

BRIEF HISTORY OF BICKNELL, UTAH

Bicknell, Wayne County, Utah, once named Thurber after an early settler, experienced a name change in 1916 when a prominent educator from Rhode Island, Thomas Bicknell offered a library of one thousand volumes to the town that would take his name. The citizens of Thurber voted to accept the library, hence, the name Bicknell Town, while the LDS Ward is still called Thurber Ward.

Bicknell (Thurber Townsite) lies southwest of the lofty Thousand Lake Mountain and gradually sloped toward the Fremont River. This river begins at Fish Lake, but two reservoirs, Johnson Valley and Mill Meadow, have been constructed to provide most of the adequate irrigation water for the crops of alfalfa, barley, and other grains grown and ripened in this high mountain valley of near 7500 feet in altitude. East of the town rises the red and white sandstone cliffs flowing from the base of the Thousand Lake Mountain. While south lies the Bicknell Bottoms Wildlife Game Reserve and the majestic Boulder Mountain with its many lakes and meadows. To the west is the Daylight plateau which gradually climbs to the Parker Mountain Range. Northwest is upper Rabbit Valley, as it was named by early settlers, and the North Mountain which hides Fish Lake and the Seven Mile meadows from our immediate view.

EARLY SETTLERS:

On June 1, 1873, President Brigham Young and the Council called a company of men consisting of A. K. Thurber, Wm. Jex, George W. Bean, General Wm. Pace and a party of about thirty men, to explore the country south-east of Richfield, Sevier Valley and to make peace treaties with the Indians. With Chief Tabiona acting as guide, George Bean and Albert K. Thurber as interpreters, the party left Richfield on June 11, 1873. They camped at Brimhall Springs or Bear Valley, Burrville and Fish Lake where they made friends with Chief Poganab, Fish Captain for all the tribes and he continued with them. They traveled down through

Rabbit Valley to Pine Creek south of the Thurber Townsite but across the Fremont River near the base of Boulder Mountain. At each encampment, they called the Indians to a council in Grass Valley near Koosharem. This Pow-Wow or Grand Council of the Tribes was held on June 21 at Cedar Grove. The Peace Treaty made and signed by the Chief of each tribe was never broken by any of them.

In 1875, A. K. Thurber brought about six hundred head of LDS Church cattle into the meadows of this lower valley. Beason Lewis came a little later with four or five hundred head of cattle and these two men took up land and settled at the mouth of Government Creek flowing from the Boulder Mountain. Lewis built a four-room log house and moved his family into it. This house was located about four hundred yards north and a little east of where Rulon Ellett's ranch house now stands. A. K. Thurber built the "Herd House" two hundred yards east of the Lewis house, but Thurber did not move his family into the valley. Christian Johnson moved in and took up a quarter section of land at the mouth of Pine Creek, later owned by Clifford Mangum family and is now part of the J. Perry Egan Fish Hatchery property. In 1877, Levi, George and Willard Brinkerhoff along with Jeremiah and George Stringham came and took up a quarter section of land each north of the Fremont River. They constructed the Tub Ditch to bring water from the river and ponds to their property. By 1879, the families of William and Joseph Meeks, Wm. Burgess and two married sons, James H. Heath, and others settled here. Soon the Bullard family, Charles and Willard Snow, Seth Taft, Keeles, Hunts, Cooks, Mansfield, Rees, Peterson, Goodwin, Riddle, Jacobs, Wilson, Durfey, Smith, McIntire, Terry, Amasa Lyman, the Bakers, Coombs and Huntsman families had arrived. But the homesteads along the river proved too wet for cultivated crops but was good pasture land, so by 1897 most of the families had moved to the present townsite. A small school and general meeting house was constructed and still stands and is owned by the Camp Thurber Daughters of Utah Pioneers.

WATER:

The move to the new townsite posed an immediate concern: obtaining culinary water for their use. The first water was brought from Cotton Wood Spring in Red Canyon and run to town in wooden troughs. The citizens decided this needed to be piped. This was accomplished. By 1899, there was need for more water so they purchased the Durfey Spring. By 1921 this supply was inadequate, so they built a new pipe line from Jackson Springs high on the Thousand Lake Mountain. In later years, the town was bonded and received a grant from the Four Corners Organization for a new culinary water system. This consisted of developing the existing spring, building a new head house, installing new pipe from the springs down the mountain and throughout the town. This project was completed in 1977 and still serves the town of Bicknell adequately.

BUSINESSES:

George Stringham was the first to engage in the mercantile business. He built a log room for this purpose, but later at the new townsite, he constructed a two story rock building. The first floor was used for general store while the upstairs was used for dances and later as a school room. Lester Riddle of Antimony purchased and operated this business as People's Merc. and added a new rock addition to the west. George C. Brinkerhoff bought the stock and became manager of Peoples Merc. After his death Alvin and Norma Brinkerhoff operated the business for many years until around 1980 when Ross Davis purchased the store and later abandoned to move to a large market built by Earl Brinkerhoff south-east of Bicknell. The original rock building was used by Hunt's Feed and Supply and later by Bert Johnson as a shoe repair and leather shop. Today these buildings stand vacant. The new super-market is named Red D.

The first garage was owned by Arthur Chaffin but it burned down. Arvil Smith operated a garage on Main Street and after he moved, Dennis Brinkerhoff operated

a garage and service station. In 1951, it was bought by John Giles and Kenneth Rees. This was later operated by the Lane Ellett family. Today it is owned by Gaylen Rees but stands vacant.

Ben Baker built a small store and service station north of Peoples Merc. which was closed on his retirement in 1941. James Smith also built a store on Center and Main where the Wayne Theatre now stands, but it was destroyed by fire. In 1945 Torval Albrecht built a hardware and grocery store north-west of the Merc. and sold it in 1949 to Wayne Jenson. This general store is owned and operated by his son, Randy and Marsha Jenson today.

In 1948, Henry Giles built a service station on 200 east Main, but after his death, Howard Blackburn purchased it and is operating a service station and paint shop at the present time.

Another service station was built at the west entrance of Bicknell by John Brinkerhoff around 1978. It was later sold to Leeon Brinkerhoff and is now owned by Larry Deem with a garage and service station. Also, in the mid 1970's Michael and Dennis Blackburn erected the M & D Auto Repair shop and now have included auto parts. In 1987 Tony Worthen purchased and built a new Auto Body and Paint shop at 100 South and 200 East. So we have at present four service and auto repair shops.

U. S. Gardner and his wife Hortense Brinkerhoff built the Sour Dough Cafe west of the People's Merc in 1946. After they moved, Verda Brinkerhoff continued to operate it for them until the 1960's. Torval and Eleanor Albrecht also had a small cafe in their home, but 1954 when they built the SunGlow Motel of 20 units on 100 East and Main Street. She continued to operate the Post Office in the basement until 1964 when they sold it to Milton Taft and then Cula Ekker built and operated the Sun Glow Cafe adjoining the motel.

The Albrecht's moved two blocks west on Main Street and built a new home and later constructed the Aquarius Motel and Cafe which is now owned and operated by Emil Brinkerhoff and his son-in-law Ted Stallman and daughter Emily. Also at this location is a Laundromat and they are planning to expand and have built the

Aquarius Inn and preparing for a new 20 unit motel.

James Ellett built the Ellet Theatre in 1949 and he and Edwin Oldroyd operated it until 1963 and John and Maida Giles operated it until 1965 when Stanley and Hilma Brinkerhoff purchased it from Ellett and changed it to the Wayne Theatre and it is still being operated by Stephen Ellett at this time.

Gail and Winona Baker bought the Wonderland Dry Cleaners from Deward and Margie White but after they moved they sold it to Howard and Myrtle Teeple who operated this dry cleaning plant until 1959. After Howard's death Myrtle continued to operate it four more years, but it became so unprofitable that the dry-cleaning business closed in 1976 when she sold it to the United States Postal Service for the Bicknell Post Office.

In 1948 Wayne and Montez Chidester built a small barber and beauty shop on Main Street west of Jenson's store. Later they moved and they leased it to house the State Liquor Agency store. This store still does business there.

Around 1948 Cline Durfey built a basement on 100 East Main and run a bowling alley for some time, but it was later taken down.

POSTMASTERS:

Those serving Bicknell Town as postmasters are as follows: William Burgess, Matthew W. Mansfield, James Grant, William Meeks, Fredonia Baker, Hattie Baker, and Eleanor Albrecht. Fredonia Baker held the record for longest service of more than twenty years, but since that time Eleanor has operated the Post Office from 1941 until December 1975 or thirty-four years. Her daughter-in-law, Raneé Albrecht operated the Post Office at the present time.

CHURCH ORGANIZATIONS:

Thurber Ward was organized on Sunday, July 24, 1881 when Apostle Francis M. Lyman and A. K. Thurber came to organize the Thurber Ward and Relief Society. George Brinkerhoff became the first Bishop. His successor in 1886 was George Brandley of Richfield who never moved here, so in 1887 William Meeks was chosen

Bishop. The Bishopric served as the stewards of the town for many years and following is a list of Bishops until the present time: Matthew W. Mansfield, 1894; James Grant, 1900; George W. Stringham, 1903; George Brinkerhoff (second term), 1906; George W. Sidwell, 1910; R. Arthur Meeks, 1912; George C. Brinkerhoff, 1924; George M. Hunt, 1928; Ruben Meeks, 1936; Clifford Mangum, 1944; Willard D. Brinkerhoff, 1948; Rullon Ellett, John Brinkerhoff, Wilford Torgerson, J. Golden Durfey, Meeks Morrell, Blaine Hilton, and at present, Bliss Brinkerhoff. Bishop R. A. Meeks was bishop when the Amusement Hall was built, later torn down. Bishop Mangum was director for the white frame chapel in the center of town and completed by Willard D. Brinkerhoff, then under the direction of Blaine Hilton and new red brick chapel and recreation hall was built at 200 North and 200 East.

TOWN CORPORATION:

Bicknell Town was incorporated in February, 1939 and Luris P. Allen was chosen as first president of the Board of Trustees. The next Presidents, later called Mayors, are as follows: Ernest B. Jackson, 1940; June King, 1942; Alma Taylor, 1946; Kay S. Taft, 1949; Wayne Smith, Ted Jones, Vern DeLeeuw, Arthur H. Lee, Sammy N. Newton, Richard N. Brinkerhoff, Loyd Hunt, and now serving, Lauren J. Deem (Larry).

Through the years the town presidents and board members have accomplished many worthwhile improvements for Bicknell Town. In 1957, George Stringham donated some money to fence the cemetery which was completed in 1958. The town sprinkling system was installed in 1968-69. First North street was oiled in 1970, and First South was oiled in 1971. A picnic shelter was erected on the town park in 1975 which was a great contribution to our recreational activities. Curb and gutter was completed along Main Street in 1967, and again in 1984 a Community Development Block Grant was obtained and curb, gutter and sidewalk was completed around the curves on the east and west ends of town. Also, money was allowed for a beautification project of planting trees, shrubs, etc., and with these improvements, Bicknell became the Tidy Town of Utah in 1984.

SCHOOL BUILDINGS:

Proper education has been an esteemed goal for the youth of Bicknell and Wayne County. The first school was held in the DUP Building, then the Stringham store. Later a two-story school was built to house all eight grades. The first high school was the white four-room rock building on 100 North constructed in 1919. In 1941 the red rock building and gymnasium was added and later the east wing. In 1977 the gymnasium was build south of the Wayne School District Office. Then the large elementary school at 400 west was used for years as a Middle School, but in 1984 the county was bonded to add another gym and classrooms and closed the red rock high school. So both buildings still stand and the east wing is used with trailer rooms for the sixth, seventh and eighth grades. The elementary students are all bused to the Loa Elementary.

BICKNELL ENTERPRISES:

Even though the population has remained around three hundred, the citizens have experienced many changes. Many of the families have farms and cattle operations, But many have worked in the timber industry. At the present time Dewey Woolsey and sons and Charles Torgerson and sons each own saw mills and haul timber from the Dixie and Fish Lake National forests. Also, the Lane Ellett and Bliss Brinkerhoff families have a lumber and saw mill operation. Over the years, we have had several building contractors: Alburn Brown, Elmer Johnson, Vern DeLeeuw, Preston Moosman and sons LaMont and David. Of these only LaMont and David Moosman are building.

Tourism aids the service stations, garages, motels, cafes and stores of town. East of Bicknell is Sun Glow Park a small over night camp ground. The J. Perry Egan Fish Hatchery invites travelers to the largest hatchery of the State of Utah. The Wild Fowl Reserve of the Bicknell Bottoms is a refuge for ducks, geese, and many birds for the hunter. The surrounding mountains shelter deer, antelope, elk, and more recently bear. Also, the Fremont River and the many lakes and reservoirs offer excellent fishing and camping areas. Bicknell is located only 20 miles from Capitol Reef National Park and has many oiled roads to beautiful scenery.