

Battlement Mesa: An Emerging New Community, Part Four

By Keith Lammey, President

The first three columns I have written here in the “Battlement Mesa: An Emerging New Community” series have explored Battlement Mesa’s history leading up to the date when Exxon terminated their Colony Project on Sunday, May 2, 1982; a date that has become known as “Black Sunday.” Since several residents have expressed an interest in some of the early history of Battlement Mesa, this article will explore an earlier period of Battlement Mesa history before Battlement Mesa became “An Emerging New Community.” Or perhaps, as we shall see, Battlement Mesa has been an emerging new community for the past century.

Before we can answer the emerging new community “for the past century” question, we need to decide which Battlement Mesa we’re talking about. Is there really only one Battlement Mesa or are there two? Today’s residents are familiar with the current Battlement Mesa, Colorado and usually think our town originated with Exxon’s Colony Project or in the years that followed when the Battlement Mesa Planned Unit Development (PUD) was created. But, is that really when Battlement Mesa was created?

I have observed how surprised our new residents are when they notice that many of the dates on the gravestone memorials in the Battlement Cemetery pre-date the Colony Project and Black Sunday by decades. The typical comment is, “how can that be?”

I know the feeling, because I experienced the same surprise. That’s my point. Battlement Mesa didn’t really begin with Exxon’s Colony Project.

The mesa that is across the river from Parachute has been recognized as Battlement Mesa for a hundred plus years. Area historians, as well as the descendants of the mesa’s early settlers that still reside in the area, know that the Battlement Mesa community existed long before the Exxon era. Perhaps you recognize family names such as Hayward, Lindauer, and Parmenter, but do you know that these families were among the area’s early settlers?

Admittedly, there wasn’t a “town” of Battlement Mesa across the river from Parachute until Exxon chose to build their “company” town, but historians will tell you that the Battlement Mesa community existed for decades before Exxon showed up.

According to “Lest We Forget,” published in 1973 by Erlene Durrant Murray, “Early settlers started coming into this area (Battlement Mesa) about the same time as into the Parachute Creek area, in the early 1880’s.” And, judging from the dates of death on the oldest gravestones in Battlement Cemetery, there is strong evidence that a significant population resided on Battlement Mesa prior to 1900, decades before Exxon. My research shows that of the approximately 480 graves in Battlement Cemetery, 32 graves are over 100 years old and three of the grave memorials show dates of death of 1885 (the oldest) and 1899.

The late Erlene Murray describes more of Battlement Mesa’s early history in another section of her book where she describes the early schools. She says, “The first school house on Battlement Mesa, District 18, was a small log building.” Later she explains that “In 1895, George Sipprell gave land especially for a school site, and a two-room stone building was constructed in 1897. This was used until 1907, when a very nice and roomy addition, also of stone, was built.” This passage, of course, describes the Historic Battlement School located at 7235 County Road 300 in Battlement Mesa. Erlene explained “The first teacher (at Battlement School) was Mrs. Mary Shutt” and that “For years there were two teachers with as many as seventy pupils enrolled in the eight grades of the school.”

In retrospect, it seems like Battlement Mesa has been an emerging new community for well over a century. In the early years, Battlement Mesa was emerging as a rural community consisting of small ranches and fruit orchards. In Battlement Mesa’s “middle years” it was a burgeoning company town until that fateful Black Sunday. Most recently, Battlement has emerged into a beautiful new planned community that is nestled on the Battlement Mesa land form as an “arm” of the Grand Mesa due south and across the Colorado River from Parachute.

The Colorado Dream

401 Arroyo Drive · PO Box 6006 · Battlement Mesa, CO 81636

PHONE: 970.285.9432 FAX: 970.285.9631 EMAIL: BMSA@BattlementMesaColorado.com WEB: www.BattlementMesaColorado.com