



Men & Women Who Tamed the Plains
(From "Adams County Crossroads of the West Volume II"
by Albin Wagner)

Eastern Adams County remained a cattle and sheep grazing area until scientific dry land farming techniques were adopted in the early part of the 20th century. Dry land farming was practiced in Utah as early as 1864. However, perfection of "dry farming" depended not only upon the development of ways to use and protect the meager amount of moisture in the soil in this region, but also a number of other components including the manufacture of the chilled iron plow by James Oliver in 1868 which could turn the shortgrass sod, introduction of hard red winter wheat by the Germans from Russia, and production of cheap barbed wire to protect the crops from cattlemen's herds.

Living Springs was a stage stop and ranch on Comanche Creek north of Strasburg that became a farming community. One of the first schools in Eastern Adams County was the Living Spring School District No. 31, organized in January 1879. The school district extended from the Weld County line to four miles south of the present town of Strasburg. During the first years the school was apparently held in private homes, but in 1886 a frame school building was built at the present location by Ed Smith for \$800.

As homesteaders settled the area between 1900 and 1915, the population grew rapidly. There was no town at Strasburg until 1907, when Mr. and Mrs. D.H. Weaver built a general store and a residence on the east end of their homestead, now the northwest corner of Main and Railroad Sts. in Strasburg. The false fronted building became the first Strasburg Post Office when Weaver became the first postmaster July 9, 1908. It also served as a meeting place and election hall. The second floor was the scene of parties, box socials and dances as late as 1927.

Weaver installed the first telephone exchange in the area in his store. It consisted of a series of switch knives which connected lines as far north as the Henry Nordloh ranch at Living Springs and south to the Elliott Ranch 15 miles southeast of Strasburg. Rural lines used barbed wire nailed to the fences and 2 x 4s' over the gates and cattle crossings. A consolidation with the Wolf Creek Telephone Company, organized in 1917, formed the present stockholder owned Strasburg Telephone Company.

Weaver sold his land in 1910 to the Strasburg Land and Development Company composed of E.M. Kidder, a real estate agent, and Dransforth, Scritton and Lee, a group of Chicago lawyers. April 11, 1910 two immigrant cars arrived at the railroad station filled with horses and supplies to begin construction of the town.

The town "boomed" in 1916. The first grain elevator was built in Strasburg that year. On April 29, 1916 the first issue of the Strasburg News (now the Eastern Colorado News) was printed

by the Rural Press Publishing Company headquartered in Englewood and edited by C.F. Deitsch. The Farmers and Drovers State Bank, Strasburg's first bank was also established in 1916 with J. D. Hardin, an ardent promoter of the area, as president and D.W. Lee as cashier. It closed its doors in December, to be replaced on March 17, 1917 by the Strasburg State Bank (now the 1st National Bank of Strasburg) which is celebrating its 60th anniversary this year.

The first church in Strasburg was organized in June 1916. The Strasburg Presbyterian Church was formed by Rev. John Knox Hall in a tent on the Dan Mitchell farm south of town.

One of the first homesteaders in the area of Kiowa (now Bennett) was Jacob Mack, a native of Metz, France. He came to the United States at the age of five with his parents who came to New Orleans. In 1867, Mack brought his family here in a covered wagon. Their large, rambling two-story house was situated on Kiowa Creek at the junction of the Smoky Hill North Trail and the Fort Morgan Cut-Off of the Overland Trail. The house was known as the Oasis by passing cowboys and travelers who were always fed and given a place to sleep there. Kiowa Crossing station was later located near there when the Kansas Pacific railroad was completed in 1870.

Other early homesteaders were three brothers, Sidney, Ed and George Smith, originally from England. They were carpenters and built most of the first buildings in the area. The two-story, L-shaped George Smith house just north of the railroad depot was the first post office after George Smith became postmaster on March 16, 1877. The Smith house, along with the depot, windmill and barns, were probably the first buildings in the town.

According to Emma Michell, author of several histories of Eastern Adams County and the surrounding area, Kiowa was renamed Bennett in 1878 for H.P. Bennett of Denver. Bennett's two daughters were widowed when the engineer and fireman died in a flash flood in Kiowa Creek that year. The rampaging waters washed away the railroad bridge and the engine, tender and 12 freight cars of a train were carried away. Mrs. Michell states that it took two months to clear the wreckage and the engine has never been found.

The Jenkins Store was established at Bennett prior to the turn of the century. It was located north of the railroad in the middle of the highway now entering Bennett from the south. Herbert D. Palmer is credited with laying out the town. The property on the north side of Bennett, formerly railroad land, was sold with the stipulation that no liquor be sold there. The land on the south was in private hands. To this day there is no liquor outlet on the north side of Bennett.

In 1903, the first school was opened in Bennett on the same site as the present school. For the first two years George Renner was the only student. Nellie Smith was the teacher.

From 1908 to 1915 homesteaders settled the area and Bennett grew by leaps and bounds. The Colorado Milling and Elevator Company built the first grain elevator in Bennett in 1912.

Walter Campbell came to Bennett in 1917 and started the town's first bank, the Bennett State Bank, on the corner of Palmer and 6th Sts.

On January 22, 1939, Bennett became incorporated with a population of 211.

Watkins was named after L.R. Watkins, a local rancher. It was formerly the Box Elder stage station on Box Elder Creek and Box Elder Crossing railroad station after 1870. Frank B. McCracken became the first postmaster on January 3, 1878. Among the early settlers in the area was a family named Traut. In the early 1900's Pete Traut had a general store in Watkins. Ike Traut owned a livery stable and the building that housed the Post office, and Charlie Traut ran a hotel. All the buildings were close together on railroad property on the south side of the railroad.

Among the rural schools in Eastern Adams County were Whittier, Friendship and Box Elder (now all part of School District 27J), Areadian, Sunnyslope, Central Valley, Comanche, Valley Center, Sunnyslope, Hopewell, Pleasant Valley, Prairie View, Bunyard, Leader, Lone Tree v Moore, Evergreen, Roseland, Chicago, Mountain View, Shamrock, Westpoint, Goldenrod, Badger, and Columbine. The small school districts were typically taxed to the limit, with an average of 9 to 20 pupils, all taught in a one-room school by one teacher.

On the ridge between Comanche and Bijou Creeks about 15 miles north of Byers and Strasburg was the community of Hill Top. An adobe schoolhouse was built there in the early years, but was later replaced with a frame school building.

In 1909, a group of Norwegian families, lately from Minnesota, took up homesteads and desert claims in the Hill Top area.

Just east of Living Springs was another group of homesteaders. There was once a Post Office there in Sam Thompson's home known as Swinford. A group of German homesteaders settled south of Antelope Flats seven miles north of Byers on the west side of Bijou Creek.

One of the earliest homesteaders in the Leader area in the eastern end of Adams County was Jay Benham. His father was Alec Benham, a stage driver and proprietor of the Benham stage station on Middle Bijou Creek south of Deer Trail. Benham homesteaded northeast of Byers in 1886. He built the store managed by Herman Eicholz, where Eicholz' sister, Mathilda Woolsey, was Leader's first postmaster in 1910. Leader grew rapidly between 1910 and 1915 with the influx of new settlers. At one time the Leisure Band from Leader was well known throughout the area. But the area never became heavily populated.

References

Emma Michell. Our Side of the Mountain. Strasburg: Eastern Colorado News, 1968
Emma Michell. Comanche Crossing Centennial; August 15, 1870-1970. Strasburg: Comanche Crossing Historical Society, 1970.