

Farewell to the Lamb School

By Milly Roeder

On Monday, March 26, 2012, a fire storm, soon to be known as the Lower North Fork fire, swept through the forest near Reynolds Ranch Park, jumped Long Gulch, and crept up steep rocky terrain toward Critchell and Kuehster Road. The fire was named after the area north of the North Fork of the South Platte River between Foxton and South Platte, where a prescribed burn had been conducted. Believed to have been put out, its purpose—to aid fire prevention by burning to reduce fuels—seemed to be fulfilled. Unexpected strong winds rose from the southwest during the afternoon of March 26. A hotspot exploded into the ferocious fire that spread over 1,400 acres or 4 square miles and devoured 23 houses and a barn. Not only that: the fire tore the lives of Ann Appel and Sam and Linda Lucas from our midst.

Besides these tremendous losses, we also lost the beloved, historic Lamb School, a traditional schoolhouse in an open meadow along Kuehster Road.

Frederick and Caroline Kuehster had married in Central City in 1872. They homesteaded southeast of Critchell in Jefferson County in the mid 1870s and built their home from logs. In 1886, nine families, including the Kuehsters, Huebners, Lambs, Dudleys, Greens, and others who had settled nearby, became school board members and organized School District 36. They built a log structure in the large meadow on today's Kuehster Road or "Green Ridge."

The Lamb School opened in 1887, named after David Lamb, a homesteader who presumably donated the



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land. It was furnished with a stove and fixtures that cost the community \$9.40; six double desks were bought for \$19.40 plus freight. It is not clear exactly what teacher Stella Dudley was paid to instruct her first 19 students: \$40.00 a month or \$400 for seven months. In 1919, the Lamb School was destroyed by fire for the first time. The cause of this fire has not been recorded.

The community constructed a new one-room frame building three years later. The one-story gabled structure had a rectangular composite stone foundation and a steep pitched roof. Three double-hung windows with four-over-four panes on each long side lit the interior. White painted shutters protected the school from bad weather and uninvited guests, though not from the fire out of the tops of nearby trees last March 26. The roof was covered with grey composite shingles, and a brick chimney sat on the northern end of the ridge. Before entering through the door on the south side, one passed a porch built of a concrete platform supported by rough stones. Two rectangular posts (4x4) supported an awning covered with the same light grey composite shingles as the

roof. Two wooden railings kept kids and visitors from falling off the sides of the porch. Horizontal wood siding was painted red. Ironically, only two boys and one girl were taught in the rebuilt school by 1924, and by 1942 it was closed entirely. The Sampson Community Club rented the building in 1955 and purchased it four years later.

In August 2000, my husband and I, with friends from the Jefferson County Historical Commission, were invited by the Sampson Community Club to their pig roast on the meadow of the Lamb School. We spent a wonderful afternoon with delicious food and delightful company. On March 26, 2012, nothing—not even the few aspen trees that surrounded the school and seemed to be dancing for the kids and visitors—could resist the ferocious fire. We will forever miss it. 🍷

Sources:

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