch was added to the irrigation system and plats for storage reservoirs #1 and #2 were filed May 20, 1908 by W.P. Osborne and signed by W. M. Randall. The #1 reservoir was called Holbrook Lake and #2 was Dye Lake. These

storage reservoirs were made later Holbrook was enlarged and a dyke built across the east end to keep from flooding the land east below. Before this, some of the water could come down as far as the Cheraw Lake and had helped to form the small Harris Lake on the place where the Harris family lived at that time. Ernest Stjernholm bought the place.

By this time the town of Cheraw was growing. A depot had been built and one of the first depot agents was Harry Lyles. R. B. Dunn was here for a short time as agent, then returned later to serve for several years. Mr. Bullard was also an agent for a time. A. F. Glase had bought one of the new city lots and erected a store just south of the filling station. He bought out Mr. Moore and Walters at the Center location and moved the merchandise to Cheraw. Then he became the first town postmaster, putting the post office in the general store.

Frank Gregory built a brick building and put in another general store. Mr. Briscoe had another general store just east of the Drug Store building and Ed Deemer built a large department store building on the corner where the turkey processing plant is located. They piped one of the artesian wells to this corner where people could fill their water tanks more conveniently.

A hardware and implement store managed by J. R. Bell was just south of the Deemer store. Another hardware and lumberyard was built where the Holbrook Pump and Supply is now. This was managed by C. R. Thomas. Dr. Edwards came out from La Junta and put in a small Drug store. He was the first doctor for the town.

I.W. Strickler and family came out from St. Joseph, Missouri in 1910 and organized a bank. William Moore was President, Strickler was Cashier and Sherman Bell was also associated with the bank. A bank building was built on the corner where the filling station was and this was probably the only filling station in the world with a tile floor. The First State Bank of Cheraw served the public until it's closing in 1925. The first newspaper in Cheraw was started in 1910. It was called the "Cheraw Clarion" and was published by C. B. Stewart.

The M. E. Church was built in 1907 with Chaplain Edwards as first minister. East Mennonite Church was built in 1907. Mr. Nunemaker and A. M. Leatherman were among the first ministers there. Further west, near Holbrook Lake, was also a church, "Free Methodist", called "Lake View". There was a grade school also at East End and Albert Nunemaker and John Thut were among the first teachers there.

Roy Bartholomew, who was a carpenter, came to Cheraw and built a house where the Holcombs lived. He put in the first telephone office and operated it for some time. Mr. Preston had a livery stable and ran a dray business, hauling ice, freight, etc. from La Junta. A new brick two-story building for grade school was built in 1910 just north of the present buildings. W. B. Painter built the hotel in 1913 and operated it as such for several years. It had been Neva Snyder's private home for some time.

Mr. Ed Deemer built the Alfalfa Hay Mill in 1911. Other businesses in town by then were: two blacksmith shops, a pool hall, a barber shop, restaurant and picture show,

which was operated in the town hall. It was the former Beehive school building, which had been moved to town on Main St. and served as a community building. The Grange also held their meetings here.

In 1912 a band was organized, a bandstand built and concerts were held. The Church Ladies would also have ice cream socials etc., to make money. The Cheraw Band became much in demand as a Real Band Master named Armstrong, came to town and organized it into a military band with uniforms etc. Until about 1915 most of the businesses were on Main St., running north and south, past the bank. In 1915 Kehl and Young built a large business building facing north, just across the street from the railroad. They made places in this building for three businesses. Dr. Hersom bought our Dr. Edwards and moved the Drug stock and his office to the one on the east side. A pool hall and barbershop were put in the middle one and the K & Y Garage in the one on the west side. Part of the businesses began moving to the new location, facing the railroad.

In 1916 L. H. Houghton from Rocky Ford bought the Drug Store from Dr. Hersom and the next year Dr. Pitney from Denver bought Dr. Hersom's practice, leaving his office in the same building at the back end of the Drug Store where he practiced until 1945, when he retired and moved to California. L. H. Houghton operated the Drug Store until he passed away in 1965.

In 1917 the town was incorporated with Mr. Ed Deemer as first Mayor. An artesian well was put down and pipes laid for a water system for the town. The telephone system had been put in and the Southern Colorado Power Company from Pueblo (through Rocky Ford) put in electricity and the town became quite modern. In 1918, the residents who went out to the ditches, dug small trees and transplanted them in town first observed Arbor Day. They kept this custom for several years, taking picnic lunches and spending the day working and visiting. By this method the town had trees.

In 1917 Charles Lyons came out from New York and found he could raise turkeys on the prairie farm land. Later several other farmers tried it and it had then become the largest business in Cheraw. In about 1922 Paul Hershey, Russell Stanton, Fred Wadleigh and several others organized the Holbrook Turkey Growers Association Co-Op. A processing plant was built on the corner where the Deemer and Lipscomb store had been. M. R. Watters was instrumental in having a turkey hatchery built and later pole sheds and a turkey-breeding farm added.

In 1967 all this was sold to Farmland Industries Inc., and they enlarged the plant, added a freezing plant and a large storage facility. They processed around 800,000 turkeys a year, employed around 40 regular employees and over a hundred seasonal employees. Farmland also owned the large feed mill, which made more than 20 different kinds of feed and served a large territory. They also had a Gooch Feed Mill, which served a large territory and having a grain elevator which was used mostly for storage at that time.

Roy Lenocker had a small café in the building where the ditch office was, and after Mr. Glase sold his store, the post office was moved into the café with Miss Ada Beman as postmistress. Wades came in 1919 and Mrs. Bert Wade succeeded Miss Beman in 1921. Later the post office was moved to the lumberyard where it remained until the lumberyard was burned down in 1941. It was then moved to the Meador grocery store that the Wades purchased. After Mrs. Wade's death, her son Howard became postmaster and a new post office building was built and the post office moved where it still remains. The new building was dedicated in April 1962. After Howard Wade's retirement, his wife became acting postmistress. The lumberyard was rebuilt and was owned by Guy Watters and is now the Holbrook Pump and Supply. Some of the previous owners were: McCue Lumber Company, Olson Lumber Company, Green & Babcock, and M. R. Watters.

In 1920 the Cheraw School, Center and East End School consolidated and formed District 31. The new building was built in 1921 and four years of high school was added. The first graduating High School class was in 1923 and included Ada Thut, Cecil Wade, and Claude Rickman. Timothy Thut, Bert Shelton and Dr. Pitney were members of the school board when the new school was built. The west wing of this building, which included a gym, class rooms, library etc., burned in 1959 and was rebuilt in 1960. There have been several classrooms, shop, garage etc. added since, making a very up-to-date school system.

In the early 1920's a group of members of the Brethren Church moved to the Valley and erected a church building on the corner of 4<sup>th</sup> St and Grand Ave., across the street from Elmer Planks. After several years it was torn down and replaced in a new location near the town of McClave. A small Catholic Church was added to the town also on South Main St. In 1955 the M. E. Church was burned and was rebuilt larger and better.

In the early 1920's the land began to get seepy and a drainage system was put in, draining the water into the Cheraw Lake, which added to its size. Another church the Holbrook Baptist was added in the west end of the Valley.

Land north of the tracks was added to the incorporated town and was called the Kulp Addition. Many new homes had been built surrounding the town. Evan Petersen purchased several acres north of the school, which has been developed and called "Cheraw Heights".

The Mennonite Church was struck by lightning in 1921 and burned which was rebuilt in 1922. The cantaloupe-shipping shed was burned but was not rebuilt. A shortage of irrigation water made it harder to grow cantaloupe and cucumbers for the pickle factory, and it was eventually abandoned. Since irrigating water was getting to be scarcer, the farmers quit raising so many beets and began raising more hay, maize, corn and some wheat, which requires less water to grow.

There was good sized stock yards located here where quite a lot of shipping of stock in and out by freight took place before the day of the trucks.

In 1920 the garage operated at that time by Philip Beman burned and damaged the Drug store building also. Both buildings were rebuilt. Later a grocery store was operated in the garage building. In 1968 while being operated by Marion Hyder, the grocery store burned down and the Drug store was damaged again. Ernest Stjernholm, who owned the grocery store building rebuilt it. The Drug store building was repaired and until June of 1968 a public auction was held selling the building and remaining merchandise. Mrs. Houghton retired and Gene Broce restocked the grocery store and opened it for business.

Several different owners had operated the garage: Kehl & Young, Philip Beman, Ren Estep, Alvin Kauffman, etc. Clyde Coffman had operated a mechanics shop in the back end of the garage for some time.

There was a cheese factory operated by Henry Berger for several years. It was located on the corner, north of the Vasquez home. There had also been a shoe shop. Several other owners of general merchandise and grocery stores had been: Wilson Bergey, Willis Boyd, Frank Gregory, Briscoe, Lipscomb, Hart and Watson, Butterbaugh, Thomas, Corbin, Floyd Bollacker, Eva Mae Young, Ed Hall, Francis Ratliff, Mel Bailey and Kenneth Jenkins. Some of the different operators of the filling station before Farmland had been: M.R. Watters, Ray Amend and Ernest Stjernholm.

Hwy 109 now goes through town connecting with Hwy 96 to the north and Hwy 50 to the south. Three or four additional artesian wells had been put down in the surrounding territory. Cheraw and the community had good soft artesian well water. The town storage tank was plastiglass lined and the water was aerated and filtered before entering the city water mains. Some of the maintenance men were: James McGourty, Walter Painter, Chester Howard, Frank Houck, Ed Rains and Dave Albrecht. All highways and streets were oiled.